



**The role and  
practices of the  
*curandeiro* and  
*saludador* in early  
modern Portuguese  
society**

*O papel e as práticas  
dos curandeiros e  
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This paper will explore the role and practices of magic-using folk healers — *curandeiros* and *saludadores* — in early modern Portuguese society. The article will examine the ambivalent place of the folk healer as a figure both central to and marginal in Portuguese popular culture. In considering some of the services offered by unlicensed popular healers and their recourse to the unorthodox magical means inherent in popular curing, the paper will investigate *curandeiros'* and *saludadores'* illicit sources of power. Further, this work will examine the prominence of men as folk healers in southern Portugal during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Finally, by looking at the notoriety of Luso-African folk healers, the paper will assess the importance of race as a factor in the culture of Portuguese magical curing.

KEYWORDS: folk-healers, Portuguese society, Portuguese popular culture, popular curing, seventeenth/eighteenth centuries.

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*Este artigo discute os papéis e as práticas dos curandeiros e saludadores nos primórdios da moderna sociedade portuguesa. Examina o lugar ambivalente destes praticantes da arte de curar que fazem uso da magia e que têm, a um só tempo, importância central e inserção marginal na cultura popular portuguesa. Ao analisar os serviços nada ortodoxos e, oficialmente, não autorizados que prestam, o autor investiga as fontes do poder ilícito que exercem. Além disso, analisa a predominância dos homens como curandeiros no sul de Portugal durante os séculos XVII e XVIII. Por fim, ao destacar a notoriedade dos curandeiros luso-africanos, demonstra a importância da questão racial na cura pela magia em Portugal.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *curandeiros, benzedores, sociedade portuguesa, cultura popular portuguesa, séculos XVII e XVIII.*

Joana Baptista, a *curandeira* (folk healer) living in the village of São Marcos near the important regional market town of Evora, was known to her neighbors as *Ratinha*, or “the Little Mouse.”<sup>1</sup> She had moved to Evora, located on the plains of the Alentejo province in southeast Portugal, a number of years before from the far north of Portugal — near Chaves in the Archbishopric of Braga. She lived with her husband, who was a common laborer. On the day *familiares* of the Holy Office arrested her, 15 June 1747, she claimed to be above thirty years old; like most of her contemporaries, she did not know her exact date of birth.<sup>2</sup>

By profession, Joana Baptista was also a recognized practicing *parteira*, or midwife. Her highly questionable methods, however, resulted in her being denounced to Inquisition authorities. The charges against her included practicing sorcery, disseminating superstitions, and having entered into a pact with the Devil. Before her arrest, her neighbors had provided a Holy Office evidence-gathering commission with damaging testimony about her magical healing techniques.<sup>3</sup>

Consistent with her position as a midwife, Joana Baptista’s illicit healing practices focused on the maladies of childhood. Among the superstitious curing rituals she was said to perform was the following, meant to extract sickness from patients who were, of necessity, quite small and therefore very young: Joana Baptista cured children by passing them through a special circular loaf of bread, called a *rosca*. The loaf was formed by twisting and braiding together three long strings of dough. This particular bread dough was to be made from flour provided from the households of three different woman, each named Maria. Once the dough had been baked into a big wreath or hoop, Joana Baptista would pass the ill child through this “*rosca de três Marias*” three times in an unbroken sequence, all the while reciting a special incantation which addressed the sickness or disorder in question.<sup>4</sup>

Joana Baptista remained in the custody of the Evora tribunal of the Portuguese Inquisition, enduring interrogation and periodic torture, for over two years. According to the terms of her final punitive sentence, she was exiled for two years to the Bishopric of Portalegre, obliged to receive religious instruction, again imprisoned for an arbitrary length of time determined by the whim of her Inquisitor jailers, and made to pay all costs stemming from her trial and incarceration. She was released from prison on 31 October 1749 — the eve of All Saints’ Day — eleven days after her public act of faith, or *auto-de-fé*, which she celebrated on 20 October 1749.<sup>5</sup> She was then dispatched to travel northward to begin her term of banishment.

