

## THE CONVENT OF SANTA MÓNICA OF GOA AND SINGLE WOMEN IN THE *ESTADO DA INDIA*, 1550-1700

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This paper explores how a series of female shelters and convents in Asia, principally the Convent of Santa Mónica, bound together the far-flung outposts of the *Estado da Índia* until 1700. In this process, it will be possible to see the imperial importance of these institutions that have until recently only been viewed as local phenomena. Portuguese women in the *Estado da Índia* can be divided into two categories: those who went willingly and those who were forced or encouraged by the state to leave Europe. Both groups acted as colonizers, although the second group is more visible to the modern historian. The article concludes with several suggestions for future research in this area.

Portuguese women in the *Estado da Índia* can be divided into two categories. First, there are those who went willingly. In this group we find the most diverse lot ranging from castaways to the wives of important official, such as a governor or viceroy. While it is easy to understand why elite women such as these would want to accompany their husbands, castaways hiding on ships left Portugal for many of the same reasons men did: greater economic opportunities and the desire to begin a new life overseas.

The second group of Portuguese women in Asia were those who were encouraged or rewarded to leave Europe for Asia. This group would include the well-known royal orphan girls or *orfãs do rei* and reformed prostitutes. Orphan girls such as these were rewarded with dowries of state positions, land, money or any combination of these three if they agreed to leave Portugal and marry in Goa. Reformed prostitutes left the Shelter of Mary Magdalene in Lisbon for Angola and Mozambique with payments for dowries. Similar *convertidas* left the Magdalene House in Goa for various locales in Portuguese Asia.

### The Holy Trinity of Archbishop D. Alexio de Meneses. Sarah Phoenix

With this in mind, it is important to keep in mind that shelters for orphan girls such as these and Magdalene houses were not unique to Portugal. They appeared with increased frequency throughout the Catholic world after the Council of Trent. What is unusual in the Portuguese case is that these shelters were recreated throughout the empire and were linked to efforts at colonization. In the case of Goa, a remarkable Archbishop of Goa, D. Alexio de Meneses, established two shelters. In his first two years in Goa in the 1590s, there were an alleged fifty-two noblewomen killed by their husbands because of adultery. To remedy this situation, the Bishop created a shelter for orphans, a Magdalene house (modeled on Lisbon's) and the Convent of Santa Mónica (see below) and dedicated each to an aspect of the Holy Trinity. In a parallel that would foretell much of the impact of these institutions, the Archbishop linked Santa Mónica to God the Father, The Orphanage (Nossa Senhora da Serra) to God the Son, and the Magdalene House to the Holy Spirit<sup>1</sup>.

The Royal Monastery of Santa Mónica was a cloistered Augustinian Convent founded between 1606 and 1610<sup>2</sup> only after overcoming protracted royal opposition. It formed the final link in the Archbishop's trinity of shelters and homes for single women in Portuguese Asia. While both the shelters of Serra and Magdalene offered dowries and promoted marriage as the basis of Portuguese colonization, the sisters of the Convent of Santa Mónica linked far-flung outposts of the Asian Empire with the Convent's economic base (mostly) in Goa. As a result, its impact was powerful in Goa and felt throughout the *Estado da Índia*. It is this imperial connection that has been largely overlooked by historians of Portuguese Asia.

At first, the Goan city council was the Convent's strongest ally: arguing for its creation, while the Crown in Lisbon refused to allow a convent in Portuguese Asia. In 1605 the city council discussed at some length the benefits of having a convent filled with nuns in that city,

<sup>1</sup> Miguel Vicente de Abreu, *Resumo da Vida do arcebispo D. Frei Alexio de Meneses, Fundador do Mosteiro de S. Mónica de Goa*, s/l, s/d., p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> "The founding stone of the Convento de Santa Mónica was put in place in 1606 on the day of the visitation of Santa Isabel. Twenty donzelas entered the convent as its first nuns, from the recolhimento of Serra," Biblioteca Geral da Universidade de Coimbra (BGUC), códice 1085, *Breve Tratado do Muito Religiosissimo Mosteiro de Santa Mónica de Goa*, ff. 2-2v., s/d but in a seventeenth century hand.

completing the good deeds of the other shelters<sup>3</sup>. The reasons why the Crown was initially against the creation of this convent were not stated but became clearer after it prospered. At that point, interestingly enough, the city council and Lisbon reversed their standing on Santa Mónica; the Crown became its principal protector, while the city council attacked it.

