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The possessions of a moneylender: Afonso Pires...

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The possessions of a moneylender: Afonso Pires Borreco (d. 1578)*.**Las posesiones de un prestamista: Afonso Pires Borreco (d 1578).**Isabel dos Guimaraes Sá
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Abstract: Afonso Pires Borreco was neither a nobleman, nor a native of Porto, two features that might have prevented him from integrating the urban elites of the city. However, he married into a family of local affluent shoemakers; performed the duties of scribe to the judge of orphans; and belonged to numerous confraternities, including the Misericórdia. At his death the Misericórdia inherited half of his estate. The presence of pawned objects in his inventory demonstrates that moneylending was one of his profitable activities. Besides throwing light on our understanding of upward social mobility, this case study enables the study of his mobile possessions within his domestic context.

Keywords: confraternities of Misericórdia; social mobility; transmission of property; material culture; social relations

Résumé: Afonso Pires Borreco no era ni noble, ni natural de Porto, dos características que podrían haberle impedido la integración entre las élites urbanas de la ciudad. Sin embargo, se casó en una próspera familia de zapateros; asumió las funciones de escribano del juez de los huérfanos; y perteneció a numerosas cofradías, la Misericordia incluida. A su muerte la Misericordia heredó la mitad de sus bienes. La presencia de objetos empeñados en su inventario demuestra préstamos de dinero entre sus actividades más rentables. Además de arrojar luz sobre nuestra comprensión de la movilidad social ascendente, este estudio de caso permite inserir los bienes móviles de su inventario en su entorno doméstico.

Palabras clave: Cofradías de Misericordia; movilidad social; transmisión de la propiedad cultura material; relaciones sociales.

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The possessions of a moneylender: Afonso Pires Borreco (d. 1578)

Afonso Pires Borreco was neither a nobleman, nor a native of Porto, two features that might have prevented him from leaving a substantial documental trace behind¹. However, by the second half of the sixteenth century, he had married comfortably into a family of city dwellers; he was scribe to the judge of orphans; owned a horse; and belonged to several confraternities, including the local Misericórdia. His economic success allowed him to purchase a remarkable pool of urban houses, thus benefitting from numerous rents. At his death in 1578, in the absence of children, the Misericórdia inherited half of his estate, and an inventory was drawn. The fact that the latter refers to the location of his mobile assets within the house allows a rare insight into the domestic environment, including pawned objects in his possession.

Afonso Pires illustrates a case of social upward mobility. Although the historian often deals with persons who escalated the social ladder, their life stories are kept in the shadow because only individual attention can tackle the agency of the individual in his social ascent, as well as the strategies put forward in order to achieve social recognition from his community. Afonso Pires Borreco is a good example of a man who, not being a native of a city where he spent most of his life, was able to promote himself through a good marriage and the gathering of a fortune due in great part to his office of scribe to the judge of orphans. This article deals not only with the strategies involved in the constitution of this heritage, but also with the presentation of his self, that is, his agency towards the recognition of his status. In the latter, material environment played an important role. As we shall see, we can infer the subject's system of values and behaviour through the lists of assets he possessed².

This research follows a micro-analytical approach, as the latter is considered an efficient strategy to understand the individual in historical context, in cases where the aim is not to gather big data across large geographical areas or long spans of time³. The intention was not to write a biography, for two motives. In the first instance, information about our case study is not as substantial as to allow it. Second, the aim was not to reconstruct Afonso Pires' whole life but to understand the person through the material possessions gathered during his lifetime in a context of upward social mobility. In this case, the execution of Afonso's last will gave origin to a detailed inventory of his possessions. Lists of things have not been treated as a mere compilation of assets, but as insights into his life and social relations.⁴

¹ I thank Maria de Fátima Machado, who offered me a substantial transcription of archive records on Afonso Pires Borreco that formed the initial information gathered for this article, to which I added further research. She also wrote on this character (Maria de Fátima P. MACHADO, *Os órfãos e os enjeitados da cidade e do termo do Porto (1500-1580)*, diss. doutoramento, Porto, Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, 2010, pp. 293-303).

² This study has been influenced by the anthropological work carried out by Daniel Miller on contemporary London, in which material culture is held to be central to relationships. See Daniel MILLER, *The Comfort of Things*, Oxford, Polity Press, 2008, p. 282-297.

³ For a comparison between the two approaches, at the micro and macro levels, see Jacques REVEL, "Micro análise e construção do social", see REVEL, Jacques (org.), *Jogos de Escalas. A Experiência da Microanálise*, Rio de Janeiro, Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 1998, p. 15-38.

⁴ Natalie Zemon Davis has held the inventory as "an opening onto a set of relationships and a style of living". Natalie Zemon DAVIS and Peter MILLER. 2009. "About an Inventory. A conversation

The social landscape of Porto's elites during the sixteenth century has been described as being formed by former merchants who ascended to the nobility, thus abandoning their former activities in trade, and also investing on land and increasingly marrying among themselves, thus forming a closed group⁵. Some of them improved their stance by becoming citizens, noblemen or even *fidalgos*; others positioned themselves in the threshold of noble status, by living according to the law of the nobility (*lei da nobreza*), that is, assuming a life style punctuated by a careful self presentation that included lavish clothing, servants, and the possession of horses and slaves⁶. The king sanctioned those distinctions, albeit with different levels of control. To be a citizen was an honour given to men who distinguished themselves by their occupation or service to the city; there were professions which awarded noble status to their practitioners (magistrates, notaries and other royal officers); to become a *fidalgo* was harder, but not impossible⁷. The case of Afonso Pires Borreco documents that there was room for the ascension of single individuals. The possession of wealth, both in land, houses or money, facilitated his rise among the city's elites. For instance, Afonso was admitted among the members of the Misericórdia, a confraternity that assembled the local elite men. As a childless married man, the confraternity could be particularly interested in inheriting his assets, thus facilitating his integration among its members; however, as we shall see in this article, his social ascent was not without its limits and ambiguities.

The life and times of Afonso Pires Borreco

Afonso Pires was born in Sardeal, further in the south, in the Portuguese Estremadura, a region known for its high fertility. His mother and father are totally absent in the genealogies of the sixteenth century; he is not known to have emigrated to the Portuguese empire, which was offering possibilities to build fortunes. How was it possible for a non-native of Porto to have reached such social heights? While his earlier life remains a mystery, thus concealing the first stages of his enrichment, we know how he amassed his fortune in his mature years and how he invested it.

His parents, however, were not entirely destitute, as Afonso mentioned in his will that they had endowed him. They must have belonged to an intermediate group, as they gave their son the not insignificant sum of 40.000 réis, which was worth twice the

between Natalie Zemon Davis and Peter Miller", in Khron, Deborah L. and Peter Miller, eds. *Dutch New York between East and West. The World of Margrieta van Varick*, New Haven, Yale University Press, p. 118.

⁵ A. BRITO, *Patriciado urbano quinhentista: as famílias dominantes do Porto, 1500-1580*, Porto, Câmara Municipal-Arquivo Histórico, 1997, pp. 418-419.