In many ways, Joana Baptista’s experience fits a scenario typical among popular healers in Enlightenment-era Portugal. Like most other *curandeiras* and *curandeiros*, she was a member of Portugal’s poorest social class, was an outsider to the community in which she resided and, at the time of her arrest — which fell during the Portuguese

Inquisition's most active period of prosecuting magical criminals — was a relatively young adult. In gender terms, she also represents the mean; just over half the illicit healers brought to trial in the region under the Evora tribunal's jurisdiction were women (though this ratio was higher for the nation as a whole). Further, like nearly half of the women arrested for magical crimes in Portugal in the eighteenth century, Joana Baptista was married. Finally, as a first-time offender, her sentence was light; she was not required to travel an extraordinary distance from her home (Portalegre lies just eighty-five kilometers north of Evora) and a two-year banishment was, by Holy Office standards, brief (Walker, 2001; see also tables of penalties in Chapter VIII of the dissertation).

What Joana Baptista's case illustrates most clearly, though, is that superstitious healing was perfectly commonplace in Portuguese peasant society, even in the middle of the eighteenth century after decades of active repression at the hands of Holy Office authorities and other elites. Although she may have worked behind closed doors, this *curandeira* and *parteira* employed — apparently for many years — healing methods of which a substantial proportion of the people in her village were aware and must have condoned, at least in practice if not in theory. Once denounced, however, this illicit healer's position was revealed as a fragile one. Joana Baptista's case also illustrates that the step from being an oft-patronized and even respected local authority on remedies to being a moral criminal under prosecution by the Inquisition could be a rapid one.

Who, then, were Portugal's popular healers, those common women and men who cured by superstitious means? What was their place in Portuguese society, and how did their neighbors perceive them? What kinds of curative services were *curandeiros* and *curandeiras* expected to provide, and who were their clients? The present chapter will take up and examine qualitative questions such as these, leaving to Chapter VIII a more quantitatively based analysis concerning the demographics of popular healers.

### **The ambivalent place of the folk healer in early modern Portuguese Society**

From the outset, it is important to establish that *curandeiros* and *saludadores* provided health care services which the social groups they served — mostly rural people of commoner status (though popular healers certainly worked in cities, too, and counted elites among their patrons) — both desired and needed. To that extent, popular healers must be seen, at least at the level of their client base, as being purveyors of a socially approved body of magical beliefs and practices. Borrowing from anthropologist Raymond Firth's analysis of the different types of social functions that practitioners of magic can fulfill (productive,

protective, or destructive), we see that the healer's magical art falls squarely in the realm of what Firth calls protective magic (Firth, 1990, pp. 38-40). Protective magic is performed for the good of the community; besides curing illness, its intent is to guard property, avert misfortune, provide security while travelling or hunting, and otherwise assist the activities of the social group for which it is generated.

Superstitious popular healing, then, had a socially positive function; its practice was not ill intentioned. On the contrary, the earnest healer performed a service meant to aid individuals in the community, as "a stimulus to [general social] effort" (Firth, 1990, p. 38). (Of course, this rules out the inevitable cynical charlatans; still, the majority of folk healers appear to have had a sincere faith in their own stated abilities.) Popular remedies by design were aimed at restoring members of a social organization — a village or neighborhood community — to their full productive capacity, not to cause harm to the social fabric. Further, a healer did not intend curative acts to be a divisive matter for elites and commoners; most *curandeiros*, in fact, reacted with indignation when accused of acts repugnant to the Church.<sup>6</sup>

### **Sources of power — inalienability of unorthodox magical means**

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, one could encounter a range of popular healers in Portugal. There were complete charlatans, charismatics who knowingly performed fantastic but false curing rituals on simple country folk. These false healers took advantage of rural peoples' pain, fear, and gullibility to extract small payments in cash or kind, thus earning a meager itinerant livelihood.<sup>7</sup> Conversely, popular folkways provided an abundance of home remedies — treatments that drew on the accumulated experience of untold agrarian generations. To that extent, virtually every household included someone who attended to common human complaints, pains, and ailments. Using well-known remedies, the vegetable ingredients for which were readily available, old wives and wizened men could employ their broad knowledge of plant characteristics — unscientifically gained but often effective — to address all manner of common maladies (Araújo, 1992, pp. 19-26). Typically, such cures would be administered in combination with a prayer, incantation, prolonged healing ritual, or dietary regimen (Araújo, 1958, pp. 293-335).