In the early 1600s, the great costs of building and maintaining the convent might have been one very legitimate concern of the Crown. However, in the context of colonization, one important aspect of Santa Mónica was that it provided young ladies with a respectable alternative to marriage. Relatively quickly, Santa Mónica was accused by the city council of two serious and interconnected charges: being too wealthy and sabotaging the possibility of marrying Portuguese women by drawing an excessive number into their convent. We will examine these charges and see what truth, if any, was behind them.

In reading the correspondence between Goa and Lisbon, one theme that emerges is that the Crown believed (correctly, as it would develop later) that the number of convents and monasteries in Goa was excessive. For example, in 1635 the Carmelites started a convent without royal authority and were ordered to stop<sup>4</sup>. A few years earlier, the city council had complained to Lisbon that: Before [the foundation of] the Convent of Santa Mónica, there were many marriages, ...each year there were more than one hundred soldiers married. Nowadays, all this has changed because the Convent is draining Goa of its wealth and girls<sup>5</sup>.

It was this second possibility that Lisbon had feared and which was probably the source for initial royal opposition. That is, Lisbon felt that a convent in the *Estado da Índia* would thwart Portuguese marriages and thus frustrate colonization plans, such as the rationale behind sending orphan girls, *convertidas*, and any other available Portuguese women overseas<sup>6</sup>. However, once the convent was founded, the Crown went to great lengths to protect it, while attempting to balance these two conflicting requirements by limiting the number of nuns who could enter. The city council, on the other hand, was concerned that Santa Mónica was not only decreasing the number of eligible Portuguese wives, but also was simultaneously becoming too wealthy.

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<sup>3</sup> Historical Archives of Goa (HAG), códice 7747, ff. 141-143v. 7 September 1605.

<sup>4</sup> BGUC, códice 460: parecer, of the Mesa da Consciência e Ordens and the Conselho do Estado, ff. 84-85v., dated 10 December 1635.

<sup>5</sup> *Documentos Remitidos da Índia*, (DR da I) Vol. VIII, p. 88, dated 18 February 1620.

<sup>6</sup> C. R. Boxer, *Portuguese Society in the Tropics*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1965, p. 37.

In a series of exchanges in the 1620s, the Crown and the Viceroy discussed Santa Mónica and its newly acquired riches. The Viceroy wrote that the Convent "had eighty nuns and numerous novices and was getting too wealthy and too big for Goa and had even allowed in some women forbidden by its own statutes"<sup>7</sup>.

Around the same time (1620s), the Crown ordered the number of nuns in Santa Mónica limited to a total of forty, in accordance with the wishes of the city council. This total was increased to fifty in 1624<sup>8</sup>. Nuns were also not to inherit goods without royal authority. Furthermore, the Crown ordered that the convent be discontinued after the death of the present occupants, after which time it was to serve as a shelter supported by the convent's current sources of income. Lisbon noted:

We have gone to every extreme to attempt to encourage marriages in that *Estado* [da India] by sending orphans from this Kingdom. In the absence of enough Portuguese women, we have also worked very hard to encourage the marriage of Portuguese soldiers with local women... It works against all these efforts to have the richest and most noble women enter this convent and drain that *Estado* of this assistance which will enable it to continue, not being any less in the service of the Lord to conserve the Faith in that land by having many Portuguese to serve in positions and administer it and engage in commerce... all of which will come to a halt because of the large number of nuns...<sup>9</sup>

In the opinions from Goa which the King requested and which followed this order, the Inquisitor Francisco Borges de Souza defended Santa Mónica, noting that it played an important role in Goa:

since many of these women are poor, having only around 2,000 *xerafins* which is much too small a sum to allow them to marry. The convent has cost so far around 200,000 *xerafins*, a sum which hardly threatens the well-being of the *Estado da India*, one shipment made by merchants costs more when it is lost and [when that occurs] no one thinks that the state is threatened. While it may be true that this city is lacking in wealth, the number of Portuguese couples has never been greater. The cause of this decline is the enemy from Europe...<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *DR da I*, Vol. 6, pp. 121-122, dated 10 February 1620.