⁶ Being a citizen was a local distinction given to the notables by the municipal council, whilst a nobleman was supposed to observe the law of the nobility. The category of *fidalgo* held above the other two, as it was dependent upon a registrar in a seigniorial house, namely that of the crown itself (*"fidalgo da casa real"*).

⁷ On the social stratification of Porto, especially in what concerns the blurred frontiers between nobles and the upper strata of the bourgeoisie, see Francisco Ribeiro da SILVA, "Tempos Modernos", in *História do Porto*, dir. Luís A. de Oliveira Ramos, 3ª ed., Porto, Porto Editora, 2000, pp. 323-330. On the distinctions between *fidalgos* and noblemen see Nuno Gonçalo MONTEIRO, "Noblesse et aristocratie au Portugal sous l'Ancien Régime (XVIIe-début du XIXe siècle)", *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, vol. 46, 1999, n. 1, p. 185-210, especially p. 190.

average price of a marriage dowry given to a poor orphaned girl⁸. However, at the time he made his last will, on the eve of his death, Afonso claimed he had never received it. This was not a rare occurrence, as we know that many transactions of this type were never consummated, even if the parts involved often went to the notary to draw a scripture. Perhaps we should not think that Afonso's start in life was made possible by a fund given by his parents that was invested and multiplied by his agency. His fortune, as it stands for many persons of his kind, that is, whose birth was not a warrant of social status and wealth, was probably made possible by his skills in literacy (reading, writing and counting), which he must have learned sometime. However, his talent for money must have been his own, as we shall see later in this article.

Afonso's arrival to Porto must have occurred sometime before 1541. In the same year, the *corregedor* drew a list of the men who owned mounts and horses that was sent to the king. Afonso integrated it, and he was already stated to be the scribe to the city's judge of orphans⁹. It was mandatory by law that scribes of the judges of orphans, as well as notaries and other royal officers, should possess a horse and some weapons¹⁰. Afonso had thus the status of *cavaleiro*, and he must have sometime applied for a royal charter of confirmation, without which he could not enjoy the corresponding privileges¹¹. However, even if this status can be inscribed in the lower nobility, it had deteriorated during the fourteenth and especially during the fifteenth century, due to conquests in North Africa, maritime trade and the bureaucratization of the administration¹². Some contemporaries even talked about "usurped" nobility...

He married into a family of shoemakers in Porto, who at the time were concentrated in a specific neighbourhood, which included the streets of *Cangostas*, *Canos* and *Pelames*, and comprised the *tinarias*, that is, the basins where animal calves were transformed into leather¹³. His in-laws must have been well to do artisans, because at the time he made his will, on the 21 November 1578, Afonso mentioned several assets that the couple had inherited from his wife's family.

Afonso lived in Rua das Cangostas, the same street where his in-laws lived, where he also acquired various houses. Afonso's father-in-law, Bastião (Sebastião)

⁸ The average value of the marriage dowries to poor orphaned girls awarded by the misericórdia of Porto during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was 20.000 réis. Although dowries have been associated with brides, the word *dote* could also designate the *legítima*, that is, the share of the inheritance each son or daughter was to receive upon the death of his/her parents. It was not rare for parents to anticipate the *legítima* to their sons, and this might have been the case with Afonso.

⁹ AN/TT, *Corpo Cronológico*, "Rol das pessoas que tinham cavalos na comarca do Porto, e seu termo, concelho de Benviver e Portocarreiro", parte II, maço 235, doc. 7 [7 de Junho de 1541].

¹⁰ *Ordenações Manuelinas*, Lisboa, Calouste Gulbenkian, 1984, livro V, tit. CV, "Como os Escrivães, e Meirinhos, e outros Officiaes ham de teer armas, e cavalos, e que os privilegiados tenham lanças", pp. 305-308.

¹¹ *Ordenações Manuelinas* [...], op. cit., livro II, tit. XXXVIII, "Que os cavaleiros nom guozem dos privilégios da cavalaria sem terem cavalos e armas, e confirmaçam de sua cavallaria", pp. 204-206.

¹² Armindo de SOUSA, "A socialidade (estruturas, grupos e motivações)", in *História de Portugal*, dir. de José Mattoso, Lisboa, Círculo de Leitores, 1993, vol. 2, p. 449.

¹³ António Cruz noted the high number of shoemakers in the city, and suggested they sold their products in the whole region (A. Cruz, *Algumas observações sobre a vida económica e social da cidade do Porto nas vésperas de Alcácer Quibir*, Porto, Bibl. Pública Municipal, 1967, pp. 36, 77-84). Shoemakers were also the most important artisan group in Porto according to Francisco Ribeiro da SILVA, "Tempos Modernos..." [...], op. cit., p. 296-297.

Martins, was a shoemaker. The misericórdia holds a copy of his testament among the papers of Afonso Pires Borreco, his son-in-law. It is dated 13 August 1541, thirty-seven years before Afonso's death. In Bastião's will his daughter Maria (Afonso's wife to be) was not married at the time, and he disposed of his free share (*terça* in Portuguese) in order to assemble her a proper dowry, so it would equal that of her half sisters. Maria was his only daughter, as his wife, Maria Gonçalves, had other daughters from a first marriage¹⁴. Maria must have enjoyed the trust of her father, because he designated her the administrator of the masses to be celebrated on behalf of his soul. Bastião was ill in bed when he drew his will, which was a *testamento cerrado* (closed will in which sheets of paper were stitched¹⁵). Four days later the notary was called in to validate it; he registered he had written it with his handwriting and signed it, a fact that confirms that Bastião, as we suspected, was a qualified craftsman. However, at the time of the validation Bastião was unable to sign it again, which means that his health had deteriorated in the meantime. The witnesses were all from the same street of Cangostas, and fellow shoemakers.

Bastião's last will confirms that Afonso was the maker of his own fortune, and that his marriage did not play a significant part in his enrichment. Almost forty years later, the only property owned by Bastião to be found among Afonso's assets were some rural estates that did not form the bulk of the latter's heritage, where newly acquired urban houses took central stage.

Sixteenth century records of the misericórdia of Porto survive only from the 1560s onwards: as such, we do not know when Afonso was admitted into the confraternity and mostly, we ignore whether he was grouped among the first category members or the second. Confraternity membership was binary, as there were first class members, a category reserved for noblemen, and second rate ones who belonged to an intermediate group of artisans or merchants¹⁶.

¹⁴ Bastião's will mentions an indeterminate number of daughters of his wife's first marriage. AHSCMP, Série H, banco 4, lv. 36, fl. 79.

¹⁵ This type of will was elaborated privately; the testator wrote it in his own hand or had it written by someone else, and then proceeded to fold the sheets of paper, stitch and seal them. He subsequently handed it over to a notary, who would validate it in the presence of another five witnesses. Such a will allowed the testator to keep his/her testamentary dispositions secret during his lifetime, as his testament was to be opened only after his/her death. *Ordenações Manuelinas* [...], op. cit., livro IV, título LXXVI, "Em que forma se farão os testamentos, e das testemunhas que em elles se requerem", pp. 195-199, especially p. 196. The main reference work on the subject is Ana Cristina ARAÚJO, *A Morte em Lisboa. Atitudes e Representações 1700-1830*, Lisboa, Editorial Notícias, 1997, especially p. 75.