Finally, there were also those *curandeiros* and *saludadores* in Portugal who firmly believed that they had been given a divine gift: an inherent healing "virtue" which empowered them with the capacity to cure humans or animals with nothing more than a touch, or with rituals and the aid of an intangible holy power. Of course, charlatans could and did make this same assertion, but Inquisition cases provide numerous

examples of illicit folk healers who, when pressed or tortured, would not easily back away from their conviction that God had imbued them with a special internal restorative power.<sup>8</sup>

These were the true *saludadores*, or healers, who most concerned and challenged the ecclesiastical officers of the Inquisition. True, the attention of the Holy Office was much occupied with those *curandeiros* who applied superstitious folk remedies founded on horticultural lore, as well — physicians and surgeons within the Inquisition particularly opposed their competition — but in terms of a theological challenge to the Church, *saludadores* who claimed to have a divine gift represented the greater threat. Note, too, that the assertion of possessing “divine virtue” is part of what made *saludadores* and *curandeiros* such a threat to the medical profession, as well, by discounting the value of the *médicos*’ conventional training. Claiming divine virtue, then, was one means by which a person could establish his — or, more rarely, her — status as a *saludador* (Bethencourt, 1987, pp. 55-7).

Antónia Pereira, for example, was a sixty-five year-old *curandeira* whose nickname, *Galinheira*, meant “Chicken Lady” or “Poultry Seller.” After the Coimbra tribunal arrested her on 8 October 1722, she maintained that God had bestowed a divine virtue upon her that empowered her to heal people. State-licensed medical personnel working within the Inquisition, however, confirmed that “her cures were faked.” Further, they asserted in the trial summary that Antónia Pereira’s remedies had not resulted in any healing effect, and that “such effects could not proceed from any ‘natural virtue’” which Antónia Pereira claimed to have. The attacks that she treated without medicine, the Holy Office maintained, could only have been “cured by Doctors, not by ‘divine virtue.’”<sup>9</sup>

In another trial held in Coimbra in 1724, one witness for the prosecution, a physician named Dr. João Baptista da Fonseca, complained that the folk healer Francisco Martins had claimed to cure by “divine virtue.” The *médico* had “heard it said” that the *curandeiro* could, using just words, “cure both people and animals.”<sup>10</sup> In yet another case — this one in 1783 — a licensed barber, José da Silva, explicitly stated that he had made his denunciation of the folk healer Cristovão Silva Marreiros for professional reasons. “I denounced him by motive of his occupation,” he said. “I heard ... diverse people tell, with admiration and respect, of [Cristovão Silva Marreiros] Divine Virtue.”<sup>11</sup>

Portuguese folk healers’ often-claimed power to cure people by divine virtue is roundly ridiculed in a short Holy Office treatise concerning healers called *Dos Saludadores*.<sup>12</sup> This brief but influential work was written during the second decade of the eighteenth century. In subsequent trials against illicit superstitious healers, the Inquisitors took the opportunity to drive home the point that folk medicine had no efficacy because God no longer provided mere mortals with healing powers.

Official trial summaries often reiterated the language of *Dos Saludadores* almost verbatim.<sup>13</sup> Take, for example, the case of *saludador* Manuel Fernandes, arrested by the Evora tribunal in 1720. Towards the end of his trial, when tallying the evidence against the accused, the Inquisitors noted that Fernandes:

... experimented with good effect except when the sickness was serious, because ... he did not cure grave sicknesses; he did not have the virtue he would have needed to cure them. Also, [Fernandes' assertion that he possessed virtue] is unbelievable, because the Lord is virtue. ... It is not good to imitate the power of God; [and] there are those [to whom] the culprit said he had His [God's] virtue to cure.<sup>14</sup>

This raises the question of a slight variation in meaning between the words *curandeiro* and *saludador*. In common parlance at the end of the seventeenth century, the two were often used interchangeably, *saludador* being the more archaic term. The usage of *curandeiro* (or, often, simply *curador*) was more favored in the north of Portugal, and that word became more common generally as the eighteenth century progressed. In Holy Office practice, however, the distinction was a bit more clearly drawn: *saludador* is the masculine term *Inquisidores* initially used to describe persons, almost always men, who claimed to heal by divine virtue, while *curandeiro* referred more generally to persons who relied on superstitious rites and home-made concoctions to effect cures.<sup>15</sup> If indeed any fine distinction is to be drawn between the two terms, it would be on these grounds, though it must be stated that later Inquisition documents often conflate and confuse the terms, rendering any fine distinction meaningless in the long view (Paiva, 1997, pp. 60-2).

