# The Évora foundlings between the 16th and the 19th century: The Portuguese public welfare system under analysis (*)

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**SUMMARY**

1.—The phenomenon of the abandoned children. 2.—Conditions and results of children abandonment. 3.—The number of abandoned children. 4.—The Évora foundlings. 5.—Final remarks.

**ABSTRACT**

By the beginning of the 16th century, the Portuguese State imposed on local powers the obligation to bring up and take care of foundlings. However, with the creation of the *Misericórdia* fraternities all over the country, the municipalities transferred the assistance of the children to those charities, with the promise of economic support. Nonetheless, in spite of the State «interest», the concern of local powers and the care provided by the *Misericórdias*, the results were tragic for the children. In this paper I intend to provide a summary about the welfare services for foundlings in Portugal, and to study the assistance that was given to them in the city of Évora.

**Palabras clave:** Hospicianos, hermandades de Misericordia, Portugal, siglos XVI-XVIII
**Keywords:** Évora foundlings, *Misericórdias* fraternities, Portugal, 16th-18th centuries

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Fitted into a common cultural mould, the relationship between Portuguese medieval society and the poor and the sick did not differ, in the essential, from that of any other occidental Christian society. Given the identical characteristics of the social-economic context, the concern of Portugal, as in the case of other European countries, about the problem of public health and the well being of the population emerged towards the middle of the 15th century, when the increase of pauperism, the cyclical outbreaks of the plague and the rising number of beggars and vagabonds threatened urban centres, demanding established powers to act. From then on, the rationalisation and modernisation of the mechanisms of support against poverty and sickness began —through the creation of the so-called General Hospitals— and charity gave way to social welfare (1).

Therefore, caught in the net of a church also under reform, the social welfare system did not remain indifferent to religious orientations. As is known, the religious rupture that took place in the 16th century divided Europe with regards to welfare policies too, distinguishing two paths, that of Protestants and that of Catholics; the latter dominated by the guidelines of the Council of Trento (1545-1563), which reaffirmed the authority of the church in almost all the social fields.

It was precisely within this chronological and factual context that Portugal created its public welfare system. A system that could not remain outside the Trento guidelines, from the ideological point of view, but that followed its own course, with unique characteristics within the European context: a kind of third way, which had its roots at the end of the 15th century, when the monarchy got directly involved in the creation of a network of fraternities that reproduced the same objectives and functioned according to the same principles all over the country, from its headquarters in Lisbon (2).

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(1) The bibliography on the subject is enormous. Referring to the most recent, see BRONISLAW, Geremek. *A Piedade e a Forca. História da Miséria e da Caridade na Europa,* Lisboa, Terramar, 1995; JUTTE, Robert. *Poverty and Deviance in Early Modern Europe,* 2nd ed., Cambridge, University Press, 1996; GRELL, Ole Peter, CUNNINGHAM, Andrew, ARRIZABALAGA, Jon (ed.). *Health care and poor relief in Counter-Reformation Europe*, London, Routledge, 1999.

(2) An idea that I developed in the work that I presented in the *VI Congresso da As-*

Named *Santas Casas de Misericórdia*, those institutions —created and managed by laymen— were in charge of fourteen forms of charity: seven spiritual (namely, to teach the simple-minded; to give good advice; to be merciful with those who made errors; to comfort the sad; to forgive the insults; to suffer the insults with patience; to pray to God for the living and for the dead); and seven material (namely, to redeem the captives and visit the prisoners; to cure the sick; to clothe the naked; to feed the hungry; to quench the thirsty; to lodge the pilgrims; to bury the dead), which covered all the welfare needs of the population.

The additional value that Portugal took from Trento was the official recognition that *Misericórdias* were fraternities under royal protection, which meant, out of the control of the church. This is extremely important because as soon as the Council ended the *Misericórdias* started to assimilate hospitals progressively, in this way achieving the economic conditions to carry out their work, and also the control over the different welfare services. The new system created then would be controlled by the State, and would be managed at the local level by the elite, who, in the meantime, had already taken over the *Misericórdias*, transforming them into local power centres.

The most important feature of this system was that it was a self-financed one. This happened because at the same time Trento pointed out that the entrance to Paradise depended on the number of masses prayed for the souls, Popes and Portuguese monarchy issued some laws allowing the transfer of the offerings from the masses prayed for the souls to the welfare system. After all —they said— taking care of the living was as meritorious as praying for the dead. And there was no doubt that the bodies of those who suffered should be given priority over the souls of the dead (3).

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*sociação de Demografia Histórica (ADEH)*, Castelo Branco, 18-20 April, 2001, entitled *A especificidade do sistema de assistência pública português: linhas estruturantes.*

(3) These opinions can be found in ABREU, Laurinda. *Memórias da Alma e do Corpo. A Misericórdia de Setúbal na Modernidade,* Viseu, Palimage, 1999, pp. 135-172.

## 1. *THE PHENOMENON OF THE ABANDONED CHILDREN*

One of the welfare competencies of *Misericórdias* was to take care of abandoned children. This idea was entertained since the *Ordenações Manuelinas* in 1521 (4), when the monarchy had issued the first legislative regularisation on the subject, establishing an order of responsibilities with regards to the upbringing of the children: first, their parents, then, their relatives, and, in the absence or incapacity of those, the hospitals or hospices, followed by the municipalities (5). Thus, it was only when the hospitals came under the jurisdiction of the *Misericórdias* that those fraternities became responsible for the children that were previously under the care of the municipalities. However, while the expenses of the patients in general were directly financed by means of pious donations and, after the Council of Trento, with the money coming from the Purgatory masses, only in a few cases were children contemplated by the private charity, being also excluded from the negotiation whereby the money of the deceased became the financing funds that would be used to take care of the living.

That was the reason why foundlings were completely dependent on the amounts allocated for them by the local powers. In situations of great economic difficulties, which were rather frequent, the State allowed Town Halls to tax the population in order to collect money for those children —which, indirectly, contributed to the rise of people's ill-will against them.

When the municipalities transferred the responsibilities concerning foundlings to the *Misericórdias*, they undertook to share the general expenses and, in many cases, promised to provide medical assistance for the children and their nurses. But, no Town Hall is known to have kept that promise. On the contrary, there are many documents showing that local powers took advantage of this transfer in order to exempt its weak finances from such onerous charges. It was due to this fact that,

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(4) *Ordenações Manuelinas*, Liv. I, tit. 67, §10.