¹⁶ The first *compromisso* of the Misericórdia of Lisbon, valid in this period in Porto, mentioned only people of "desvairadas condições" (different conditions). See "Primeiro compromisso impresso da Misericórdia de Lisboa [1516, Dezembro 20]" in Isabel dos Guimarães SÁ and José Pedro PAIVA (dir.), *A fundação das Misericórdias: o Reinado de D. Manuel I*, in José Pedro Paiva (coord.), *Portugaliae Monumenta Misericordiarum*, vol. 3, p. 413. However, the *compromisso* of 1577 already made a clear distinction between first and second class members (*Compromisso da Irmandade da Casa da Sancta Misericórdia da Cidade de Lisboa*, Lisboa, António Alvarez, 1600, fl. 1). In the misericórdia of Porto that distinction was in already in practice before the new *compromisso* was published. In 1575, for instance, artisan members were qualified as "oficiais" (AHSCMP, Série E, banco 1, livro 3, fls. 3v). About the functioning and evolution of the confraternities of Misericórdia, see 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, p. 49-113; by the same author, *As Misericórdias Portuguesas de D. Manuel I a Pombal*, Lisboa, Livros Horizonte, 2001, p. 39-79.

The most documented years of Borreco's life are his last, that is, during the 1570s. By 1572, he was a scribe to the ruling board (*mesa*) of the misericórdia, the post immediately below the *provedor*. For those not familiar with the misericórdias, the ruling board included a group of thirteen men elected annually¹⁷. They gathered twice a week at a table, thus the name "mesa", and divided the numerous tasks of the confraternity among themselves. The scrivener was, of course, one of the most prestigious and also time consuming posts in the confraternity, as it implied writing down not only all the decisions of the *mesa* but also doing all registers in the books.

For Afonso Pires, being a scribe must have been a promotion, as no doubt he was sharing tasks with the *fidalgos* of the city who belonged to the misericórdia. Confraternities were convivial institutions, where men were expected not only to be present in religious celebrations and events (masses for the dead, offices, as well as the religious ceremonies of the liturgical year) but also to perform the works of mercy collectively, as the misericórdias were to abide to all fourteen of them, corporal and spiritual. The former included tending to the sick in the hospitals administrated by the confraternity, visiting the prisoners in jail, feeding and clothing the poor, and burying the dead. Among the spiritual ones, praying for the dead was undoubtedly the most time consuming, as many donors of the confraternity required the saying of masses as counter donation. However, the daily life of the misericórdia required numerous other daily tasks, which were directly or indirectly connected to the practice of the works of mercy: collecting alms through the city and its hinterland, visiting the shamefaced poor in their homes, organizing processions, surveying the saying of masses by the chaplains, participating in the funeral cortèges of other members, etc. The numerous judicial cases brought about by conflict over inheritances also required hiring lawyers and procurators who would often have to go to court, in Lisbon, in order to settle affairs. Also, the fact that the misericórdia rose to be an affluent institution, receiving rents from rural estates and urban houses gave origin to the need for solicitors.

Surely, not all members participated actively in such tasks, but the number of men involved in them ascended to several dozens each year. The variety of different posts required to perform all these tasks is impressive. At the top, there was a *provedor*, assisted by twelve *mesários*; among the latter, the second and third posts of the confraternity, the scribe and the treasurer. These men assembled twice a week in order to take decisions on the matters of the confraternity; during the year 1575-1576¹⁸, for which we have information, the *mesários* served for three months each, thus quadruplicating the number of members involved; thirty-four different men were on duty throughout the year. However, there were other members who had to perform tasks on a monthly basis, which were called *mordomos dos meses*. There were three kinds of *mordomos*: the *mordomos da capela*, who supervised the collection of alms, the *mordomos de fora*, who visited prisons, and the *mordomos* of the hospital and those who catered for the shamefaced poor. At least thirty different men performed those roles; the norm was to make them work in pairs formed by a noble and a non-noble member. There was also a *capelão-mor*, head of the chaplains, who supervised a variable number of priests. As such, many members had to get directly involved in the confraternity's daily life. Even if many of them performed several different tasks during

¹⁷ See "Primeiro compromisso impresso [cit.]", vol. 3, doc. 249, pp. 410-423.

¹⁸ Each administrative year of the misericórdia began on 2 July and ended 30 June of the following year.

the same year, their number could add up to nearly seventy people each year¹⁹. There were thus plenty of occasions for these men to meet face to face in the performance of all these duties, involving some degree of comradeship (or perhaps the lack of it); to men like Afonso conviviality with the members of the noble elites might have been a sign of social acceptance.

The last years of Afonso's life must have been troubled. 1574 and 1575 were difficult years in the city; there was hunger in all the area of Entre Douro e Minho²⁰, followed by exanthematic typhus (*tabardilho*). By February 1575, the municipality tried to make decisions in order to soften the effects of bad harvests and epidemics²¹. Three months later the councillors of the Misericórdia decided that the confraternity's members should take turns to care for the sick in an improvised hospital located at the Portas do Olival²², an entrance to the city located just outside its walls. An episode concerning Borrreco followed. Apparently, he had been designated to serve in that hospital, but he had disobeyed publicly, and in consequence was expelled from membership. Tending to the sick was no doubt a risky business, and probably many members of the Misericórdia gave excuses not to participate in this task. However, when Borrreco was summoned to explain himself before the *mesa*, he refused once again to go attend the sick, uttering the surprising remark that the confraternity would be at loss with his expulsion, not him²³. He probably was alluding to the fact that he was rich, and hinting that, as an heirless man, he might dispose of his inheritance on behalf of the misericórdia. However, expulsions from the misericórdia did not last long, and he was readmitted the following year. Only then he explained himself legitimizing his former refusal: he had to care for his own sick brother, and at the time he was not in good health either²⁴. This episode, however, suggests that as a prosperous self-made man Afonso probably provoked resentment among those he had joined as peers.

1577 was another year of alarm in the city of Porto, as Matosinhos, then a fishing town in the outskirts of the city, was isolated on account of an outburst of plague²⁵. Up in the skies, a comet was seen that year and the next, an event that contemporaries were always keen to associate with upcoming misfortunes²⁶. As we have seen, 1577 was the year in which the kingdom prepared itself to go to war in North Africa; the battle of Alcazarquivir (Ksar el-Kivir), where King Sebastião lost his life, paved the way for the Dynastic Union, which took place in 1580. As we shall see, the story of Afonso is also entangled with the Portuguese disaster that would follow the battle, leaving the throne without an heir and the kingdom deprived of its best

¹⁹ We have done the calculations as these schedules were registered every year in the ledger of the treasurer. However, homonymy is a deterrent when it comes to giving precise numbers of people involved. See Arquivo Histórico da Santa Casa da Misericórdia do Porto (AHSCMP), Série E, banco 1, livro 3, fl. 3v.

