

SPECIAL ISSUE: SLAVERY, EVERYDAY LIFE,
AND DYNAMICS OF MISCEGENATION IN
THE IBERIAN WORLD (16TH-18TH CENTURIES):
SPACES, MOBILITY, AGREEMENTS AND CONFLICTS

The Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary and Saint Benedict of the Black Men and the Holy House of Mercy in the disputes over the privilege of using skiffs in colonial Rio de Janeiro (17th and 18th centuries)

A Irmandade de Nossa Senhora do Rosário e São
Benedito dos Homens Pretos e a Santa Casa da
Misericórdia nas disputas pelo privilégio do uso de
esquifes no Rio de Janeiro colonial (séculos XVII e XVIII)

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Varia Historia, Belo Horizonte, v. 41, e25031, 2025
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/0104-87752025v41e25031>



ABSTRACT This article analyzes the conflicts and disputes over the privilege of using a skiff between the brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary and Saint Benedict the Moor and *Santa Casa da Misericórdia* [the Holy House of Mercy] in Rio de Janeiro. It aims to demonstrate that the wooden object used to carry the bodies of the deceased from the house to the grave was a significant element of the pompous funerals in the funeral processions that traveled through the streets of the city. Based on documentation from the Overseas Council, commitments from both brotherhoods and parish registers of deaths and wills, it analyses how the privilege of using tombs and skiffs held by the *Misericórdia* do Rio from the beginning of the 17th century was an element of discord between the two associations until the middle of the 18th century, in a process of legal disputes that crossed both sides of the Portuguese Atlantic to safeguard privileges, precedence and hierarchies in that society.

KEYWORDS skiffs and tombs, privileges and hierarchies, funerary pomp

RESUMO Este artigo analisa os conflitos e as disputas pelo privilégio do uso de esquife entre a irmandade de Nossa Senhora do Rosário e São Benedito dos Homens Pretos e a Santa Casa da Misericórdia do Rio de Janeiro. Pretende demonstrar que o objeto de madeira utilizado para carregar os cadáveres dos falecidos da casa à sepultura era significativo elemento dos funerais com pompa, nos cortejos fúnebres que atravessaram as ruas da cidade. Com base na documentação do Conselho Ultramarino, de compromissos de ambas as irmandades e de registros paroquiais de óbitos e testamentos, analisa de que modo o privilégio do uso de tumbas e esquifes que a Misericórdia do Rio possuía desde início do século XVII foi o elemento de discórdia entre as duas associações até a metade do século XVIII, num processo de disputas jurídicas que atravessou os dois lados do Atlântico português, a fim de se resguardar privilégios, precedências e hierarquias naquela sociedade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE esquifes e tumbas, privilégios e hierarquias, pompa fúnebre

SKIFF, PROCESSION, AND FUNERAL POMP IN THE CATHOLIC “GOOD DEATH”

In the city of Rio de Janeiro during the 17th and 18th centuries, attitudes towards death were significantly influenced by the dominance of Catholic rituals. These rituals were officially recognized due to Catholicism being the official religion of the Portuguese monarchy. Extensive research has demonstrated the prevalence of such rituals within the slave society of the time, characterized by a series of ceremonies that ideally began before death. These ceremonies included writing a will to profess the Catholic faith, seeking the last sacraments (penance, Eucharist, and extreme unction), using religious shrouds to wrap the deceased, conducting a wake and/or funeral service attended by brotherhoods and priests—particularly the parish priest, a funeral procession from the home to the sacred burial site within a city church, and holding masses and suffrages posthumously for the soul of the deceased. These elements combined to define the Catholic ‘good death,’ characterized by the preparation of rituals aimed at maximizing intercession and salvation for the soul of the deceased, whose body would remain in a sacred place until resurrection at the Second Coming of Christ for the Last Judgment (Campos, 2004, 2013; Reis, 1991; Rodrigues, 2005, 2008, 2022a; among many others). The specific rituals performed could vary based on the death circumstances (e.g., sudden death preventing will-writing and sacrament reception) and the deceased’s social connections and family wealth.

One aspect of Catholic funerals was the procession, utilizing a coffin and/or tomb carried by members of religious brotherhoods. The use of such a conveyance, monopolized by the *Santa Casa da Misericórdia* [the Holy House of Mercy] since the late 16th century in the Portuguese kingdom and later across its Empire, including Rio de Janeiro, indicated a distinguished funeral marked by ceremonial pomp. Beyond its religious connotation, mimicking the procession of the deceased Christ to the grave, its ownership highlighted less spiritual concerns, such as disputes over monopoly, power, precedence, and privilege within

a society bearing traces of the Ancien Régime, also impacting the religious brotherhoods of blacks.