<sup>8</sup> *Dr da I*, Vol. X, pp. 363-364, Crown to Viceroy, dated 23 March 1624.

<sup>9</sup> *DR da I*, Vol. VIII, documento 71, pp. 80-90, carta régia to the Viceroy, 22 February 1622.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

In the second opinion, the chancellor of the Goan High Court, Gonçalo Pinto da Fonseca, attacked the convent, saying that:

it cannot be denied that since it was founded the number of marriages has decreased and that a large amount of money has been siphoned away from commerce and customs [duties], which are our basis in India. According to the complaints made by the Fathers of Santo Augustinho, if things continue as they have been, soon there will be over 200 nuns in that convent, among these, the richest; in spite of being New Christians, bastards, and even children of unions with slaves and daughters of tradesmen, because around here only money is respected. We suggest that the limit of fifty nuns be strictly enforced... And because the dowry of 2,000 *xerafins* is excessive since costs here are low and the women here are used to this, we suggest that the dowry be lowered to 1,000 so that more spaces will be made available to the poor daughters of nobles and other deserving gentlemen, who can then enter, as was the original intention when Santa Mónica was founded – not to get rich by receiving money from those who do not have these qualities.

In the list of properties owned by the Convent made in 1618, only eight years after its being founded, ...there were sixty-six nuns and the convents had an income of 4,000 *pardaos*, and they had spent on the construction of the convent over 200,000, counting the costs of clearing away the houses which had earlier stood on the land.

These sixty-six nuns, each with their dowries of 2,000 *xerafins*, total the sums of money listed in the register because many enter with dowries of four, five, or six thousand *xerafins* with the agreement that when their parents die, the Convent will not inherit. The others who enter the convent are rich widows, because these are whom the convent seeks out as novices, not the poor, helpless orphans... that did enter at the time of Archbishop Meneses.

One of the "rich widows" the judge may have had in mind was D. Catarina de Lima, the widow of Sancho de Vasconcellos and a native of Malacca. She entered the Convent in 1609 and was known by the name of Catarina de Santa Mónica. In honor of services to the Crown rendered by her husband, two dead brothers, and dead son (all of whom died in royal service), the Convent was awarded one of the very lucrative official voyages to China. Catarina and her three daughters in Santa Mónica were awarded 400 *pardaus* for life<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> In the past, the Crown owed her 8,000 *pardaus*. Because of slowness in being repaid, she was forced to sell some papers worth that much for only 1,000 *pardaus*, which was all that she could get at the time. The person who bought these papers was ordered to be punished according to the law. In the event that this person was

An inventory of the properties owned by Santa Mónica in 1618 tends to support the charges of excessive wealth. In less than ten years, Santa Mónica owned an impressive list of real estate in Goa, which yielded an annual income around 4,000 *pardaus*. This list included the income from three villages in the Bassein area; pharmacies scattered throughout western coastal India, annual income from a variety of land holdings, and a long list of houses and lands in the city of Goa itself<sup>12</sup>. With some justification, in 1635 the city council called Santa Mónica's holdings "the lion's share of the patrimonies of the city"<sup>13</sup>. Only five years later, the Mother Superior of the convent, Sister Ursula de Encarnação was adding to the Convent's holdings when she purchased some additional lands with palm trees<sup>14</sup>. Complaints fingering Santa Mónica as the principal reason for the decline in married *soldados* were made again in 1644 and 1650<sup>15</sup>.