²⁰ F. DIAS, *Memórias quinhentistas dum procurador del Rei no Porto*, ed. Artur de Magalhães Basto, Porto, Câmara Municipal, 1937, p. 22.

²¹ A. CRUZ, *Algumas observações sobre a vida económica e social da cidade do Porto nas vésperas de Alcácer Quibir*, Porto, Bibl. Pública Municipal, 1967, p. 103. For a complete list of epidemic diseases from 1415 to 1637 in Porto see Amândio BARROS, *A Morte que Vinha do Mar. Saúde e sanidade marítima num Porto Atlântico (Séculos XV-XVII)*, Porto, Fronteira do Caos, 2013, p. 166-173.

²² A. CRUZ, *Algumas observações sobre [...]*, op. cit., p. 128.

²³ AHSCMP, Série D, banco 8, livro 1, fl. 68v [1575-05-15].

²⁴ AHSCMP, Série D, banco 8, livro 1, fl. 74 [1576-06-10].

²⁵ António CRUZ, *Algumas observações sobre [...]* op. cit., p. 149.

²⁶ F. DIAS, *Memórias quinhentistas [...]*, op. cit., p. 114.

aristocracy. Many warriors who participated were made prisoners, and the profitable business of ransoming captives would follow.

Afonso was also member of the confraternity of the Espírito Santo (Holy Ghost), which assembled the officials of justice (we remind that Afonso's official occupation was that of scribe to the judge of orphans). In 1578, in the day of the confraternity's feast, which must have been sometime between late May or June, Borreco was elected warden (*mordomo*), but did not show up to fulfil his duties; his fellow members punished him with a fine of eight thousand réis²⁷. A misunderstanding had taken place, - we do not know if it was intended or not- because Afonso Pires stated in his last will that he was bedridden, and could not even attend the church: "because I have not been able to go and see God for eleven months, lest to serve as warden because I am paralysed"²⁸. In all probability he was not lying, as Afonso died a few months afterwards, in November 1578. How not to think that his peers wanted some leverage, easy to obtain now that Afonso was ill? In order to appease the conflict, Borreco reimbursed the confraternity in his will and donated an extra two thousand réis, stating that they would cover up judicial expenses.

If we consider confraternities as barometers of social acceptance, or at least homologation of economic success, maybe Borreco was not as respected in the city as he might have wished, even if his job as scribe to the judge of orphans awarded him some respectability. Even so, this post might offer, to the less scrupulous, opportunities for enrichment, as the scribes were guardians to the assets of the orphans, and a set of possibilities for manoeuvring could take place. Like, for instance, taking orphans' money and lending it, and replacing it when needed. The fact that he was a moneylender, although the interests on loans are not documented in the sources, might explain his wealth. In fact, the sources do not mention that he took interests on loans, so Afonso might hardly be called a usurer. Even if he did, it would not be the kind of behaviour that the sources of the confraternity would acknowledge at this point in time²⁹. But he certainly was a pawnbroker, lending money to people in need, an activity that was unlikely to make him popular. Borreco must have made his fortune through some process of enrichment, licit or illicit.

The last will

Afonso Pires Borreco's testament must have been written at the last moment, as it declared that he had confessed and taken the Holy Ghost. The following day the judge of the orphans issued an order to freeze his assets at the request of the misericórdia, on the 22 November 1578, which proves he was already dead.

²⁷ It must have been on Pentecost, celebrated 50 days after Easter. On the liturgical calendar, and movable feasts, see Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p. 59. About the incident, see F. DIAS, *Memórias quinhentistas* [...], op. cit., p. 114.

²⁸ "porque onze meses há que não posso ir ver a Deus quanto mais servir de mordomo por estar entrevado". (AHSCMP, Série H, banco 4, livro 36, fl. 56v).

²⁹ The misericórdia of Porto only started to acknowledge interests upon money loans during the 1640s. AHSCMP, série E, banco 1, livros 25 a 36.

Afonso Pires, as we have said, was a childless married man, and his wife was still alive. Laws ascribed to each member of the couple half of their estate, and the wife was to have the juridical status of head of household³⁰. Maria Martins, however, was mentally deranged. Afonso Pires detached his property from his wife's: she was to bequeath her share freely, whilst he left his to the Misericórdia. As we shall see, Maria Martins died sometime during 1580, without drawing a will, although she had a pool of prospective heirs.

Even if her husband acknowledged her mental disability, Borreco still gave her the possibility of taking decisions in properties that he thought were more hers than his. This confirms recent research on the capacity of women to exert authority over their assets³¹; Maria Martins is a case in point, as in Borreco's words, she was too aged to deal with the whole estate, and "belonged more to the other world than this one"³². Even deemed incapable, Maria Martins was expected to take decisions, and her wishes concerning specific items of property were acknowledged in her husband's will. As to Afonso, as previously referred to, he designated the misericórdia as the heir to his share of the couple's estate, and that is the reason why we came across this case study, because otherwise the documentation would have been lost. As we shall see, the confraternity was not willing to lose the opportunity of incorporating its share of Afonso Pires Borreco's fortune.

Afonso was very specific about designating his heirs: he declared not to have children from his wife Maria Martins, neither hopes of having them; his parents and grandparents were all dead. As such, he could dispose of his estate freely, according to the "lei do Reino" (law of the kingdom). Portuguese laws recognized only direct ascendants and descendants as mandatory heirs, and as such no collaterals such as brothers, uncles or cousins inherited, unless testators stated otherwise³³. As a childless man, his parents and grandparents being also dead, Afonso was free to bequeath his assets to whomever he wanted. As could be expected with someone who had dealt with orphans' estates at least during part of his life, Afonso knew about inheritance laws. He also emphasized this decision by officially disinheriting any relatives he might have. This sounds strange, for a man whose parents were dead and had no children by his wife, but easy to understand if we think, that, as a commoner, any illegitimate children he might have would be entitled to inheritance automatically (in opposition to noblemen, who had to designate and benefit illegitimate offspring explicitly in their last wills)³⁴. As such, Afonso might be preventing that someone might come forward claiming to be his son or daughter, and thus apply for a share of the inheritance.

³⁰ *Ordenações Manuelinas* [...], op. cit., livro IV, título LXIX, "De como o marido e a mulher socedem huu ao outro", p. 178 and IDEM, tit. VII, "Como a mulher fica em posse e cabeça de casal per morte de seu marido", pp. 23-26.

³¹ Darlene ABREU-FERREIRA, *Women, Crime, and Forgiveness in Early Modern Portugal*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2015, p. 180.

³² "por ela não ter disposição para o poder fazer por si só nem idade e ser mais do outro mundo que deste". AHSCMP, Série H, banco 4, lv. 36, fl. 72.