The terms *curandeiro* and *curandeirismo* carry a strong pejorative connotation in modern Portuguese; they have become words that refer to the artifice of a quack, charlatan, or witch doctor. Just when that definition began to be applied, however, and by whom, is an important matter for consideration. Contemporary eighteenth-century dictionaries, including the influential volume compiled by Raphael Bluteau for the Jesuits between 1712 and 1728, include the terms *curador* and *curadora*, but not specifically *curandeiro* or *curandeira* (Bluteau, 1712-28; Bluteau and Moraes Silva, 1789, pp. 355-6). Popular usage, however, as is made clear by repeated references in Inquisition trial testimony, was far more broad and ambiguous. Peasants used the term to refer to any folk healer.

Generations of exposure to clerical remonstrance about the moral dangers of superstitious practices had, by the seventeenth century, rendered any popular healer's activities suspect in the eyes of common folk. That notwithstanding, the circumstances of life in the countryside during the early modern period — agrarian, isolated, and conservative — dictated that the services on offer from *curandeiros* and *saludadores* continued to be in broad demand. Poor rustics required

relief for their health problems, too, of course; traditionally, such succor was to be found in the person of a local or itinerant healer (Araújo, 1988, pp. 1-18; Paiva, 1997, pp. 60-2; Bethencourt, 1987, pp. 55-7). In any case, licensed medical practitioners were relatively few in Portugal's rural areas during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (more on this below). If one could be found, peasants of pitifully small financial means could rarely afford the fees an educated surgeon or physician was likely to charge. Further, merely citing peasants' inability to pay does not address the profound cultural differences that separated the medical treatment of elites from that of commoners, nor the barrier of perception that divided each group's ideas about healing. Such differences would become increasingly divergent as the eighteenth century progressed and enlightened ideas about science and healing spread through elite groups, leaving the poor increasingly outside the currents of rationalized medicine.

### **Other services offered by popular healers**

Someone calling himself a *curandeiro* might also willingly perform other rites from the range of services magical practitioners provided. However, an assertion like this could indicate that such a *mágico* was merely a charlatan, a cynical fake who took advantage of the gullible by performing superstitious rituals only for material gain.

By all appearances, however, many popular healers genuinely believed that their capacity to heal came from God's hand, and that such "divine virtue" did not empower them to do anything else. Indeed, Holy Office personnel seemed to have been, if possible, the most agitated — even unnerved — when they occasionally encountered *saludadores* who asked for no specific sum in return for their services, asserting that it was unseemly for a man of God to solicit remuneration.<sup>16</sup> The *Inquisidores* were on firmer legal and religious ground when confronted by cases they could classify as straightforward charlatanism. "True" *curandeiros*, though, who typically did not indulge in fortune telling, love magic, or any practice other than the healing of human or animal bodies, caused a problem, especially if they refused to accept any but voluntary donations for their work. Such behavior, modeled on the lives of Christ and the Saints, raised the unwelcome possibility that the *saludador's* claim to possessing divine virtue might not be false.

Portuguese Inquisition records are full of examples of *curandeiros* who also performed other functions unrelated to curing. Popular healer Manuel António, for example, a thirty year-old wanderer from Lagos in the Algarve, was arrested by the Evora tribunal on 21 July 1760. At one time he had been a licensed surgeon, but he had fallen on hard times. He was unmarried, had no fixed residence, and had taken to performing superstitious cures. Although the Holy Office classified him as a *curandeiro*, he earned additional income by divining future events on

demand and giving people supernaturally derived advice about where to seek hidden treasure.<sup>17</sup>

Another part-time healer was Maria da Assunção, whom the Evora tribunal incarcerated on 16 March 1738 when she was forty-three years old. She had been born in Beja in the southern Alentejo and was married to a tailor. The Inquisitors charged her with having a pact with the Devil and performing acts of sorcery, which included superstitious cures and prayers. Among the illicit healing activities cited in her trial dossier were curing body “malformations” and improving her clients’ faulty vision through superstitious means. Beyond her skill as a *curandeira*, though, she was also known as a purveyor of love magic, performing spells to solve marital problems and to help young people attract and hold the attentions of a desired mate.<sup>18</sup>