How is it possible to reconcile these two very different views of the situation regarding Santa Mónica and the nature of the nuns? The third opinion in this most revealing series, from the city council of Goa, explains that while the motivations for starting the convent were noble, the greed of parents and relatives made it attractive to place daughters in Santa Mónica with this modest dowry. In this way, the parents and relatives were left with the difference in what would have been a more generous dowry as well as anything the daughter would have inherited. As a result:

these days no one tries to marry their daughters, but just to place them in the Convent, even those who only have one daughter. This is why the number of nuns has grown so remarkably as well as the requirements to take care of them, so the convent is forced to seek out rentals and properties... It is in the best interests that this city should have a lot of married couples for its defense... couples that it does not have now. Before this convent was founded, there were many marriages.... As a result, commerce has declined... Some daughters are put in the convent by force, against their wills. This situation could be solved by limiting entrance to Santa Mónica to those poor, noble women who have only the required dowry, but no more. In addition, the Serra should be used for its original intention of raising girls for marriage...<sup>16</sup>

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dead or absent, that sum was to be taken from his estate and awarded to D. Catarina. *DR da I*, Vol. 2, pp. 384-386, Crown to Viceroy, 9 March 1613.

<sup>12</sup> *DR da I*, Vol. VIII, documento 71, Appendix C, pp. 85-87.

<sup>13</sup> HAG, Monções do Reino (MR) 19D, ff. 1303-1305v., 25 January 1635.

<sup>14</sup> HAG, códice 3045, ff. 18-18v., 1639.

<sup>15</sup> HAG, códice 7745, f. 12v., 31 March 1644; AHU, India caixa 21, 14, 1650.

<sup>16</sup> *Dr da I*, Vol. VIII, pp. 87-90, doc. 71.

In 1629 the Mother Superior of the Convent responded to the charges of excessive wealth. She claimed the convent was not as well off as many believed it to be; since they were now limited to 100 nuns, they barely were able to meet their expenses. In addition, they had taken in several women with no dowries at all or with small children to raise, as well as the 100 nuns<sup>17</sup>.

There appears to be some truth in the charges that families attempted to swindle nuns out of their lawful inheritances, in the manner described above. In 1646, the Mother-Superior wrote to the Overseas Council to complain that one of the nuns in Santa Mónica (now deceased), the daughter of Luis de Brito and D. Catarina de Vilhena, was robbed of her inheritance. Specifically, her father inherited and then sold some lands, without giving anything to his daughter or to the Convent. At the same time, he owed it money, since he only made a 200 *xerafim* deposit when his daughter entered<sup>18</sup>.

Santa Mónica appears to have become a victim of its own early success, both economic and social. In 1625, just a few years after its beginning, Santa Mónica had ninety-six nuns in residence and had acquired 129 dowries. The number of nuns in residence and dowries accumulated by Santa Mónica from its beginnings in 1610 until in 1874, when the last nun was in residence, is condensed in Table 1, below.

Table 1. Number of Nuns in Residence and Cumulative Dowries Obtained by the Convent of Santa Mónica of Goa, 1610-1874.

Year	Nuns in Residence	Cumulative Dowries
1610	32	33
1630	100	152
1650	104	214
1670	67	262
1690	55	298
1710	53	339
1730	57	376
1750	43	396
1770	51	435
1790	42	458
1810	40	479
1830	24	489
1850	10	493
1874	0	493

<sup>17</sup> HAG, MR 13A, ff. 67-68, 7 December 1629.

<sup>18</sup> Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (AHU), Índia caixa 18, 126, 2 March 1646. Vestiges of this practice appear in the Goan practice that required the bride to sign a document known as a *desistencia*, forfeiting any further claims on her parents' property. See Alfred Braganza, *The Discovery of Goa*. Bombay: Brooks, 1964, p. 96.

Source: António Francisco Moniz, "Relação completa das religiosas do Mosteiro de Santa Mónica," *O Oriente Português*, (first series) XV: 177-198, XVI: 284-294, 354-363, XVII: 92-102, 188-197, (second series) II-III: 111-119. The date of entry on one occasion and the dates of death on eight occasions are not stated. I have assigned an arbitrary number of twenty-five years in the Convent in these nine cases. However, twenty-five years may or may not actually be the average length that nuns were in Santa Mónica. Some were nuns only a few months before they died; others lived fifty years or longer in the Convent. This list is compiled from that made by Moniz, which is problematic and contains a number of errors. As a result, these data should be considered only as a general overview and used with caution.