³³ *Ordenações Manuelinas* [...], op. cit., livro IV, título LXXV, "Como o padre e madre herdão ao filho, e nom o irmão. E da mulher que casou sendo de idade de cinquenta anos", p. 191-195, especially p. 191.

³⁴ *Ordenações Manuelinas* [...], op. cit., livro IV, título LXXI, "Como o filho piam herda a herança de seu padre", pp. 181-183.

Borreco had already elaborated the inventory of his landed property, having also enumerated a list of all his debtors and the money they owed him, as well as of the pawned objects he had in his power in order to serve as pledge. In order to make proof of the sums of money at stake, he annexed to the testament written statements known as *conhecimentos*, documents signed by both debtor and creditor. Last wills of merchants and other businessmen were generally drawn after inventories and business records (*livros de razão*) made beforehand, which could be transcribed in significant parts into their last wills, but never totally. Many testators, in fact, mentioned their ledgers as supplementary sources that should be consulted when executing their last wills; however, as could be expected, they have not survived, in opposition to testaments, which had to be registered by notaries.

Surprisingly, in his last will Afonso Pires Borreco stated that he was not rich, and what he owned was due to his labour: “[...] I have always been the enemy of money and also of dealings with it, and only cared to earn it by my own sweat”³⁵. Sweat, a biblical word mostly used with a symbiotic relationship with work, was not doubt a *cliché*; however, in this case, it confirmed the plebeian ascent of Afonso, as no nobleman would have used an expression that described the commoners’ quest for survival. Afonso’s self-denial tried to erase his moneylending practice in a world whose moral economy prescribed any financial gain³⁶. To the *misericórdia*, Borreco’s life as moneylender was not relevant; according to the Catholic religious logic, all sinners could be forgiven. Maybe that is the reason why the last will states that he had already confessed and received the last sacrament beforehand, as if to calm down any eventual anxieties the *misericórdia* might have about receiving half the fortune of a sinner.

Afonso had not cut ties with his family back in Sardeal. He seems to have had a brother near him, António Ferreira, living either in Porto or its outskirts, who was about to enter some religious order, and to whom he left one of the best items of his many landed assets, a farm worth 180.000 réis. Afonso designated him executor of his will, but he did not perform that role, probably because he professed in the meantime.

Among the many debtors Afonso listed in his testament, he mentions a nephew from Sardeal, to whom he lent the necessary equipment (including clothes) and money for an unknown venture. He stated in his will that he had given him the money so that he would not have to sell a vine and an olive grove³⁷.

On the other hand, Afonso helped a godchild of his to become a scribe to the orphans; his name was Francisco de Magalhães, married to Genebra Pinto, his wife’s half-niece. In those days, posts in administration or justice were family property, and were to be passed on to sons or sons in law. In their absence, Afonso chose to benefit the nearest relative he could dispose of, to whom he lent the substantial sum of 180.000

³⁵ “e porque o mundo me tinha por rico faço esta declaração para [que] se não presuma o contrário porque sempre fui inimigo de dinheiro nem tratos com ele somente ganhá-lo por meu suor”. AHSCMP, Série H, banco 4, livro 36, fl. 73.

³⁶ Bartolomé CLAVERO, *La grâce du don. Anthropologie catholique de l'économie moderne*, Paris, Albin Michel, 1996, p. 64.

³⁷ AHSCMP, Série H, banco 4, livro 36, fls. 69-69v.

(enough to buy a farm or a good urban house), that Francisco would have to repay in five years³⁸.

However, Afonso had no intention to return to his homeland. His detachment towards his hometown is also documented by the fact that he did not order his mortal remains to be taken back to Sardeal, but to be buried in the church of the convent of S. Domingos. This was the favourite burial site of non-nobles and merchants, whilst the neighbouring Franciscans catered preferentially for *fidalgos*. He assigned three different options for his grave, all consisting of shallow graves, where some of his wife's kin were already deposited; the first was his father-in-law's burial site; the second would be his wife's grandfather, and the third his mother-in-law first husband's grave³⁹. Even if Afonso had tried to live by the law of the nobility, hers was a family of shoemakers, a craft that was known in the city for the wealth of its practitioners.

The way Afonso organized his own funeral was in itself testimony to the position he had acquired in life. He was not modest concerning his funeral's *cortège*; all priests present in his funeral should say mass, and the cathedral's choristers, Dominicans, and the Franciscans should accompany his body to the grave. Also, all the city's confraternities should be present, including those where he was a member, that is, the confraternity of Espírito Santo (Holy Ghost), designed to court officials, to which he belonged as a scribe to the judge of orphans, the confraternity of the shoemakers, and the misericórdia itself, who would carry him to the grave. He also declared: "there shall be no mourners because I do not want strident noise from women"⁴⁰. Instead, a small group of prisoners, selected by the Misericórdia among the most needy, should receive the traditional alms that were given to the poor at the occasion of funerals (*obradas*).

If we read carefully Afonso's last will, we realize that something is missing: Borreco did not envision the saying of masses on behalf of his soul for the years to come, as did the majority of other donors of the misericórdia, his father in law included. This constitutes an unsolvable enigma: was it because moneylending was a sin? In no moment the sources hint at Borreco being of Jewish ascendancy, so we have no reason to believe that he was not a staunch Catholic. The misericórdia cashed the half of his estate without further obligations: a neat sum of 1.083.345, one of the first significant amounts of money that the confraternity received since its creation in 1499, and which could easily have been used to fund perpetual masses, as did other donors of the misericórdia. This sum was almost equal to the revenues of the misericórdia during two years of the 1570s⁴¹. In fact, the relative financial prosperity of Porto's misericórdia would start only in that decade and improve considerably until the next. Only then the confraternity surpassed what had been chronic economic difficulties, because its donors left it small donations. Starting from the 1570s several huge donations, mostly from donors who had enriched by emigrating to the territories of the Iberian Empires, allowed

³⁸ The farm Afonso bequeathed to his own brother was evaluated at 180.000 réis, and the value of town house where he lived was estimated at 215.000 réis.

³⁹ AHSCMP, Série H, banco 4, livro 36, fl. 55v.

⁴⁰ "E me não levarão obradas com o meu corpo somente por não fazerem estrondas nem alvoroço com mulheres" (AHSCMP, Série H, banco 4, livro 36, fl. 56v).

⁴¹ We have information for the years 1474-1575 and 1575-1576, in which the treasurer cashed entries in the value of 1,234.658 réis. AHSCMP, Série E, banco 1, livro 3, fls. 57v, and in the same book, although in a second ledger numbered anew, fl. 64v.

the confraternity to build a solid heritage formed by the rents of urban and rural estates, but, above all, by bonds of public debt (*padrões de juro*)⁴².

The testament would then enounce the people and institutions he left legacies to: to the confraternity of the *Lázarus* a four storey house and the friars of convent de Santo António de Vale de Piedade should receive a thousand réis in cash to be spent in clothing⁴³.