In this context, the purpose of this article is to analyze the process of disputes between the The Holy House of Mercy and the brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary and Saint Benedict in the city of Rio de Janeiro between the 17th and 18th centuries and how the members of this religious association sought to navigate through the bureaucratic web of the Portuguese Empire, making use of political communication, in defense of their so-called immemorial right and possession of the bier to carry their deceased brethren to burial. The significance and role of the bier in the Catholic funeral can be highlighted in the wills of former slaves affiliated with the brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary, through which they planned their ‘good death,’ in some cases, surrounded by funerary pomp, as can be identified in several cases discussed herein.

The black freedman José Dias was another freedman of African origin who lived in the central area of Rio de Janeiro. Of Mina origin, he had been baptized in the parish of Sé. He was married to Mariana da Conceição and had no children, making her his universal heir. He owned a fish stall on the city’s riverside and three slaves—two Africans of Ganguela origin, Antônio and Maria, and one other, Helena—his wife’s gold and some personal belongings. In his network of relationships, he was a creditor of the also freed Miguel, to whom he had lent 25\$600 to buy his freedom, and of Domingos da Costa Forte, to whom he had lent the same amount. José Dias also lent money to blacks and was a creditor of the carpenter Manoel Ferreira, a white man, to whom he had lent 12\$800.¹

At the beginning of 1740, he fell ill and, despite investing in treatment, died on February 26, having ordered his executor to sell his slave Helena to cover the costs of his illness and burial. To ensure assistance at the time of his death, he had joined the brotherhoods of Santo Antônio

1 ARQUIVO DA CÚRIA METROPOLITANA DO RIO DE JANEIRO (ACMRJ). Livro de Óbitos e Testamentos da freguesia da Sé: AP0406 (1737-1740). Testamento de José Dias, p. 221v.

da Mouraria and Our Lady of the Rosary in the city, from which he hoped to receive the usual suffrages and a grave in the latter's church. Aiming to guarantee the salvation of his soul after death, he specified the suffrages and pious legacies he believed would help shorten his soul's passage through Purgatory. These included 100 masses for his soul, 50 in the church of Rosário and the other 50 in the church of São José; alms for the poor on the day of his burial; and a donation of 4\$800 réis in alms to each of his brotherhoods. Intending to depart with dignity and secure the intercession of his confreres, friends, and relatives in his final journey through the city streets, he requested his remains be transported to the grave in the skiff of the Rosário brotherhood.²

Six years later, the same brotherhood's skiff would carry the remains of another freed person, Francisca Vieira, through those streets on December 22, 1746, to the Cathedral church in the newly-built church of Our Lady of the Rosary. Vieira, a black freed woman from Minas Gerais who had been a slave of Pedro Vieira Tomás, had paid two hundred thousand réis for her freedom. Without ties to her parents since she had been uprooted from the Costa da Mina and unmarried, with no children, she declared her soul the universal heir to all her possessions. These included three slaves—Luzia, Sebastião, and Josefa Vieira—and various gold pieces, such as necklaces, memorabilia, earrings, crosses, and buttons for shirts, vests, and skirts, valued at around one hundred thousand réis. She had no debts and no one owed her. After her inventory was completed, she decreed the remainder of all her assets should be used for masses for her soul and for the souls in Purgatory, to be said both in the parish church of Sé and in the church of her brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary, which, at the time her will was written by Francisco da Rocha Monteiro on July 27, 1736, were still located in two different temples.³

2 Idem.

3 ACMRJ. Livro de Óbitos e Testamentos da freguesia da Sé: AP0155 (1746-1758). Testamento de Francisca Vieira, p. 28.

It may be that Francisca Vieira fell ill when she had her will drawn up and that, unlike José Dias, she managed to recover.⁴ The time may have passed and, on the eve of Christmas in 1746, she died suddenly, without time to receive the last sacraments. The period between the drafting of the will and her death might explain the information provided in the death register by the curate of the Cathedral, Antônio Pereira Nunes, indicating that she was married to the free black man Antônio Lopes dos Anjos, whose name had not been mentioned at any point in the will made ten years earlier. We have no way of knowing if all the details about the funeral she had organized in her “last wishes” were fulfilled, such as the commissioning by the parish priest with the presence of twenty priests, the masses stipulated for the days of death and burial, the distribution of three thousand two hundred réis to the poor on the day of burial, and the request that her body be taken to the grave in the skiff of the Rosário brotherhood. Her death record only states that she was buried in the cathedral church, which, at the time of her death, was housed in the temple of the Brotherhood of the Rosary. Nothing more is mentioned about the funeral; it does not mention whether she received the last sacraments, in which shroud her corpse was wrapped, whether and how the commissioning occurred, and the number of priests present.⁵