From data presented here, we can note that the number of nuns in Santa Mónica very quickly peaked in 1650s at 104. The cumulative number of dowries exceeded 300 before the close of the seventeenth century. Given the reality of these figures in the context of the sharp economic downturn faced by Portuguese Asia during the same period, the complaints made by the city council and others take on a new validity. It was only after 1730 that the Convent began a gradual decline, which extended into the late nineteenth century.

Complaints of Santa Mónica's excessive wealth continued at least until 1702. At that time, the city council complained to the Crown that Santa Mónica made a loan to the Crown attorney of the *Estado da Índia* and that in doing so had not listed all its properties nor had it revealed all its dowries. In addition, Santa Mónica had exceeded the number of sisters allowed as well as its limit of 8,000 *cruzados* in income. Specifically, the city council accused the Convent of not listing its land holdings in the north and failing to mention that the required dowry for entry was two or three thousand *xerafins*, which "had to be paid or they would simply refuse admission with no scruples whatsoever"<sup>19</sup>.

This economic growth of Santa Mónica occurred at a time of general decline in the rest of Portuguese Asia and was undoubtedly a factor causing the envy expressed by the city, courts, and governors. Santa Mónica prospered, but by 1687 the city council commented: We see every day in the city houses falling into decay, not on account of the antiquity of the building, but for a lack of money ...which proceeds from the great poverty and general misery of the inhabitants ...<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> HAG, MR 67, ff. 63-89, 1702. The letter from the câmara is on f. 85 and dated 15 January 1702.

<sup>20</sup> José Nicolau da Fonseca, *An Historical and Archaeological Sketch of the City of Goa*. Bombay: Thacker and Co., Ltd., 1878, pp. 173-174.



The next year, the same body noted that there were a lot of houses in disrepair, the formerly "sumptuous homes were, for the greater part, destroyed"<sup>21</sup>. Fonseca, in his study of Goa, noted that the inhabitants "were in a deplorably wretched condition. They were reduced to such a degree of destitution that they were obliged in most cases to part with their household furniture in order to provide themselves with the bare necessities of life; ...while many ...Portuguese families ...supported themselves by alms"<sup>22</sup>.

Nor was the *Misericórdia* of Goa immune from these same economic pressures. In 1651, the *Misericórdia* informed the Crown that it was no longer able to fund orphanages and hospitals and requested help<sup>23</sup>. A few years later in 1664, the *Misericórdia* was granted the right to keep money belonging to absentees who died there, provided there were no heirs. This privilege was granted as a special favor to the *Santa Casa* because of its great poverty and to provide it with enough income to care for the many widows and orphans from the southern forts and the city of Cochin who were being sheltered there<sup>24</sup>. By 1666, the Crown had already been informed by the *Misericórdia* that both the orphanage of Nossa Senhora da Serra and Magdalene were on hard times<sup>25</sup>. Of course, the orphanage of Serra had been established with the initial goal of sheltering young Portuguese and Indo-Portuguese ladies until they married and were awarded dowries of land, positions in the state bureaucracy for their husbands, money, or any combination of these three. While Serra had flourished along with the general economy of the *Estado da Índia*, it too had become increasingly Goan and much less imperial in its focus by 1700. The Goan Magdalene house had a modest but important role to play in female colonization in the region and had also fallen onto hard economic times by 1700. In 1676, the *Misericórdia*, still claiming poverty, was awarded income from some lands in the north specifically to support the shelters in Goa<sup>26</sup>. In that year (1676), the city council reported that Serra had "more than 100 daughters of nobles and Magdalene had seventy orphans and *convertidas*"<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> HAG, códice 7761, ff. 121v.-122, 14 August 1688.

<sup>22</sup> Fonseca, pp. 173-174.

<sup>23</sup> AHU, Índia, caixa 21A, doc. 117, 15 December 1651.

<sup>24</sup> AHU, Índia caixa 28, doc. 24, 30 March 1664.

<sup>25</sup> HAG, MR 33, f. 157, 7 January 1666.

<sup>26</sup> AHU, Índia, caixa 30, doc. 67, 22 January 1676; HAG, MR 39-40, ff. 95-95v.

<sup>27</sup> HAG, MR 39-40, ff. 93-94, correspondence between Goa and Lisbon dated 13 August 1674 and 22 January 1676.