(5) There are references of specific contracts between the municipalities and the *Misericórdias* for the upbringing of the children as an autonomous service to the hospitals.

from an early stage, the *Misericórdias* tried to get rid of such obligation. In the meantime, they reduced or even stopped paying the salaries of the nurses. This happened due to the suffocating burden of hospital expenses, the absence of State investment in welfare services, and the notorious non investment by the faithful in Purgatory, among other factors. This would place the *Misericórdia* charities under a tremendous pressure, leading them to bankruptcy, and making them abandon everything but hospital assistance. Either explicitly or by neglect, the amounts spent with the prisoners, the needy and orphan girls were reduced. And it seems that by the end of the 18th century some of them had already relieved themselves from their obligations towards the foundlings.

For various reasons, it was also at this moment that the State reinforced the legislation concerning foundlings. From the vast amount of laws promulgated then, three stand out:

— The order from the *Intendência Geral da Policia*, a governmental institution which was led by Pina Manique, of the 10th of May 1783, which, basically, determined the opening of the foundling houses in those municipalities where there were none.
— The law of the 19th of September 1836, which declared the official end of the jurisdiction of the *Misericórdias* over the foundlings and transferred it to the civil authorities.
— The law of the 21st of November 1867, which forbode the abandonment of children and created a new institutional and legal frame for children in need (6).

(6) Some considerations about these laws, in PINTO, António Joaquim de Gouveia. *Exame critico e histórico sobre os direitos estabelecidos pela legislação antiga e moderna, tanto pátria como subsidiária, e das nações mais vizinhas e cultas, relativamente aos expostos e engeitados*, Lisboa, Tipografia da Academia Real das Ciências, 1828; and in SÁ, Isabel dos Guimarães. Abandono de crianças, infanticídio e aborto na sociedade tradicional portuguesa através das fontes jurídicas. *Penélope* (Lisboa), 1992, nº 8, 75-89.

All these measures were followed by violent discussions that divided society into those who defended the existence of foundling houses and those who were against them. However, it was generally agreed that should those institutions close down, the government would have to make up for that void by providing other means of social support such as subsidies for children during the lactation period and the creation of day nurseries (7).

Even though the results of those measures are not well known to us yet, there is no doubt that after the spread of foundling houses there was an increase in the number of abandoned infants. It is a fact that those were years of demographic growth, but some authors believe that it was a greater laxity in customs that provoked children abandonment. This hypothesis indirectly classifies those children as illegitimate. Indeed, the discussion about the existence of foundling houses as an element that favoured child abandonment or as the answer to a social necessity is not closed yet. As it happened in the past, it may not bring about consensus among historians. The only thing that we are sure about is that the 1783 law facilitated and legitimised abandonment.

As contemplated by that law, the demographic necessities and the economic difficulties that the country was going through, determined a rapid intervention of the government. By endowing the country with a net of foundling houses, the State tried to avoid the long, dangerous and awkward trips that children would usually take. This measure was also aimed at providing the children with the chance of a better life, with the assistance of their own community. However, not even this law produced the expected benefits, as there was no decrease in children mortality rates, nor all the authorities abode to it as quickly as ordered, even ignoring it in some cases. In other cases, as little villages did not have the necessary structures to enable the functioning of foundling houses, many of the ones created by the Pina Manique law of the 10th of May 1783 ended up becoming intermediary houses where children would be taken in before being sent to the so-called

(7) But for the State it was cheaper to straighten the control of who abandoned instead of giving them aid in order to bring up the children.

central *Wheels*. It was possibly due to this that in 1836 the speeches of those who defended the existence of foundling houses were practically the same as those from the previous century (8).

Finally, if we add the circumstances of the general frame of the Portuguese public welfare system and the adaptation of the local law concerning foundlings to the ups and downs that the welfare sector used to go through —and which were particularly complex during the institutional and administrative changes that took place during the transition from Absolutism to Liberalism—, it is easy to conclude that only when we have a large number of case studies will we really be able to carry out a correct analysis of the subject.

## 2. *CONDITIONS AND RESULTS OF CHILDREN ABANDONMENT*

From a structural point of view, the phenomenon of the abandoned children is lost in the memory of the occidental societies (9). Being an excellent indicative of the changes registered in the sensibility and in the mentality of the different communities, it is something that is not easy to get hold of. But while there is a lack of data with regards to the motivations that justified certain behaviours, there is plenty of quantitative information, beyond the laws issued and the speeches made about this subject, which helps recover a significant part of this social reality. In some cases, that information dates back to the Middle Ages, when the institutionalisation of relief for the abandoned children began, and the first specific hospitals for children were created (10), and the *Wheels* —turning cylinder in the wall of certain

(8) LOPES, Maria Antónia. *Pobreza, assistência e controlo social em Coimbra (1750-1850)*, Coimbra, Faculdade de Letras, 1999, pp. 71-126.

(9) From the hundreds of titles that there are on foundlings and abandoned children, the works that stand out are presented in *Enfance abandonnée et société en Europe XIVe-XX siècle. Actes du colloque*. Rome, École Française de Rome, 1991, and in *Expostos e Ilegítimos na realidade Ibérica do século XVI ao presente. Actas do III Congresso da Associação de Demografia Histórica,* Porto, Edições Afrontamento, 1996, vol. 3.

(10) SÁ, Isabel dos Guimarães. *A circulação das crianças na Europa do Sul: o caso dos expostos do Porto no século XVIII*, Lisboa, FCG/JNIC, 1995, pp. 37-38.

public buildings, with an open vertical axle where objects were placed in order to be introduced or taken out of the building— became the usual places to leave undesired children. Curiously enough, their quick success contributed to their association with the abandonment act, and even those foundling houses that did not have a wheel became known as *Wheels*. The analysis of its spread —throughout Portugal, Spain, southern France (and the whole Empire after 1811), and Italy— shows a geographic distribution that immediately suggests some theological and moral considerations, in spite of the conclusions presented by some authors, that pointed out misery rather than shame or dishonour as the main cause of infant abandonment (11).

Abandoning infants in the *Wheels* was an act that followed specific rules repeated everywhere in an almost ritual way: when the church bells announced nightfall, the *Wheels* opened —only to close at daybreak— and the children started to be left in them under the cover of darkness, which preserved the anonymity of the person who abandoned them. Alerted by a bell, a nurse took the children inside, and after having registered them and their belongings, she would feed them, clean them and prepare them for baptism the following day, unless there was irrefutable proof that they had already been baptised. Then, the children were ready to be handed over to an external nurse.