The black freedwoman, Ângela Correia, who had been a slave of Dona Guiomar de Marins, also recorded her funeral wishes in the will that was written at her request by Francisco da Rocha Monteiro,⁶ on January 21, 1747, about four months before her death. She was single, childless, and therefore had no compulsory heir, which is why she also established her soul as her universal heir.

4 This data points to an unusual practice, which was the writing of a will ten years before death (Rodrigues, 2005, p. 123-128).

5 ACMRJ. Livro de Óbitos e Testamentos da freguesia da Sé: AP0155 (1746-1758). Testamento de Francisca Vieira, p. 28.

6 It seems that he was a specialist in writing the wills of some of the black *forro* brothers who were members of the Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary, although the reasons for choosing who would write a will is a question that still deserves further investigation.

As with Francisca Vieira's will, the curate of the cathedral, Antônio Pereira Nunes, provided no further details about Ângela Vieira's funeral, which took place on May 31. The last wills of this testator reveal her wish to be shrouded in the habit of Saint Anthony and buried in the church of Our Lady of the Rosary of the Blacks, where she was a sister, to whom she also requested to give her a grave and to accompany her body in a funeral procession to the grave, together with her reverend parish priest and five other priests. She requested masses in suffrage for her soul both on the day of burial and after her death. The costs of the funeral were to be covered by her possessions, namely: pairs of "gold buttons, granite buttons, shirt buttons," two pairs of small buttons, "two strands of gold neck beads, two pairs of chorizo earrings, some larger and others smaller, a gold Lady of the Conception," a length and a half of gold cord, as well as two slaves — Maria and Felipa, both from Angola — some furniture, and household items.⁷

Unlike the scant information provided by curate Antônio Pereira Nunes in the death records of the freedwomen mentioned above, the death and funeral of the black freedwoman from Minas Gerais, Cristina de Almeida, was recorded in detail by the other curate of the Cathedral, Manoel Francisco da Costa, in the parish book. The widow of Domingos Fernandes, she only received the sacrament of extreme unction because she died "almost suddenly" on July 5, 1751, leaving as her heir her mulatto son, João Garcia do Lago, who was in the city of Goa, on the coast of India, and of whom she had recently heard. She was shrouded in the habit of St. Francis and commissioned by none other than the curate of the Cathedral, the Reverend Doctor João Bento Barros Casada, along with twenty-two priests,⁸ by whom she was accompanied from her home to the church of Our Lady of the Rosary, where she was buried, having been accompanied by the Rosary brothers in the skiff in which the brotherhood used to carry its members. Cristina's case differed from the

7 ACMRJ. Livro de Óbitos e Testamentos da freguesia da Sé: AP0155 (1746-1758). Testamento de Angela Correia, p. 44.

8 Although he requested the assistance of thirty priests in his will.

others mentioned above because of the amount of property she claimed to own: four houses on Rua do Cano, three slaves — the boys Pedro and Sebastião and Esperança, from the Gentio da Guiné — six sticks of gold cord, four of which were thicker and two thinner; two pairs of aljofres earrings, four pairs of buttons, 10 vest buttons, all made of gold, an image of Our Lady of the Conception, a string of beads, some necklaces “set in gold.” She left 115\$200 réis to Gonçalo Gonçalves Chaves, who had lent her money, bricks, and lime to build her houses. She also owed the master carpenter, Bento Gonçalves, the remaining 4\$000 from the work he had done for her, as well as lime and bricks. She owed Tomás de Abreu 12\$800, five patacas to Luiz Ramos, 9\$600 to Lopes Carneiro, and 1\$750 to the locksmith Domingos, who lived on Rua do Rosário opposite the Hospício church, for the remainder of a hardware debt she had ordered from him. Her will, written by Antônio Teixeira da Mota, contains a request for various suffrages and pious legacies, evidence of her different social position in the Sé parish compared to the other black testators mentioned above. Such was her social standing that the former slave, who paid two hundred thousand réis for her freedom, was accompanied at the time of her death by at least twenty-three priests, including the canon curate of the Sé parish.⁹