As we can see from these examples, the real problem underlying Santa Mónica's wealth was that it was accumulated in spite of (and in sharp contrast to) the economic decline surrounding it. To put it another way, its wealth was comparative rather than absolute. The prestige enjoyed by such a convent in Portuguese society meant that it drew its novices from the wealthy and upper classes. In the case of the former, Goans and *mestiços* could buy respectability; in the latter case, impoverished Portuguese could place their daughters in Santa Mónica to avoid large dowries and possibly to increase the inheritances of other siblings. The combination of these two distinct elements only made the union stronger, until its economic base truly eroded. This occurred by the late eighteenth century, when the Crown noted that Santa Mónica had fallen onto hard times and deserved all the assistance available<sup>28</sup>.

Table 2: Birthplaces and Number of Nuns  
in the Convent of Santa Mónica of Goa, 1607-1834.

Birthplace	Number According to Moniz/ Percentage (493 total)	Number According to Telles <sup>29</sup> / Percentage (661 total)
Lisbon	7	8
Porto	0	1
Portalegre	1	0
Alemquer	1	0
Guimarães	0	1
Royal Orphans	0	14
Total born in Portugal	9 1.8%	24 3.6%
Tete	1	1
Sofala	0	1
Mozambique	9	11
Mombassa	2	3
Ormuz	3	2
Diu	2	3
Damão [Daman]	9	14
Baçaim [Bassein/Vasai]	27	33
Trapur/Tarapur (Daman area)	9	1
Maimbandura [Maim, Bombay area]	1	1
Talapor [Bombay]	0	4
Taná [Thana]	17	20
Bombaim [Bombay]	2	2
Chaul	9	9
Locations in Goa	321 65%	465 70%

<sup>28</sup> HAG, MR 164B, f. 440, 1783.

<sup>29</sup> Moniz states that his list was compiled from the Livro das Profissões do Mosteiro. This manuscript was not in HAG in 1991 and may have disappeared since his article was published. Telles does not state his source for these figures nor does either Telles or Moniz address the differences between their figures.

	(1)	(2)		
Angediva Island	(1)	(2)		
Guirim	(1)	locations in Goa not stated		
Cabo da Rama	(1)			
Ribandar	(1)			
Nerul	(1)			
Mayem [Maém]	(1)			
Colvale	(1)			
Chorão	(1)			
Xivelim	(1)			
Taleigão	(1)			
Panaji	(2)			
Carvelossim [Cavelossim]	(3)			
Mangalor	1		1	
Cannanore	1		1	
Calicut	0		1	
Cranganor	1		1	
Cochim	19		20	
Ceilão [Ceylon/Sri Lanka]	1		4	
Colombo	3		0	
Malacca	7		10	
Macau	12		17	
Ambionio [Ambon]	1		3	
Total born in the Estado da Índia	458	93%	620	93%
Patana [Somnath, Gujarat]	1		1	
Surrate [Surat]	1		1	
Talicheira [Talicheri?]	2		1	
Couronya [Parur, Kerala]	1		0	
Coulão [Quilon, Kerala]	1		0	
Nagapatão [Nagappattinam]	1		12	
Pondicheri	0		1	
São Thomé [Mylapur-Madras]	2		1	
Madrasta [Madras]	1		1	
Calcuta [Calcutta]	1		0	
Batavia	1		0	
Japão [Japan]	1		0	
Total born in Asia, outside Portuguese Control	13	2.6%	18	2.7%
Putchiri [location unknown]	1		0	
Caranjá [location unknown]	6		5	
place of birth not stated	7		0	
Total	493	100%	661	100%

Sources: As in Table 1 and Ricardo Michael Telles, "Igrejas, Conventos, e Capelas na Velha Cidade de Goa, Real Mosteiro de Santa Mónica," *O Oriente Português*, second series, Vol. 1 (1931), pp. 90-91

Table 2 provides an overview of these young ladies origins. One of the original complaints against the Convent was that it attracted too many women from Portugal, including some orphans sent from Lisbon. There does not appear to be much truth to that charge, since the total number of *reinol* women who entered Santa Mónica was between nine and twenty-four, or between two and 3.6 percent of all those who entered. Almost all of these were novices in the first years of the Convent's history. Between sixty-five and seventy percent of the ladies

who entered were *castiço*, *mestiço*, and Goan women from lands around the city; the remainder came from virtually every corner of the *Estado da Índia*. Only a handful was from areas outside Portuguese political control. As a result, Santa Mónica was firmly attached to Goan society while it enjoyed a reputation throughout the Asian Empire as a convent of distinction. It proved to be one more link that united the scattered outposts of Portuguese Asia. In this case, the link was a powerful social and religious institution for women and the first Christian convent in Asia established by the Portuguese.