The case of Maria da Conceição, a folk healer over fifty years of age who was married to a common laborer, provides yet another example. Even though she was from Alcácer do Sal, in the western Alentejo seventy kilometers southeast of Lisbon, her nickname was *Vasca* (“the Basque”). The Holy Office arrested her for the first time on 11 June 1728, but she was arrested again for relapse on 4 May 1741, after evading her initial sentence — a four-year banishment northward to Viseu. Maria da Conceição, too, was not strictly a *curandeira*; she also “effected marriages through magic” and made “lost objects become apparent.”<sup>19</sup>

Finally, consider this service, offered by at least two *curandeiras* whose tenure as healers was separated by wide geographical and temporal gaps. Yet another Maria de Conceição, this one known by her nickname *Maravilha* (the Marvel), was arrested at her home in Beja in 1716. An earlier *curandeira*, Luisa Barreiros, had been born near Avis but was arrested in Sousal, twenty-two kilometers away, in 1697. Beja and Sousal are separated by more than one hundred kilometers of sparsely populated, arid pasture and scrub land.<sup>20</sup> Both women provided ritual remedies, but they also claimed to be able to divine — from a great distance, without the need to see or examine the subject — the state of health of a family member or friend.<sup>21</sup> Such information must have been in high demand in the days before rapid, or even regular, communication between the various regions of the Portuguese Empire. In practical terms, these women performed a service which no doubt provided a welcome comfort to people whose relatives and loved ones were serving at sea or in the colonies.

### **The prominence of men as folk healers in the South of Portugal**

An important aspect of the culture of popular medicine in early modern Portugal, particularly in the southern reaches of the realm, was that the practice of folk healing arts was almost evenly distributed



between women and men. Among those Portuguese folk healers whom the Inquisition brought to trial, just over forty percent were men, while women accounted for just under sixty percent, counting all Holy Office tribunals.<sup>22</sup> To do so, however, distorts the actual historical landscape, because the three Portuguese Inquisition tribunals persecuted *curandeiros* and *curandeiras* at greatly varying rates. In Lisbon, for example, cunning men were in the majority among those the Holy Office prosecuted, outnumbering cunning women thirteen to nine, or 59.09 percent compared to 40.91 percent (which indicates an apparent preference among Lisbon's residents for male healers). In Evora, however, the ratio was nearly even, with a total of thirty-four female folk healers tried during the period in question, compared to thirty-two males (51.51 percent versus 48.48 percent). Only in the northern part of the country was this trend markedly different. The Holy Office tribunal of Coimbra prosecuted a far larger percentage of women healers: *curandeiras* accounted for 69.79 percent of the trials against popular healers, while *curandeiros* made up only 30.21 percent (sixty-seven women and twenty-nine men were tried for illicit healing in Coimbra during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries).<sup>23</sup>

Note that none of these figures is necessarily representative of the actual gender ratio of popular healers functioning at large in contemporary Portuguese society. It is possible, for example — though virtually impossible to prove — that inquisitors in Coimbra were specifically targeting female healers for arrest. However, in the north of Portugal, as elsewhere in the northern Iberian Peninsula, women played a stronger social role as folk healers than they did in the south. Modern scholarship has indicated that women shaped and controlled the general expression of popular culture paradigms in northern Portugal and Galicia to an extent far greater than did men (Contreras, 1982, pp. 571-79 and 685-7). An elevated number of arrests among female healers by the Coimbra Inquisition tribunal, then, may be related to this point, as well.

In fact, the masculine folk healer was a well-entrenched figure in Portuguese peasant society. Of the twelve *saludadores* and *curandeiros* whom the Portuguese Inquisition arrested in the sixteenth century, as documented by Universidade Nova historian Francisco Bethencourt (1987, pp. 177, 302-7), ten of them were men. But the tradition of men acting as folk healers in the south of Portugal was at least as old as the six-hundred-year Moorish occupation of the Iberian peninsula, beginning in the eighth century C. E.. North African Muslim society generally placed men in the position of being agents of healing, even at the popular level; this seems to be the historical genesis of the Portuguese practice south of the River Tagus (Chejne, 1983, pp. 115-31; Bethencourt, 1987, pp. 182-3; Paiva, 1997, 159-60).