He refused to free Francisco, his old male slave worth 20 thousand *réis*, stating that he would then become a jailer, a fate he ascribed to men in his situation; instead, he should be handed over to serve in the male convent of Conceição de Matosinhos, because he was obedient, a good servant, and virtuous⁴⁴. Should Francisco refuse this fate, he would then reincorporate Afonso's estate and be sold as such⁴⁵. In fact, Francisco chose not to serve the friars and was sold, together with Afonso's horse and his other three slaves, Maria, Botelho and Vieira.

The numerous urban houses he acquired in his lifetime formed the bulk of Borreco's estate, and Afonso's detailed list included the price he had paid for them. Most were located in the same street where he lived (Rua das Cangostas), and in the nearby streets, which formed, as we have seen, in neighbourhood of the city's shoemakers. These registers also list the tenants who lived in those houses, as their ownership transformed Afonso into the landlord of many city dwellers, mainly craftsmen, and poor single women, either widowed or orphaned. To some of the latter he manifested a charitable disposition, by declaring that he was trying to find husbands for them, or recommending that certain widows or poor women should not be evicted from their lodgings after his death. One of his houses was even to be inserted in the Misericórdia's annual balloting of dowries. It could be expected that such houses in the shoemakers' neighbourhood had been passed onto him by marriage, as his father in law, Bastião Martins, was an affluent shoemaker, but it was not the case. Afonso had bought most of those urban assets during his lifetime. Instead, his in-laws had transmitted him some of rural estates Afonso declared to possess at the time of his death.

It is almost impossible to have an idea of what Afonso's urban houses looked like. Some are described as *sobrados*, but Afonso enumerated a long list of tenants for each, probably because he rented them by room. In ancient Portuguese a single room was called a *casa*, and thus it is difficult to know how many tenants a building had, or in

⁴² I. dos Guimarães Sá, "Conectando vivos e mortos nos territórios da expansão ibérica: religião e ritual entre os doadores da Misericórdia do Porto (1500-1700)", *Colóquio Internacional Religião e religiosidades na Época Moderna*, Rio de Janeiro, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Novembro 2014 (in print).

⁴³ A convent of the Franciscan Order, located in the south bank of the river Douro (Vila Nova de Gaia), founded in 1568. F. Ribeiro da SILVA, "Tempos Modernos" [...], op. cit., p. 309.

⁴⁴ Nossa Senhora da Conceição de Matosinhos belonged to the order of the Observant Franciscans and was located in the nearby town of Leça da Palmeira. B. Vasconcelos e SOUSA (dir.), *Ordens Religiosas em Portugal. Das Origens a Trento – Guia Histórico*, 2ª ed., Lisboa, Livros Horizonte, 2006, pp. 281-282.

⁴⁵ "para que sirva a dita casa em sua vida por ser bom sujeito obediente e saber servir e virtuoso e não o querendo servir nem obedecendo e danando-se em tal caso não o podendo ter como próprio entre digo em tal caso se tornara para a fazenda e lhe darão o dinheiro para necessidades da dita casa porque esta vida que lhe dou é mais certa que a servir de beleguim em que ordinariamente os tais vem parar" (AHSCMP, Série H, banco 4, livro 36, fl. 57v).

which building a specific lodger lived. Also, the confusion is worsened by the fact that the word was often used in the plural, *casas*. Afonso mentioned in his will buildings with doors giving to different urban arteries, doors that had been recently opened and should be closed, tenants who lived in *lojas* (rooms in the ground floor, generally non-paved, that is, *terra batida*)⁴⁶. However, he was very precise about what he had paid for their purchase and the money he had spent in improvements. The quantity and quality of the urban houses that Borreco stated to have bought during his lifetime leaves no doubt about the existence of a conscious investment strategy.

The misericórdia acts

The procedures taken by the confraternity in order to preserve Afonso Pires' assets from predatory action are impressive. As we have seen, his testament was drawn on the 21st November, approved by the notary the following day, the same of his death. On that very same day, while the ceremonies of his funeral were presumably taking place or being prepared, the misericórdia obtained an order to freeze his assets from the judicial authority (which included sealing his house), and the elaboration of the inventory started immediately afterwards. At the confraternity's request, the *juiz de fora* placed three men at the house as guards: the Misericórdia chose two members to protect its interests, whilst a certain Francisco de Magalhães, a citizen, represented the widow's prospective heirs (it is worth reminding she was still alive at the time).

The next step consisted of settling for good the state of Maria's (Afonso's wife) mental health. As mentally destitute, her case fell within the scope of the jurisdiction of the judge of the orphans. Its bearer, D. Duarte de Almeida, having heard she was "prodigal and incapable of governing and administering her person and assets"⁴⁷ summoned her to his presence. This happened on the 24 November 1578, and we must note the celerity of the process, no doubt due to the attention that the misericórdia placed upon this inheritance. The judge asked her some questions and confirmed her insanity, and ordered the elaboration of an inventory of her assets. That was the first step in order to enable the partition between the Misericórdia, as Afonso's main heir, and the inheritors from Maria's side. By now we have a better idea of all the people who were interested in following the process as closely as possible. The following persons boarded in the house, keeping a close eye on its household effects:

- António Dias de Magalhães, a citizen, and father to Francisco de Magalhães, who was married to Genebra Pinto. These were Afonso's widow potential heirs, as Genebra was the niece of Maria Martins, together with other nieces who had entered convents⁴⁸.

⁴⁶ On the morphology of urban houses during this period see Luís Miguel DUARTE, "A Propriedade Urbana", *Portugal do Renascimento à Crise Dinástica*, coordenação de João José Alves Dias, in *Nova História de Portugal*, dir. de Joel Serrão e A. H. de Oliveira Marques, vol. 5), Lisboa, Presença, 1998, pp. 114-160; Luísa TRINDADE, *A Casa Corrente em Coimbra. Dos Finais da Idade Média aos Inícios da Época Moderna*, Coimbra, Câmara Municipal de Coimbra, 2002; Manuel Sílvio Alves CONDE, *Construir, Habitar: a Casa Medieval*, Braga, CITCEM, 2012.

⁴⁷ "pródiga e inábil para poder reger governar nem administrar sua pessoa bens e fazenda" (AHSCMP, Série H, banco 4, livro 36, fl. 86).

⁴⁸ Genebra Pinto was one of the daughters of Maria Martins's half sister Cecília Fernandes Pinto. Maria de Fátima MACHADO, *Os órfãos e os enjeitados [...]*, op. cit., p. 293.

- Maria, a black slave born at the house;
- Two members of the misericórdia, who represented the interests of the confraternity, which was to inherit half of the deceased's estate.

The intervention of the misericórdia in this process, however, is pervading in the inventorying procedures, where several of its members were present. The executor of the will, João Álvares Pereira de Berredo, a *fidalgo*, whom Afonso declared to be a friend, was himself a member of the confraternity. He was Afonso's second option, but as previously referred to, the first, his brother António Ferreira, vanished from the sources, probably because he had already entered convent. As a reward for his work, Afonso left Berredo a whistle in gold with precious gems evaluated in 14.000 réis⁴⁹. This man was to enjoy a long career in the confraternity ruling boards; he was elected provedor in 1595.