This imperial link becomes all the more evident when we apply one more question to the list presented above in Table 2. At what point did Santa Mónica begin to attract a majority of its novices from Goa itself and not from the list presented in Table 2? That information is presented in Table 3, below.

Table 3: Goan and non-Goan novices entering the Convent of Santa Mónica.

Period	Total new novices	From Goa	% of total
1610-1649	211	103	48%
1650-1700	106	58	54%
1700-1749	80	53	66%
1750 and after	95	75	79%

Source: as in Table 1

So, judging from the simple data presented here in Tables 2 and 3, the Convent of Santa Mónica was clearly a supporting link in the *Estado da Índia* until the late 1600's when it became increasingly local in its focus. After 1700, Santa Mónica was (for all practical purposes) a local Goan convent.

As a real indicator of Santa Mónica's success, several other cities petitioned to be allowed their own convents, but the High Court of Goa and the authorities in Lisbon ensured that no additional convents were started in the *Estado da Índia*. For example, in 1608 the High Court noted that the shelter for young ladies in Bassein was allowed because it was not a convent<sup>30</sup>. By 1627, the *Relação* forbid any more shelters or convents without specific royal authorization<sup>31</sup>. In spite of these problems, Lisbon did allow one additional convent in the *Estado da Índia*: Santa Clara in

<sup>30</sup> HAG, códice 8797, ff. 27v.-28, 20 February 1608.

<sup>31</sup> HAG, códice 8797, f. 189, 1627.

Macau. It, too, faced the same charges as Santa Mónica – thwarting the marriage possibilities of Portuguese *soldados*. In 1686, this Convent was forbidden to allow any more women to enter. This law was renewed in 1687, with the penalty of 500 *pardaus* if broken. "The intention was to end this convent..."<sup>32</sup> The Viceroy renewed this law in 1718, stating that "One of the reasons for the decline of the city of Macau is the lack of resident Portuguese. This develops from the large number of women who have dowries with which they could marry but instead enter the convent of that city to become nuns in order to evade that state [of marriage]"<sup>33</sup>.

The maximum number of nuns was set at thirty-three and increased to forty in 1731<sup>34</sup>. At the same time, the first orphanage in Macau was started in 1726 and the girls were also given dowries by the *Misericórdia*<sup>35</sup>.

Around this same time, the Crown perceived that convents in Portugal were subverting colonization in Portuguese America. In 1732, the King noted:

It has come to my attention that the principal reason that the population in Brazil is not growing... is the great excess of women which come [from Brazil] to this Kingdom with the pretext of becoming nuns, ... [something which] they are forced to do by their fathers or mothers, against their wills... the result of which is a lack of marriageable women in Brazil which would augment Brazil and these women have lives [in Portugal] which they dislike and did not want... Therefore, I hereby order that no woman of any condition be allowed to come to this Kingdom from Brazil without a license...<sup>36</sup>

These convents were perceived as alternatives to marriage both by the women concerned as well as the authorities. Thus, we see the Crown's rationale behind limiting the maximum number of nuns, or, in the Brazilian case, their ability to leave the colony. On the other hand, the authorities did not wish to suppress the convents altogether; two years after the Viceroy wrote the letter concerning Macau quoted above, he

<sup>32</sup> Manuel Teixeira, *Macau e a sua Diocese* (Macau: Soi-Sang, 1940-82), Vol. III, pp. 500-501.

<sup>33</sup> "Ordem para no convento de Maccão não tomarem mais Religiozas completo o numero (7 de Maio de 1718)," *Asia Portuguesa no Tempo do Vice-Rei Conde de Ericeira*, ed. C. R. Boxer (Macau: Imprensa Nacional, 1970), p. 11.