From all these routines, the act of registering the elements that children had with them and that served to identify them acquired special value because their future could depend on it. Many different objects or just messages, known as *writings*, served to identify the children, providing their names, and information on whether or not they were baptised, promising also a reward to the nurses who best looked after them. Those «signs» acquired the status of an identity document, known only to those who abandoned and took in the child, and they had to be shown when children were restored back to their families. Being a tempting documental source, its small representation in the

(11) Therefore, those statements can only be completely accepted when there are enough studies that can prove them. Until then, the association of the Wheels' success with the values defended by the Catholicism, specially after Trento, continues to be valid and remains as a work field where there is still much to do.

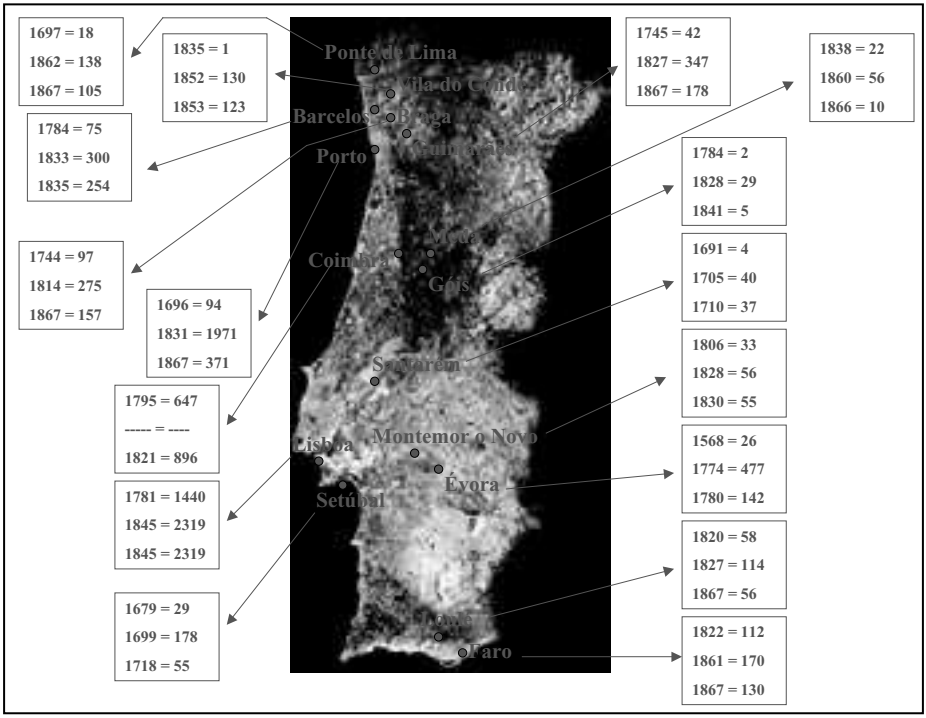
universe of abandoned children, as well as the impossibility to confirm whether or not the information collected was true, transform them into a source of information more useful to anthropologists than to historians.

## 3. *THE NUMBER OF ABANDONED CHILDREN*

The hypothesis of a systematic work on Portuguese abandoned children is completely out of the question at the moment. The absence of a sufficient number of case studies, the chronological divergences among the existing ones (12) the insufficient development of historic demography, which prevents the knowledge of an infinite number of variables such as population density and migratory movements, are

(12) As it can be proved by the chronology of the following works: SÁ, note 10; PILOTO, Adelina. *Os expostos da roda de Vila do Conde*, Vila do Conde, 1998; CORTES, Nuno Osório. *O abandono de crianças no Algarve. O caso dos expostos de Loulé (1820-1884)*, Porto, Faculdade de Letras, 1991; FONTE, Teodoro da. *O abandono de crianças em Ponte de Lima (1690-1920)*, Ponte de Lima, Centro de Estudos Regionais, Câmara Municipal de Ponte de Lima, 1996; LOPES, Maria Antónia. Os expostos no concelho da Meda em meados do século XIX (1838-1869). *Revista Portuguesa de História,* 1984, *21*, 119-176; MORAIS, Maria da Graça. Dos expostos da Roda do Hospital Real de Santo André da Vila de Montemor-o-Novo no início do século XIX (1806-1830). *Almansor,* 1987, nº 5, pp. 45-88; NEIVA, Manuel Albino Penteado. A administração de Barcelos no século XIX face ao problema dos enjeitados. *Barcellos-Revista*, 1985, *2* (2), 91-99; REIS, Maria de Fátima dos. *As crianças expostas em Santarém em meados do Antigo Regime (1691-1701). Elementos sociais e demográficos*, Lisboa, Cosmos, 2001; MATOS, Sebastião. Os expostos da Roda em Esposende. *Boletim Cultural de Esposende,* 1983, Dezembro, 39-90; MATOS, Sebastião. *Os expostos da roda de Barcelos, 1783/1835*, Barcelos, Acrav, 1995; SIMÕES, João Alves. *Os expostos da roda de Góis, 1784-1841*, Porto, Faculdade de Letras, 1999; FERREIRA, Jorge M. Rodrigues; FERREIRA, Olegário A. Vieira. O abandono de crianças na roda da câmara municipal de Faro entre 1839 e 1848. *In*: *Expostos e Ilegítimos na realidade Ibérica do século XVI ao presente*, pp. 139-157; PÁSCOA, Marta. *Os expostos de Castro Verde entre 1887 e 1889*, Castro Verde, Câmara Municipal de Castro Verde, s/d; RIBEIRO, Victor. *A Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa*, Lisboa, Typographia da Academia Real das Sciencias, 1902. For Setúbal, for the years of 1679-1718, see ABREU, Laurinda. *A Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Setúbal de 1500 a 1755: aspectos de sociabilidade e poder*, Setúbal, Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Setúbal, 1990, pp. 77-96.

FIGURE 1
FOUNDLING NUMBERS IN PORTUGAL, 16TH TO 19TH CENTURY.