In his only work on Portuguese witchcraft trials to appear in English, in fact, historian Francisco Bethencourt refers to folk healing as virtually

an exclusively masculine activity; he calls all Portuguese healers at the popular level “cunning men” (Bethencourt, 1990, pp. 410-11). It is well to remember, too, that the Inquisition referred to popular healers exclusively in the masculine form in its policy statement, *Dos Saludadores*. So, clearly, elites in Portugal, too, were accustomed to thinking of folk healers in masculine terms. As indicated, however, this conceit does not seem to have been so prevalent in the north of the country, where the incidence of prosecuted male healers, at least, was far less (Walker, 2001; see tables of penalties in chapter VIII).

### **The race factor: black healers and mystique as a power source**

*Familiars* of the Evora Inquisition arrested the *curandeira* Maria Grácia on 7 October 1724. The crimes alleged against her were many: pact with the Devil, sorcery, superstitions, sacrilege, and “practicing false arts.” This accused healer was a slave, born in Angola; she is described in the trial record as being unmarried, forty years old, and *preta retinta* (“pitch black”). Her master was Felipe Rodrigues Vitória, a wool contractor who lived on the Travessa de Alegria in Evora. Because she had been taken from Angola when she was very young, the trial record explains, the accused did not know the name of her parents. Maria Grácia was taken into custody in the dispensary house of the Evora Inquisition palace — she was not incarcerated with white offenders in the official prison.<sup>24</sup>

She was said to cure the malady of “weakness” (*quebranto*, thought to be caused by bewitching, or transmitted through the Evil Eye), and the “malady of the moon,” which she achieved with the following superstitious chants (*orações*):

I bless you, [name], the bewitched one; sun, fire and moon  
 In the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit  
 Here is the way of the Truth  
 In this way, take the evil from this creature  
 Jesus gives birth to Santa Ana  
 Santa Ana gives birth to Jesus  
 Here is the way of the Truth  
 In this way, take the evil from this creature.<sup>25</sup>

At other times, Maria Grácia conducted a remedy that involved the use of simple sorcery and mechanical healing methods. She would employ the following chant, using a cup of cool, clean water that she had blessed:

When the Virgin, Our Lady, walked through the world curing  
She cured with a cup of cold water.

Jesus gives life to Santa Ana

Santa Ana gives life to Jesus

In the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.<sup>26</sup>

Additionally, in order to cure carbuncles, she would exclaim:

I bless you, carbuncles, in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit!

When the Virgin, Our Lady, passed by here, snakes and lizards were killed

In this way I beg God and the Virgin Mary for that which has begun to go back!<sup>27</sup>

Maria Grácia only “completed her confession of guilt” after being tortured on 10 September 1725, nearly a year after her date of arrest. She performed her *auto-de-fé* on 16 December 1725, after which she was banished to Faro, in the Algarve, for three years.<sup>28</sup>

Statistically, persons of African descent make up only a small percentage of the total cadre of folk healers encountered in early modern Portugal. At most, the Portuguese Holy Office tried only fifteen or twenty Luso-Africans as *curandeiros* during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, amounting to less than ten percent of all prosecuted contemporary folk healers.<sup>29</sup> Yet blacks were some of the most renowned and notorious purveyors of superstitious remedies in the country. Healers of African origin seem to have been surrounded by a mystique that benefited their commerce in folk remedies. Many whites accorded black healers respect and power based on their singular exoticism, assuming that their origins in Africa or Brazil had provided them with healing knowledge to which white *médicos* or *curandeiros* did not have access.

This dynamic is especially true regarding black women. Of the twelve positively known cases where the Portuguese Inquisition prosecuted blacks as healers, two-thirds (eight) are women. Four of the twenty-two popular healers tried in Lisbon — two women and two men — were of African descent (though most had been born in Brazil). The Evora tribunal tried five Luso-Africans; this number is higher because the southernmost Algarve province, where the black population was greater, was in Evora’s jurisdiction.

A good deal of the popular esteem given to black women as healers is, once again, attributable to North African influences on Portugal’s past. Folk tales of mysterious, alluring *mouras encantadas* (enchanted Moorish women) originated during the medieval *Reconquista*. Such stories abounded in early modern Portugal; they spread powerful images that resonated in the popular mind. Beautiful dark women from Africa

were said to entrance, seduce, or spirit away lone travelers in the Portuguese countryside. Peasants commonly believed these *mouras encantadas* were ageless; they had been left behind to guard treasures hidden by the retreating Muslims (Paiva, 1997, pp. 159-60). Such women were said to have uncommon powers to charm and to heal Christians. In context, that unlettered rustics should project the powers of characters in folk tales on to living Luso-Africans is not so difficult to understand.