<sup>34</sup> Manuel Teixeira, *Macau e a sua Diocese*, Vol. III, pp. 500-501.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Colecção Chronologica de Leis Extravagantes posteriores a Nova Compilação das Ordenações do Reino publicadas em 1603 desde este anno até o de 1761...* (Coimbra: Real Imprensa da Universidade, 1819), Vol. 2, pp. 431-433, *alvará* dated 10 March 1732.

wrote the mother-superior of the Convent of Santa Clara, concerned that the convent was not receiving all of the money due it: "I specifically ordered that city to continue to pay and not attempt to evade [paying the convent] the [proceeds from a special] one percent [tax]"<sup>37</sup>. In the same letter, Dom Luis de Menezes asked to be remembered in the nuns' prayers.

### Conclusion and Future Possibilities for Research in this Area

Clearly, the Crown was caught on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, it wanted convents to flourish. On the other hand, if they did prosper, *soldados* would be hampered in making the best possible matches with Portuguese ladies. Santa Mónica became a victim of its own successes when it prospered in the face of the well-documented economic decline in the *Estado da Índia* during the late 1600's. It was then attacked by those who had previously supported it and faced prolonged criticism until it too was effected by economic decline. At the same time, and for the first time, by 1700 Santa Mónica became a local Goan convent and was no longer one of the ties that bound together the huge expanses that formed the Portuguese Asian Empire.

Was Santa Mónica guilty of subverting marriage, as some of its attackers charged? I would argue that this was not really the case. In the period post 1650, Portuguese and Luso-Indian men and women found it increasingly attractive to marry Goans. I have argued at some length on this issue elsewhere, but in brief the reason is that Goan and other South Asians offered long term financial stability. Santa Mónica was blamed for this when in reality it was caused by fundamental economic problems in Portuguese Asia.

This short article has attempted to highlight the importance of the convent of Santa Mónica and its Asian links. While this convent may be one of the more obvious possibilities for the study of women in the former *Estado da Índia*, there are many other possible avenues that could yield rich possibilities for the researcher. For example, more so than any other single source, the Jesuit letters offer numerous possibilities for additional investigation on castaways (and especially female castaways) on the *carreira da Índia*, a subject that has escaped the attention of most maritime historians, in spite of the depth and wealth of Portuguese and foreign historians who have written on this subject. The royal orphan girls, while the subject of my own work and that of others, have yet to be

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<sup>37</sup> Boxer, *Asia Portuguesa*, p. 98.

exploited to their full potential. In particular, the numerous dowries associated with them (at least some 111 encountered in the Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino) would make a wonderful, tightly focused study that could have much to say about marriage and wealth in Portuguese Asia. The female controlled landholding system in Mozambique has been the subject of several important monographs [e.g. Allen Isaacman, *Mozambique: The Africanization of a European Institution, The Zambesi Prazos, 1750-1902* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1972); M. D. D. Newitt, *Portuguese Settlement on the Zambesi: Exploration, Land Tenure and Colonial Rule in East Africa* (London: Longman, 1973)], but no one has yet turned to a similar land holding pattern in the Bombay region or on Sri Lanka. The various chapters of the *Santa Casa de Misericórdia* spread throughout Portuguese Asia are additional possibilities for research, especially the branches in Macau, Damão, and Diu. The same could be said for any of the institutions mentioned here, especially the orphanage of Nossa Senhora da Serra, The Goan Magdalene house, and the Convent of Santa Clara in Macau.

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*Lady Margaret Hoby* (c. 1570-1633) é considerada a primeira diarista inglesa, restando de texto manuscrito de seu diário as datas de 1602, 1 de Agosto de 1599 até 21 de Julho de 1605. Margaret Dakins, a primeira habitante de Hackney (nord-este de Yorkshire), cedo se torna a diarista londrina (única) de uma fortuna invejável, encontrando-se o seu diário

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Virginia Blain et alii, *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English: Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present*, 1998, p. 525; *Minerva Bell et alii*, eds., *A Biographical Dictionary of English Women Writers 1500-1700*, 1990, p. 102.

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