*Note:* The first piece of information refers to the number of children entries during the first year under study; the second one refers to the annual maximum number of children entries, and the last one represents the number of children entries during the last year under study or during the year when the closing down of foundlings houses was ordered. In the cases where the sources don't specifically mention the annual number of foundling entries, the amount referred in results from an interpretation of their graphs. For that reason we avoided to make an average for the period.
*Sources*: SÁ, Isabel dos Guimarães. Abandono de crianças, ilegitimidade e concepções pré-nupciais em Portugal. Estudos recentes e perspectivas, *Expostos e Ilegítimos na realidade Ibérica do século XVI ao presente. Actas do III Congresso da Associação de Demografia Histórica*. vol. 3, Porto, Edições Afrontamento, 1996, pp. 49-54; *Arquivo Distrital de Évora*, books 423 to 430 and 433 to 459; and bibliography shown in footnote 12.

some of the limitations that historians have to face. But, in spite of all those limitations, there is a fact that we are sure about: like in other countries with an identical welfare system, in Portugal the number of abandoned children experienced also a progressive increase from the 17th century until the suppression of foundling houses. Such increase was parallel to the general growing tendency of the population and it reflected the demographic crises resulting from the liberal fights of 1820-1834 and the epidemic of cholera, during the 19th century. An estimate from the beginning of the 19th century shows that an average of 10 000 children were abandoned every year (13). Another one asserts that, in 1851, in Portugal there were 33 835 abandoned children out of a population of 3 829 108 inhabitants (14). Such data cannot be proved. However, more reliable studies provide us with the information shown on Figure 1.

As a general rule, and accompanying the seasonal birth rhythms, children were mostly abandoned between autum and winter, especially between October and February, and the number of abandonments decreased towards the end of spring and stayed low in general until August.

But if abandonment was seasonal, so was death. Most of the children died within the first days of abandonment in the Wheel and, as death rates show, their hope for better chances of survival there was groundless. For most of the abandoned children the only advantages that they had in the Wheels were a baptism and a burial in a sacred place.

However, the evaluation of this phenomenon is difficult. Sub-registers were frequently kept and there is no way of knowing the exact number of children who were dead on arrival. Set for most of the European countries between 60% and 95% (15), the studies on the

(13) PINTO, note 7, p. 234.

(14) *Almanach de Portugal para o ano de 1855*, 1854, p. 649.

(15) SÁ, Isabel dos Guimarães. Abandono de crianças, ilegitimidade e concepções pré-nupciais em Portugal. Estudos recentes e perspectivas. *In: Expostos e Ilegítimos,* note 9, pp. 56; 71-73.

death rates in Portugal present percentages so diverse as 98,3% for Setúbal and 59,9% for Loulé (16).

Such a high mortality rate, explained on so many occasions as a conscious method of population control, by means of indirect infanticide, lies within the domain of those attitudes that can never be proved, as it can state the bad results of an attempt to save some lives. In fact, trying to ascertain the reasons why people abandoned their children seems to be a fruitless task. The most reliable explanatory hypotheses are those that take into account such obvious facts as the condition of abandoned children, the diseases that children might suffer from, the life difficulties faced by their mothers and, of course, the negligent or even criminal behaviour of the nurses.

Beyond all these factors, it is the nurses' conduct that has the best documentary information. Enjoying the privileges endowed to them by the State and by local powers in order to encourage their activity, they were the main beneficiaries of the existence of abandoned children, and they were famous for scheming in multiple ways in order to increase their income. Being frequently accused of fraudulent behaviour, the less serious crimes that they were charged with —those that were not a direct attempt against children's lives— were the abandonment of their own children in order to bring them up in return for payment; the abandonment of their foundlings in another Wheel, while still being paid for taking care of them; hiding the child's death in order to keep receiving their salary as if the child was still alive (17).

However, and without denying the theory according to which the upbringing of abandoned children served to complement domestic economy, making the access to public funds easier for those who had no other way of getting such aid, it seems that this work had less relevance in Portugal than in other European countries. In fact, due to the low pays and the great salary debts, women frequently refused to

(16) Once more, the periods of the studies that show these results aren't the same and their reliability is probably also different.

(17) However, and apart from all these situations, it is important to remember that, in case of economic difficulties, the nurses' payments were the first to be stopped, sometimes waiting a few years in order to be paid.

work as nurses, which resulted very often in the handing over of the children to women who lived in deplorable socio-economic conditions, disabled or even delinquent.

But it is also important to point out that in the few cases in which children reached the end of the upbringing period, at the age of seven —when the Judge in charge of orphans would have to look for a family that would take them in or find a place for them in the work market (both situations could be equivalent)— , there were a lot of nurses who would choose to keep their children. In some cases that choice was made before the end of the upbringing period: «because of the love that I have for this child, I decided not to be paid any longer», they would say. We know that not all such decisions were made out of altruistic reasons, but in spite of that, they can still be regarded as a point in favour of the nurses.

## 4. *THE ÉVORA FOUNDLINGS*

Even though it was no longer the permanent residence of the court, which contributed to the development of the city from the middle ages until the 16th century, Évora preserved other attributes that ensured its surprising demographic stability, with approximately 12 000 or 13 000 inhabitants between 1521 and 1801 (18): it was the capital of the Alentejo and the See of the Archbishopric, it had an intense cultural life, and it was one of the most important Portuguese wheat and wine markets, which drew strong migratory movements towards the city, where rural workers from the surrounding areas joined seasonal workers from the centre and north of the country.

The first official references to foundlings in Évora date back to 1530 and are found in a document where the municipality complains that «more and more children are being abandoned in the city» and

(18) According to some calculations done from the data presented by DIAS, João José Alves. *Gentes e espaços (em torno da população portuguesa na primeira metade do século XVI)*, Lisboa, FCG/JNIC, 1996, p. 540; and SOUSA, Fernando Alberto Pereira de. *A população portuguesa nos inícios do século XIX*, Porto, Faculdade de Letras, 1979, p. 210.

that there were not enough funds to bring them up. In fact, the Town Hall was trying to avoid having to provide for a service that it was bound to by law, as is expressed by the king in a letter dated in 1557, where he explicitly accuses the municipality of negligence towards the foundlings (19). A useless remark, however, as in 1567 the hospital that took in abandoned children (the S. Lázaro House) was annexed to the *Misericórdia* (created in 1499), transferring the responsibilities of the children to the fraternity. The explanations that accompanied this transaction did not differ from the ones produced in similar situations: prepared for giving relief to the poor, the monarchy expected the *Misericórdias* to be the caring administrators of the hospitals that were handed over to them and that they could increase their budgets in order to bring up the children.

However, in Évora as in many other places, the balance brought forward from the hospital accounts was always negative and in 1585 the *Misericórdia* asked the king to exonerate it from the administration of the S. Lázaro House, returning the children to the jurisdiction of the Town Hall. Thus, the satisfaction of the municipality when the foundlings were transferred back to its jurisdiction was not as deep as the relief it had experienced back in 1618, when the children were handed over to the *Misericórdia* again, and for more than 200 years then.