The final partition document is dated 4 May 1580, but by that time Maria was dead. As she had not drawn a last will, three nieces claimed their share of the inheritance; the above mentioned Genebra Pinto, whose husband and father in law kept a close eye on the procedures, and two other nieces who were professed nuns. There were quarrels among them as to who should be given what; however, the judge managed to go ahead with the partition.

Lending money: debtors

Afonso had a list of numerous debtors, from all strata of the urban population: there was the occasional *fidalgo*, several citizens, two abbesses of the convent of Monchique, various other women on their own, but the majority were craftsmen. Although the debtors from the elites owed him the larger sums of money, as could be expected, those from the medium and low strata of the population were by far the most numerous, owing relatively low sums of money, generally below 5000 réis. This is not a surprise, since several of the latter were tenants who were late on the payment of rents; some, especially women, must have been very poor, as Borreco pardoned their rent arrears on account of charity. Many debts were difficult to receive: 13 out of 55 *conhecimentos* were not refunded, either because the debtor was absent, dead, and his widow too poor. This amounts to a nearly a quarter of the whole, and is a good example of the difficulties a creditor might find in order to get his money back.

Most pawned items Afonso had in his house at the time of his death consisted of jewellery in gold or silver (mostly rings but also some necklaces), the usual silver plates and chalices, but there was also a cape, some curtains and a bed canopy in Indian cloth⁵⁰.

⁴⁹ “apito de ouro de pedraria com sua cadeia de ouro que tenho no meu cofre que asovio” (AHSCMP, Série H, banco 4, livro 36, fl. 72).

⁵⁰ As these items were pawned, they were not included among Afonso's belongings of Asian provenance.

We do not know if Borreco trafficked regularly in horses, but one of the debtors who owed him one of the biggest sums in his portfolio (a hundred thousand réis) had bought him a horse in order to equip himself for combat in Africa. Neither the buyer nor the horse seem to have returned from Alcazarquivir, but Borreco noted in his last will that the money was still in debt. In order to recover it, the misericórdia of Porto wrote letters to the buyer's widow, and also to the Misericórdia of Santarém, which was to mediate the affair⁵¹. The widow argued that the horse's value had been overrated and managed to refund only sixty thousand réis, which were paid in 1585.

The fact that a *fidalgo* had to honour his dealings with Borreco is significant, even if we know that the aristocracy sometimes pushed forward its social status not to respect deals. In this case, even if the *fidalgo* was dead, and in spite of the tragic circumstances of a military defeat, the money was still due. The misericórdia of Porto, in any case, did not let go, and cashed the debt nearly ten years later.

Afonso's house and mobile assets

Afonso estimated the value of the house where he lived at 200.000 réis, plus 15.000 for the stall and the haystack. We do not know what it looked like, but it is likely that it was a building with no vertical homogenous boundaries, as we can imagine urban houses in the cities of the past, where buildings packed within relatively small areas, and people added structures as they saw fit⁵². He referred to provisional doors that should be boarded up after his death, rented rooms in the ground floor, a yard covered in dung, and a stall with an upper floor that served as haystack.

Let us focus on the inventoried mobile property that filled Afonso's house. The furniture was listed according to the room it belonged to. First it should be noted that the house was a *sobrado*, then a token of distinction; this type of house was characterized for having at least one storey built over wooden beams. The ground floor must have contained the kitchen and an entresol; there was also an office with a room behind it. Up the stairs there was a bedroom. The distinctions between private and public areas, which would become increasingly neat generations later, were not yet drawn in the residences of the high aristocracy⁵³. Yet, Afonso's house established a clear divide between the private bedroom upstairs and the public rooms on the ground floor, where the kitchen and the *sala* were located.

The *sala*, as is designated by the source, was a place of work and business for Afonso Pires. There were five *cadeiras de estado* (stately chairs, that is, with arms and back), a bench where the deceased sat in front of a writing table, a red cot from India, a wooden box and a safe under the writing table that contained some pawned objects. The presence of the Indian cot suggests that Borreco was accommodated in this room during his illness, as well as his vicinity to his most prized possessions. Indian cots, a non-luxurious import from India, were light beds composed by a wooden frame and

⁵¹ AHSCMP, Série H, banco 4, livro 36, fl. 130 onwards.

⁵² Richard SENNETT, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization*, New York, W. W. Norton and Company, 1996, p. 193.

⁵³ Kirsten B. NEUSCHEL, "Noble households in the Sixteenth Century: Material Settings and Human Communities", *French Historical Studies*, vol. 15, 1988, n. 4, p. 615.

intertwined straw, which have been found in several inventories from Porto. The value ascribed to it in the inventory was 3500 réis, enough to pay for fourteen days of work of a qualified labourer, at the salary of 250 réis a day.

The room also contained several tapestries and carpets, as well as wooden boxes used for storage. It contained Borreco's favourite objects, that is, the numerous items he needed to ride his horse. Horses were certainly an important part of Afonso's life, as the number and quality of his horse gear document. In this case, not even a single piece originated in pawning; they were all part of Borreco's presentation of self⁵⁴. As we have seen, his house included a stall, and he possessed a horse at the time of his death, which was sold together with his four slaves. Afonso's readiness to eventually participate in war cannot be discarded, as he possessed several weapons, such as a crossbow, with its corresponding arrows, a casque, and a breastplate, possibly in leather (*couraça*).

Afonso mounted jennet style, and possessed several pieces of equipment that might also have been used in cane games, such as an *adarga*⁵⁵. We know that cane games were a must in court and local festivities, and the presence of such objects might be related to Afonso's participation in them. However, evidence has been found of bullfights during Corpus Christi in the city, but not of cane games⁵⁶. It is possible that Afonso chose to ride jennet style, or was abiding to an old usage. In any case, by 1578 several items related to his horse attire were described as being worn out or old.

He had two horse covers, one of them curiously an old tiger skin, whose value was estimated in 1200 réis. This was the second of the four items of Asian provenance that can be found among Afonso's belongings.

Other valuable commodities were luxury textiles, such as tapestries and carpets. Two carpets and five tapestries – two door hangings, two cloths, and two *panos de armas* – were kept in a trunk, and although some of them are referred to as being “*de figuras*”, that is, with images, none of them was described in detail. His clothes were also kept in this room of the ground floor. It cannot be said that Afonso's wardrobe was particularly abundant or luxurious at the time of his death: two capes, two *pelotes*, a bonnet, a *couradanta* (cuirass), a pair of slashed trousers, and one *almilha*⁵⁷ from India. This is the third object of Indian provenance, to which we shall get back further on; the fourth was a banner, described as a “*bandeira da Índia*”. Their value was assessed respectively at a 100 and 80 réis, which means they were little value. At least two of

⁵⁴ Erwin GOFFMAN, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Edinburgh, University of Edinburgh, 1956, p. 155.