One of the most famous *curandeiras* in the diocese of Coimbra, for example, the above-mentioned Antónia Nunes de Costa, was almost certainly a black or mulatto woman. Her nickname, *Preta*, was and remains a pejorative term for people of African descent.<sup>30</sup> Still, she had earned a widespread notoriety for her ability to address many types of illness. In order to care for the numerous clients who summoned her, Da Costa would travel great distances on foot to various communities scattered across Portugal's midlands. Her long and well-documented career lasted at least from 1694 to 1716.<sup>31</sup> She was joined in the Coimbra district later in the century by two further *curandeiras* of color. In 1731, the Inquisition arrested forty-year-old Joanna Baptista, resident of a village outside Oporto; she was described as a *parda* (woman of mixed-race or mulatto).<sup>32</sup> Also, in 1754-55 the Holy Office tried one Maria Teresa; she lived in the city of Oporto. She was described as *mulata*—her father was a priest (a cleric of the habit of São Pedro who lived in the Abbey of Estorãos) and her mother was a black slave owned by another priest.<sup>33</sup> All of these women were accorded respect as healers in part because of the color of their skin.

Luso-African folk healers held a particular fascination for the cosmopolitan community living in the Portuguese capital city well into the next century. Historian of medicine Augusto da Silva Carvalho, writing in the early twentieth century, has provided us with the following vivid example of a notorious *curandeiro* active in Lisbon during the first quarter of the nineteenth century: the “*Barão de Catanea*” (Silva Carvalho, 1917, p. 52). Taking contemporary Brazilian slang into account, this pseudonym was apparently a mischievously clever quadruple-entendre, connoting simultaneously “The One-Horned [Libidinous] Baron of Medicinal Roots and Rude Insults” (Wimmer, 1961, p. 261).

There was a man well-known in the town; tall, stooped, gaunt of face, humbly dressed in a black jacket, trousers of cotton duck, and a high silk hat, mounted on an old hack, who would go about the streets of Lisbon practicing “*clínica*” or visiting his devotees whose state of health did not permit them to consult him at the house where he resided. This was a palace in ruins at the foot of Rua de São Francisco de Paulo, where over the gate was ostentatiously displayed the device of a *curandeiro*, which read: *Soli Deo, honor et gloria*.

In this house you would find crowded together a bunch of *pretas* of all ages, mixed up with a great number of animals, of which the most prominent were parrots and monkeys. All of these constituted the sonorous elements of a macabre symphony, which accompanied the consultations of “the Baron.”

The common people put great faith in him, and not only the darker part of the population; he was considered very able in healing various ailments (he was often called on for child-birthing), but also the better part of the city called upon his services not a few times. Further, he was certain to have crews of the English ships that visited our port; seamen and officers of the highest rank constituted the largest part of his clientele [for treatment of venereal disease].

It was said that he disembarked in Lisbon, coming from Brazil, but his origins, just like his [true] name, were unknown (Silva Carvalho, 1917, p. 52).

The arts of popular healing were abhorrent both to the Inquisitors and university-trained *médicos*, but for different reasons. Both groups within the Holy Office — licensed physicians or surgeons working as *familiares* and *Inquisidores* occupying the upper echelon of power — sought a policy of repression against illicit folk healers during the first half of the eighteenth century. Superstitious practices and heresies committed by illicit healers were anathema to Inquisitors because such behavior clashed with the Church orthodoxy they had pledged themselves to uphold. On those grounds alone, Portuguese Inquisition authorities felt justified in persecuting folk healers.

Licensed physicians and surgeons, meanwhile, who worked within the institution of the Holy Office, harbored an additional double-edged grievance against the purveyors of folk remedies. *Curandeiros* and *saludadores* represented an obstacle to the conventional health practitioners’ trade, insofar as most commoners preferred to patronize popular instead of state-sanctioned healers. Beyond that, though, for those conventional *médicos* whose professional outlook included innovative, rationalized medicine as it was beginning to be practiced in northern Europe — and my research suggests that there were many *familiares* who matched this description within the Holy Office — an additional benefit to persecuting folk healers was that the discrediting of popular healing methods thus opened the door to the practice of enlightened, scientific medicine at all levels of Portuguese society. To these forward-looking conventional *médicos*, convincing the general populace of the futility of superstitious healing was just one facet in a comprehensive program of long-term medical reform in Portugal.