As it happened with qualitative information, numerical data related to this period are also very scarce, they do not follow any sequence and they are not very reliable. They are provided by eight account books kept between 1581 and 1621 (20) (1581, 1616, 1617, 1618, 1620 and 1621) and the most reliable information that can be obtained from them is that the *Misericórdia* assisted an average of 45 children per year and that the mortality rate was about 50%. This means that there were a relatively large number of survivors —in 1579, about half of the children assistance had already exceeded the maximum age of

(19) GUSMÃO, Armando de. *Subsídios para a História da Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Évora,* Évora, Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Évora, 1958, p. 77.

(20) Arquivo Distrital de Évora (ADE), books nº 423; 424; 425; 426; 427, 428; 429 and 430.

7 years set by law—, especially if one considers the abandonment conditions: the city lacked a *Wheel* and, besides the usual places, children were also abandoned in weird ones, such as rooftops.

In spite of the documental gap between 1621 and 1724, the number of foundlings might have continued increasing throughout the 17th century and the survival rates might have remained high. At least this is one of the conclusions that can be drawn from a Papal edict dated 1711 allowing the *Misericórdias* to use the money from the masses that were not celebrated. In fact, this document showed that two hundred children arrived at the *Misericórdia* each year, and that the institution was compelled «to expel the foundlings after the age of seven without providing them with any teaching, which made the boys lazy and useless to the Republic, and put girls's fame and honour at risk» (21). Notwithstanding, the *Misericórdia* charity registers do not confirm such a large number of children, even though graph 1 shows an increase in the number of foundlings between 1728 —when 70 children were assisted by the *Misericórdia*— and the 1770's, reaching its peak in 1774 (22) —with 477 children—, starting afterwards a decline towards the values of the 30's.

Comparing the amount of new entries (4 406) with the total number of children that were assisted (8 025), it is obvious that there is an analogy between them. In fact, it seems that the children that disappeared from the registers of the *Misericórdia* each year, be it due to death or due to the fact that they had reached the age of seven, were automatically replaced by other foundlings (Graph 1).

Without any information about the history of the town, the birth rates, the rates of infant mortality, and the changes in the economic situation, the oscillation reflected in the graph becomes difficult to explain. Indeed, not even the «classic» explanations relating this to market price variation can be used, as variation in child abandonment rates were not determined by market forces. On the contrary,

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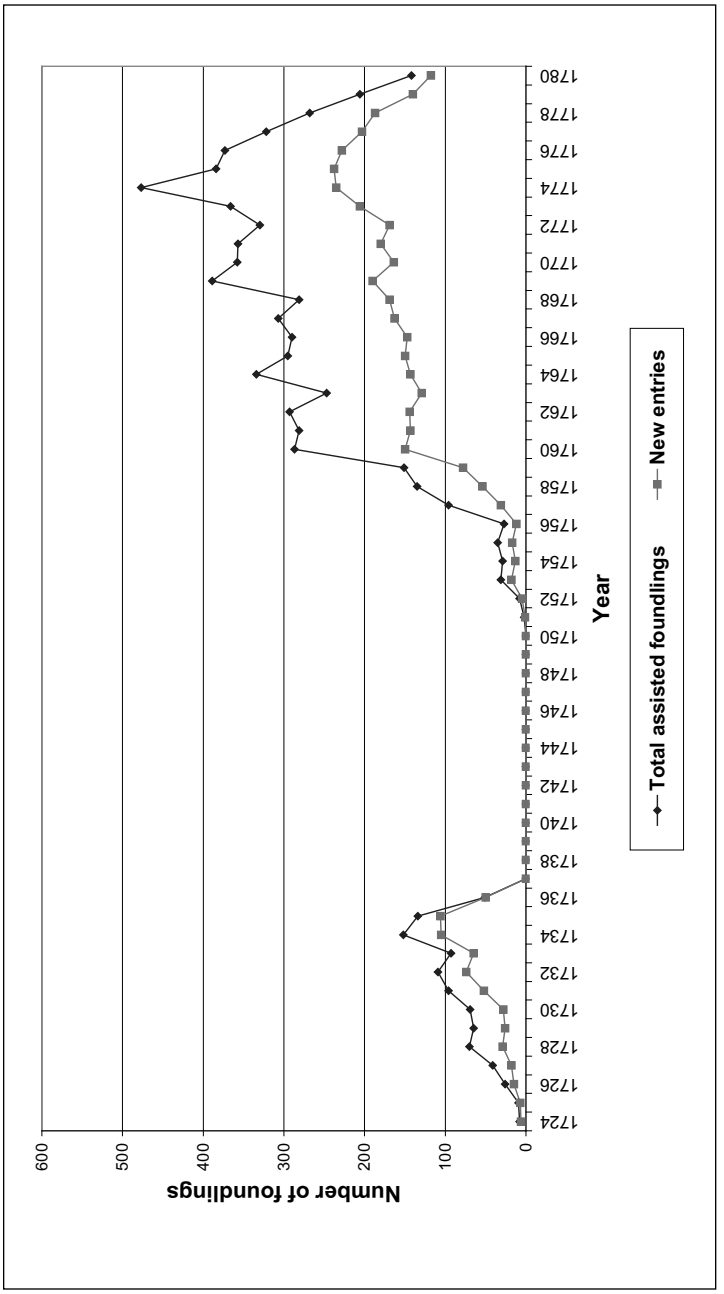
(21) *Legados Pios/Santa Casa da Misericordia d'Evora*. Évora, Typ. da Casa Pia, 1882, p. 1.

(22) Even though there is a probability that there had been a sub register between 1751 and 1756.

GRAPH 1
ÉVORA FOUNDLINGS: EVOLUTION OF ENTRIES AND DEATHS, 1724-1780




Source: Arquivo Distrital de Évora, *books 433 to 459.*

TABLE 1
EVOLUTION OF THE NUMBER OF FOUNDLINGS COLLECTED AND ASSISTED BY THE *MISERICÓRDIA*, 1568-1621

| YEAR | NEW ENTRIES | TOTAL ASSISTED FOUNDLINGS |
|---|---|---|
| 1568 | 26 | 26 |
| 1579 | 66 | 66 |
| 1591 | 42 | 42 |
| 1616 | 39 | 41 |
| 1617 | 23 | 46 |
| 1618 | 24 | 56 |
| 1620 | 13 | 38 |
| 1621 | 15 | 35 |

the percentage of foundlings started to decrease precisely when prices began to rise (23). This is a phenomenon that precedes the hypothetical creation of Wheels in neighbouring municipalities ordered by the 1783 law, and one that has to be analysed in the light of still unknown variables.