⁵⁵ Jennet riding is held to be a Moorish heritage in the Iberian Peninsula and it consisted of riding a horse with legs tightly folded, which required specific equipment. See Noel FALLOWS, *Jousting in Medieval and Renaissance Iberia*, Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 2010, 267-304. It was used mainly during cane games, where the horsemen also wore *adargas*, leather shields of equal Moorish origin. Helmut NICKEL. “About the Adarga, A Shield of Two Faiths, Three Continents, Four Cultures and Seven Centuries.” In *The Armorer's Art. Essays in Honor of Stuart Phyr*. Ed. Donald J. La Rocca. Woonsocket, RI, Mowbray Publishing, 2014, p. 13-24.

⁵⁶ On the feast of Corpus Christi of Porto, and other festivities, see Iria GONÇALVES, *As finanças municipais do Porto na segunda metade do século XV*, Porto, Câmara Municipal, 1987, pp. 93-108; Iria GONÇALVES, *As festas do «Corpus Christi» do Porto na segunda metade do século XV: a participação do concelho*, “Estudos Medievais”, n. 5-6 (1984-5), offprint.

⁵⁷ *Pelote* - a sleeveless jacket, worn between the doublet and the cape; *almilha* - padded garment used between the shirt and the doublet.*

these items were related to war, the *almilha* and the *couradanta*, in times where men's current dress included garments that one could expect to be worn only during combat⁵⁸.

A cloak of the misericórdia (*balandrau*), which its members had to wear on top of their clothes during its official ceremonies, can be found in the inventory, a sign that maybe Afonso took pride in his condition of member.

As a pawnbroker, we could expect that Afonso possessed a wide range of silver objects belonging to others, which he did; his own silverware, however, consisted only of two candlesticks and two spoons. The lavish sum of 397.480 reais in different coins was also in this room, enough to endower nearly twenty poor orphan girls at 20 thousand réis each.

Upstairs, the bedroom contained his house linen, his underwear (shirts), a bench by the bed, mattresses, blankets, towels and pillows, together with some tablecloths and napkins. His underwear was also kept in it: three linen shirts, and a pair of underpants. The bed itself was not inventoried, which suggests that it was an alcove, and as such embedded in the walls. Also in the bedroom, some valuable jewels were to be found, two bracelets and beads filled with amber, all worth 14.300 réis, stated to belong to his wife.

As to the kitchen, it had only a walnut portable table, the usual boxes, a cask, two candlesticks and tin table wear. There was also an entresol (*sobreloja*), with two containers for wine, and two trunks, one of them with the suitable shape to be carried by a donkey or a mule (*arca de duas em carga*).

His four slaves deserve to be mentioned again, three men and a woman. They were inventoried and sold together with Afonso's horse, because they were considered as belonging to the same type of property, the one formed by living things, designated by *semoventes* in Portuguese (literally 'half movable'), a word which applied to animals and slaves. Other owners of slaves manifested some kind of emotional attachment to them, but that was not the case with Afonso Pires⁵⁹.

Epilogue

The possibilities of joining an elite confraternity might have been enhanced for those who, although less respectable, were acknowledged as not having mandatory heirs. In times when the confraternity was thriving to survive economically, all inheritances were welcome, and as such the misericórdia was aware of the need to pursue fundraising strategies. Afonso Pires, as we have seen, did not have either direct

⁵⁸ Angus PATTERSON, *Fashion and Armour in Renaissance Europe. Proud Lookes and Brave Attire*, London, V&A Publishing, 2009, p. 29.

⁵⁹ Notarial records studied by Amândio Barros document the presence of slaves in the city of Porto during the sixteenth century in the homes of nobles and merchants, and also serving in institutions (Amândio BARROS, "O Porto e o trato de escravos no século XVI", *Africana Studia*, n. 7, 2004, pp. 31-51). On the other hand, many last wills of donors of the misericórdia illustrate the existence of emotional ties between owners and slaves.

ascendants or descendants. His demented wife received half of the whole estate, and the Misericórdia cashed the other half.

Afonso did not lend money to the rich and powerful citizens of Porto (with the exception of one or two), but rather to the poor and low middle strata of the population, mostly people living in the shoemakers' neighbourhood, that is, around the same area where his in-laws lived and from whom he received rents from the numerous houses he owned. The expression "in order to make his living" appears now and then in order to qualify some of his debtors. Borreco lived in times of hunger and epidemics, not to mention the preparation of the expedition to Alcazarquivir (Ksar el-Kebir), plus its dreadful consequences. Although the battle had taken place in 4 August 1578, some wives were already asking him money in order to pay their husbands' ransoms.

We can infer that Afonso's life was full of conflicts, perhaps because his peers might resent his prosperity. As a moneylender (although the sources never mention interests on loans), Borreco would hardly have been popular among Oporto's inhabitants, and probably the stigma of usury pended over him. As we have seen, the misericórdia accused him of not tending to the infirmary of the sick that had been installed *ad hoc* in the *Portas do Olival*, an entrance to the city located near its medieval walls. On the other hand, the brotherhood of his Afonso Pires' own occupational group, the one that assembled the court officials, fined him for not fulfilling his duties, when he lay incapacitated in bed.

Afonso surely did not live as a very rich man, although he surely could have afforded it. His clothes, furniture, and his luxury items are not outstanding either in number or value. Although Borreco seems never to have set foot in any of the overseas territories to where the Portuguese were travelling to, he possessed four items of Asian provenance. None of each very valuable, and mostly objects of common use: the Indian cot probably as a substitute for a bed when Afonso was ill and could not climb up the stairs to his bedroom; a tiger skin to dress his horse, and an *almilha*, a piece of protective clothing that might not be even visible under other external clothes. They all point to the fact that by 1578 Asian objects were not rarities but incorporated into the daily life of their owners as current things⁶⁰. In this case, owned by a man that was not directly involved in commerce, and who lived far from Lisbon, the Portuguese city directly connected to Asian trade, as the ships of the India route departed exclusively from its seaport⁶¹. However, as modest as his train of life might have been, Afonso possessed four slaves at the time of his death, a considerable number if we keep in mind that there were only two people to be served – his wife and him.

Afonso's sole investment seems to have been in his horse attire and weaponry that we know he was mandated by law to possess, as he performed the public office of scribe to the judge of orphans. He possessed every piece of luxurious harness we can imagine; old and sick as he might have been, he kept the horse in the stable, its attire and his weapons in his *sala*. Did he pride himself of parading on horseback across the

⁶⁰ Hugo Miguel CRESPO, "Global Interiors on the Rua Nova in Renaissance Lisbon", in Gschwend, Annemarie Jordan e K.J.P. Lowe (eds.), *The Global City. On the Streets of Renaissance Lisbon*, Londres, Paul Holberton publishing, 2015, p. 121.

⁶¹ James C. BOYAJIAN, *Portuguese Trade in Asia under the Habsburgs, 1580-1640*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, p. 3.

streets in the city? We do not know, but one thing is sure. His case certainly documents upward social mobility in a city that was increasingly closing itself to social climbers as Afonso Pires Borreco.