Each of these groups within the Inquisition’s corporation — ecclesiastical administrators and the professional medical practitioners who served as functionaries under them — had a clear set of motives

for their antagonism toward *curandeiros* and *saludadores*. Together, *médicos* and *Inquisidores* acted cooperatively, fashioning a policy of widespread, systematic repression against illicit folk healers in Enlightenment-era Portugal.

## FOOTNOTES

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<sup>2</sup> Inquisition Tribunal of Evora, *Processo* nº 6206.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> For examples, see the following trials: Inquisition Tribunal of Coimbra, *Processos* nºs 6217, 6306, 7186, 7229, 7346, 7809, 8093, 8574 and 8899; Inquisition Tribunal of Evora, *Processos* nºs 516 and 372. See also the discussion concerning magical Portuguese healers in Paiva (1997, pp. 96-112).

<sup>7</sup> For examples, see the following trials: Inquisition Tribunal of Coimbra, *Processos* nºs 6196, 6223, 6306, 7186, 7229, 7809, 8093, and 8574; Inquisition Tribunal of Evora, *Processos* nºs 5111, 5921 and 6231.

<sup>8</sup> For examples, see the following trials: Inquisition Tribunal of Coimbra, *Processos* nºs 6217, 6306, 7186, 7229, 7346, 7809, 8093, 8574 and 8899; Inquisition Tribunal of Evora, *Processos* nºs 516 and 372.

<sup>9</sup> Inquisition Tribunal of Coimbra, *Processo* nº 7346; *Forão visto*, pages un-numbered.

<sup>10</sup> Inquisition Tribunal of Coimbra, *Processo* nº 33, testimony of dr. João Baptista da Fonseca.

<sup>11</sup> Inquisition Tribunal of Evora, *Processo* nº 372.

<sup>12</sup> “Dos Saludadores,” *Santo Ofício* Volume XXVIII, Conselho Geral, Book 269, Lisbon, p. 15 (*recto* and *verso*), 1719.

<sup>13</sup> Inquisition Tribunal of Evora, *Processo* no. 516, p. 166.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> See Bethencourt, 1987, pp. 55-9. Also, note the usage of the term *saludador* in “Dos Saludadores,” *Santo Ofício* Volume XXVIII, Conselho Geral, Book 269, pp. 15-25, Lisbon, 1719.

<sup>16</sup> Such was the case with popular healer Francisco Martins (Inquisition Tribunal of Coimbra, *Processo* no. 33). According to the licensed physician who testified against him, this *saludador* claimed to cure by divine virtue, and “would accept no payment except what clients wanted to give.”

<sup>17</sup> Inquisition of Evora, *Processo* nº 5433.

<sup>18</sup> Inquisition of Evora, *Processo* nº 4569.

<sup>19</sup> Inquisition of Evora, *Processo* nº 6731.

<sup>20</sup> *Atlas de Portugal* (Lisbon: Selecções do Reader’s Digest, 1988), with letters from the Instituto Geográfico e Cadastral, p. 17..

<sup>21</sup> Inquisition of Evora, *Processos* nºs 7587 and 7336, respectively.

<sup>22</sup> On this score, dr. Paiva (1997, p. 162) reports a larger ratio of men to women: forty-two percent and fifty-eight percent, respectively.

<sup>23</sup> See the tables at the end of Chapter VIII of my dissertation, which provide data about the gender of accused folk healers.

<sup>24</sup> Inquisition Tribunal of Evora, *Processo* nº 4333.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Certain cases include the Inquisition of Coimbra, *Processos* nos. 2362, 7199 and 7807; Inquisition of Evora, *Processos* nºs 372, 4333, 5940, 6390 and 7759; Inquisition of Lisbon, *Processos* nos. 252, 437, 2355 and 4260.

<sup>30</sup> Inquisition of Coimbra, *Processo* nº 7199.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., cited in Paiva, 1992, p. 106.

<sup>32</sup> Inquisition of Coimbra, *Processo* nº 7807.

<sup>33</sup> Inquisition of Coimbra, *Processo* nº 2362.

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