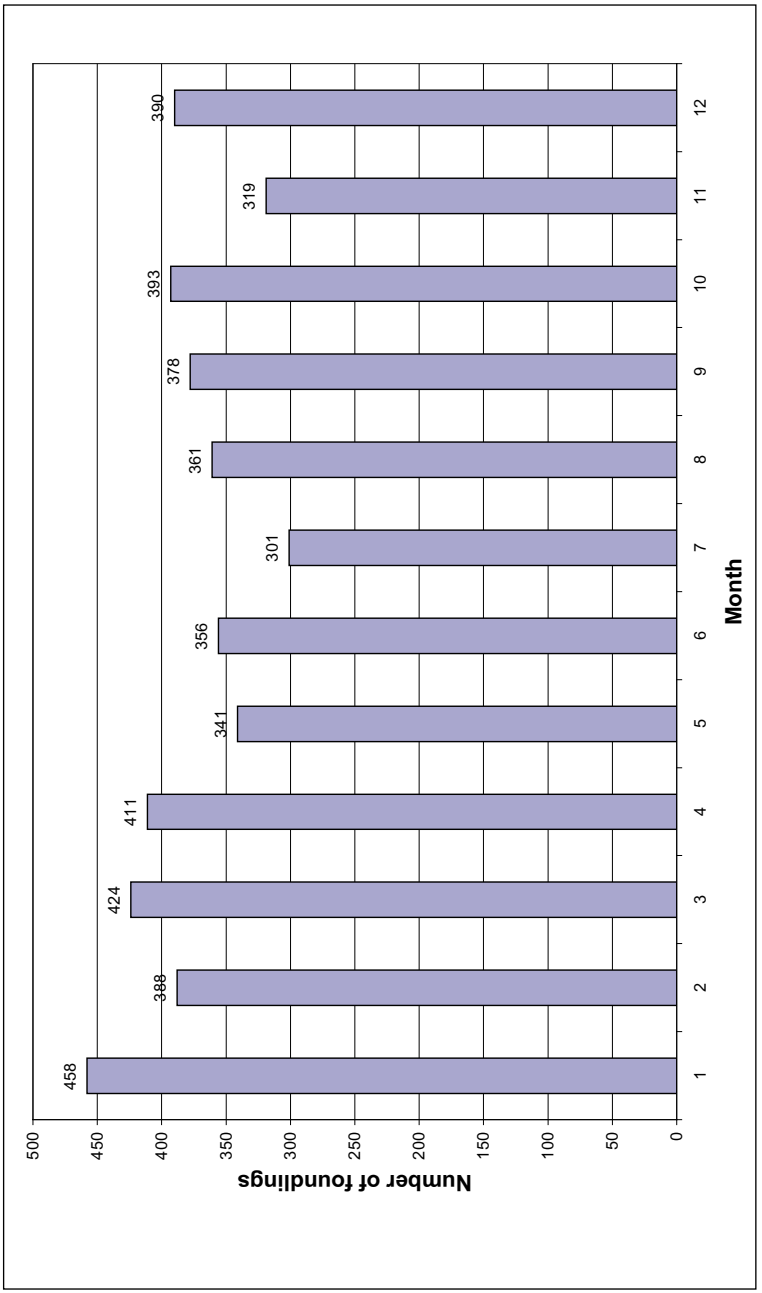
The analysis of the monthly flow of the foundlings in Évora is surprising, as it does not reveal the prominent seasonal oscillations that are usually pointed out in studies concerning foundlings. In fact, the seasonal entries are very similar and even though winter and spring show higher rates than autumn and summer, the difference between them is so small that it does not lead to any really relevant conclusion (Graph 2). Actually, this question has already been pointed out by Vicente Pérez Moreda, who has alerted about its little pertinence, especially when the percentage of illegitimate children and the monthly variations of prices during the years under study are unknown (24).

Identical considerations can be added to the data related to the monthly death flow —the death rate values are even more homoge-

(23) GODINHO, Vitorino Magalhães. *Prix et monnaies au Portugal*, Paris, A. Colin, 1955, pp. 81-85.

(24) *Expostos e Ilegítimos...*, note 9, pp. 27 and 35.

GRAPH 2
ABANDONMENT PER SEASON AT ÉVORA




*Source: Arquivo Distrital de Évora,* books 433 to 459.

neous than the entry rates— , given that the only month that really stands out is June, a fact which is usually explained by the shortfall in cereal supplies, which might have propitiated bad conditions for pregnancy and the birth of weak new born babies (Graph 3).

Mortality rates among foundlings during the period under study are really surprising. Indeed, according to the documented information, it seems that the annual average did not exceed 45% (25); a very low average —but very close to the values of the 16th and 17th centuries— compared to the average in other countries, and even more so when compared to the national averages (Graph 4).

Less than four hundred children out of the 2 283 (26) that survived abandonment reached the end of the upbringing period, and in some cases they even stayed beyond the seven years determined by the law. One hundred and twenty-three were taken in by their nurses or by the husbands of their nurses, thirty-two were coercively returned to their families (27), and ninety-one were handed over to unknown people. From among the latter group, the only social-professional sector of relevance is that of churchmen, who took in fifteen children.

In Évora, as in other parts of the country, there seems to be sound proof that most of these foundlings were employed as domestic servants or as apprentices at some handcraft workshop. However, there is very little explicit information about that, and the nurses's assertion that their husbands would look after the foundlings as if they were their own children is even rarer (28).

Although the survey of the data was interrupted in 1780 (29), it is possible to recover part of the history of the Évora foundlings during

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(25) The fact that there was only one child found dead is very strange.

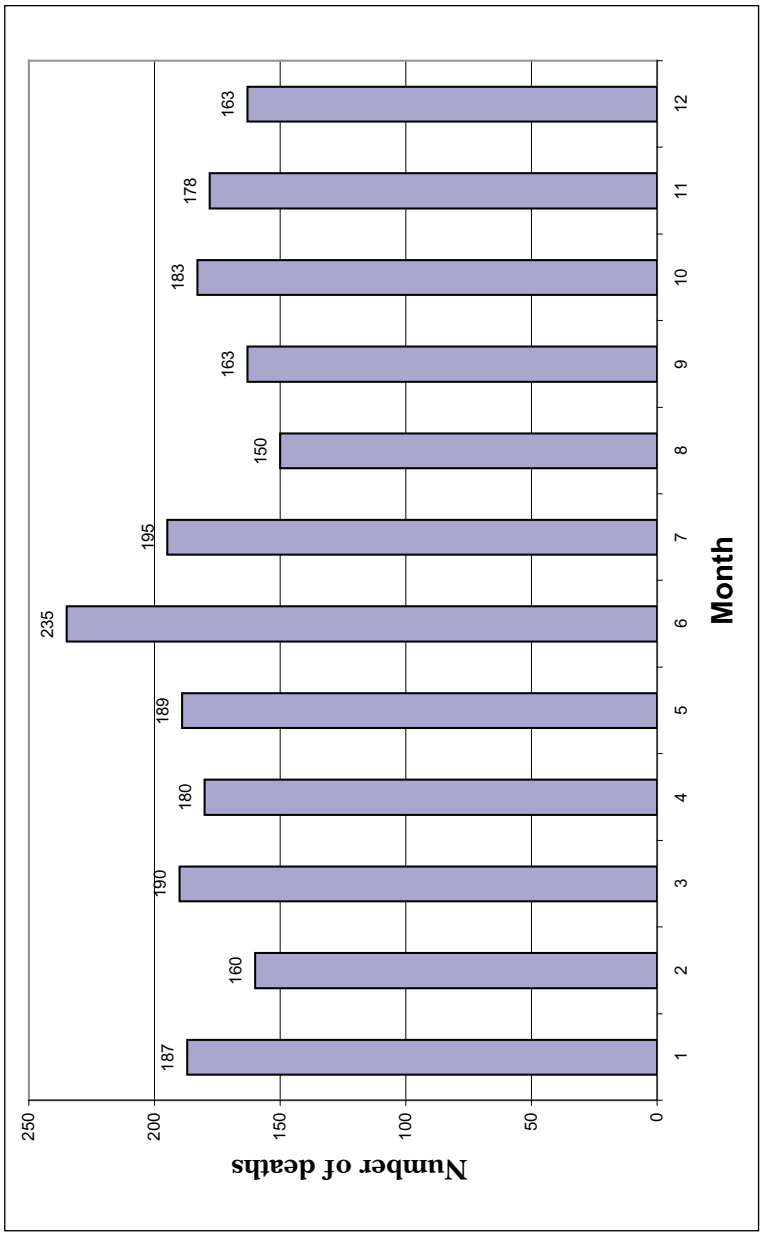
(26) Not a very reliable amount due to the deficiencies in the informative register.

(27) The 23 children that were temporarily under the care of the *Misericórdia* during the period of time that their mothers were treated in hospital are not included in this number.

(28) Concerning the difference betwee adoption and forestage, see SÁ, note 10, pp. 305-321.

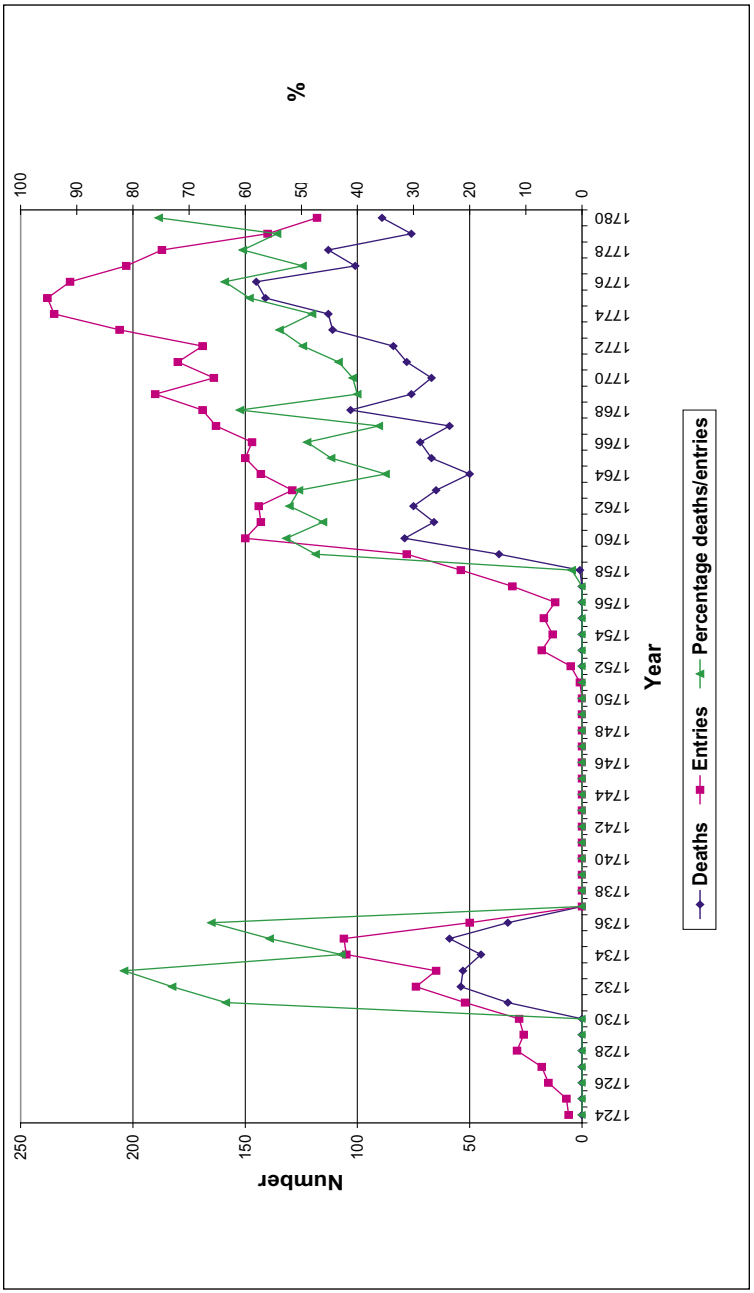
(29) ADE, books 433 to 459. The gathering of this data had the enormous support of Dr. Rute Pardal whom I thank.

GRAPH 3
ÉVORA FOUNDLINGS: NUMBER OF DEATHS PER SEASON.




*Source: Arquivo Distrital de Évora*, books 433 to 459.

GRAPH 4
ÉVORA FOUNDLINGS, 1724-1780




*Source: Arquivo Distrital de Évora*, books 433 to 459.

the first two decades of the 19th century. The main source of information that we have consists of a set of documents produced by royal officials that examined the foundlings' welfare service in 1816. The scenery outlined in their report is a truly distressing one, and it is possible to conclude that the degradation process was the responsibility of the administrators of the *Misericórdias* (who were relieved from their posts after this report).

The results of the state of neglect in which the foundlings lived were reflected by the death rates: out of the 529 children sheltered between the 18th of September 1811 and the 14th of May 1816, 414 died (79,6%) (30).

According to this evaluation, the factors that contributed to such deplorable situation originated in the lack of a *Wheel* as well as from the lack of women who would work as nurses. In order to change this situation —that contradicted all the governmental guidelines issued since the 1783 law—, the royal officials recommended the immediate substitution of the so-called Cradle for a *Wheel*, the dismissal of the Cradle nurse, because she could not breastfeed the child, and the hiring of a married woman that could breastfeed it. Among other recommendations, the report foresaw that a doctor should visit the nurses every month and that they should get their pay on time, not being reduced after the lactation period, and that it should be updated according to the inflation rate.

## 5. *FINAL REMARKS*

Although we do not know which where the results of the royal intervention, or which were the *Misericórdias'* performances from then on until 1838 —when they stopped taking care of the children—, there

(30) ADE, book 497, *Autos de Revista dos Expostos para que procedeu em auto de correição o doutor provedor destas comarcas.* Such values were practically coincident with others given for a larger period of time, 1809-1818, which refers to the entrance of 1075 children in the *Misericórdia* and the death of 885 (82,3%). See SOUSA, note 18, p. 294.

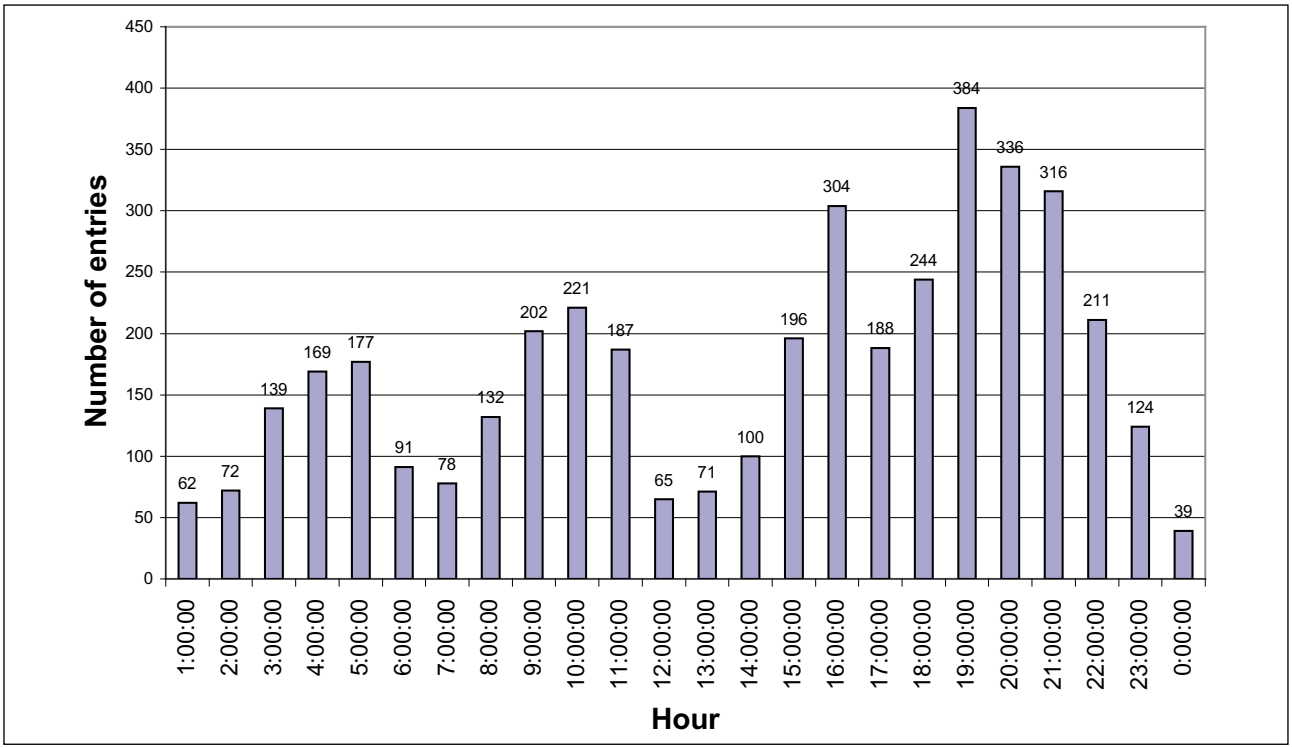
are still some factors that without being conclusive deserve to be pointed out.

The first one concerns the places where children were abandoned. As has been previously mentioned, Évora did not have a *Wheel*, at least until 1816, but had an institution that took care of foundlings, where there was a cradle to shelter the newly arrived ones. Thus, placed out of the city walls, the S. Lázaro House was never chosen as a place to abandon children. Scattered through the city or collected in the neighbouring villages, one would expect that the mortality rates among foundlings in Évora would be very high, which, in fact, was not the case. Indeed, the chances of the children's survival seemed to increase due to the time of the day when they were taken in: abandoned between late afternoon and the first hours of the night, dispersed through the city and not piled up in a *Wheel*, the children might have found in the people who sheltered them the necessary help to survive the dramatic hours that followed the moment of their abandonment. (Graph 5).

Another factor to be taken into account concerns the nurses directly. Even though the question of the economic component throughout the whole housing process has not been dealt with yet, which prevents the understanding of the relationship between the *Misericórdias* and the nurses, there are some points that should be highlighted, as, for instance, the large number of women working as nurses in Évora, that would avoid the simultaneous upbringing of several children each year. This situation can be explained by the great migratory waves towards the city, which increased the number of women searching for a job. Besides, fewer children per nurse meant less infant mortality.

Finding the answers to all these questions and, most important, getting to know the circumstances that provoked the degradation of the foundlings' welfare system —as it is affirmed in the 1816 report— is a challenge for future research.

GRAPH 5
ÉVORA FOUNDLINGS: HOUR FREQUENCY OF TAKING IN THE CHILDREN.




*Source:* Arquivo Distrital de Évora, books 433 to 459.