Four months after carrying the body of Cristina de Almeida, the skiff of the Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary once again traversed the streets of the city, conveying the deceased body of another member to their final resting place on November 27, 1751. This individual was the *parda forra*, Tereza de Jesus Maria, who had entered into a marriage by a ‘carta de ametade’ with Antônio Neto Reis, also a pardo forro. The couple had no offspring and later divorced. According to her will, he had never legally been her husband, had destroyed their communal property, and had attempted to take her life. Born in the parish of Our Lady of Candelaria, she was the daughter of Isabel, a black woman who had passed away by the time Tereza commissioned Francisco da Rocha

9 ACMRJ. Livro de Óbitos e Testamentos da freguesia da Sé: AP0155 (1746-1758). Testamento de Cristina de Almeida, p. 207v.

Monteiro to write and sign her will on her behalf. Through these 'last will and testament' documents, she aimed to reconcile with God and clear her conscience. She was clothed in the habit of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and the curate of the Cathedral, along with members of her brotherhood, accompanied her to her final resting place in the Church of the Rosary. As she had no direct heirs, she designated her soul as the universal heir to her estate, which comprised two slaves — Domingas, of Angolan descent, and Eugênia, a Creole girl — along with various gold items: three 'sage foot' buttons, a memento, two Ladies of the Conception, one and a half lengths of gold cord, three pairs of shirt buttons, one skirt button, eight garnet vest buttons, a string of beads on a red thread, and a pair of diamond pendant earrings.¹⁰

On July 1, 1752, the body of Maria Josefa, a black slave from Portugal and daughter of an unknown father and Joana de Sá, was interred in her brotherhood's church, the Rosário 'in her coffin.' Married in Rio de Janeiro to Antônio da Silva, a black slave, they remained childless. Maria Josefa was vested in the Franciscan habit of St. Anthony and escorted to her grave by the reverend parish priest and five other priests, as stipulated in her will, also penned by Francisco da Rocha Monteiro. Her possessions included a small house located opposite the sacristy of São Pedro's church, a black woman named Antônia, and two goats, José and Joaquim. Her husband owed 358\$400 réis plus interest, and thus, she bequeathed nothing further, except, if feasible, for her husband to manumit the three slaves at his discretion.¹¹

On December 11, 1756, Bernarda do Espírito Santo passed away. She was an slave Black woman married to João da Glória, who had previously left her a last will and testament. When she was unmarried, she bore two sons, Joaquim Crioulo and Apolinário Mulatinho, whom she appointed as her heirs. She requested to be buried in the skiff of her

10 ACMRJ. Livro de Óbitos e Testamentos da freguesia da Sé: AP0155 (1746-1758). Testamento de Tereza de Jesus Maria, p. 213v.

11 ACMRJ. Livro de Óbitos e Testamentos da freguesia da Sé: AP0155 (1746-1758). Testamento de Maria Josefa, p. 226.

rosary brotherhood. She desired to be dressed in the Franciscan habit of São Francisco and for her revered parish priest, along with six other priests, to escort her remains. Additionally, she sought twelve masses for her soul in the will that she commissioned Manoel Fernandes da Silva to draft on her behalf, given her inability to read or write. She possessed three slaves : Rita, of the Angolan nation, and Emerenciana and Narcisa, of the Mina nation, as well as hous. Moreover, her assets includedehold items, an image of Our Lady of the Conception in large gold, with adorned a loop of gold cord gold and earrings with diamonds Joan. Her husband had a debt of 358\$400 réis and its interest, and so she did not ask for or donate anything else. If it were possible, her husband should free the three slaves, at his discretion.¹²

Josefa de Jesus Maria was the legitimate daughter of Luis Pereira Tavares and Tomásia da Luz, both of whom were already deceased. She had been baptized in the parish of Sé and died on February 12, 1757. She stated that she was single, had always lived honestly, and had no heirs; therefore, she declared her soul as her heir. We have not yet been able to ascertain whether she was of brown, black, or white ethnicity. Owing to her illness, albeit ambulatory, she had made her will about four months earlier, in October 1756. In it, she informed the Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary that she had paid ten years' worth of annual fees in arrears, with only two more years remaining. She requested these be paid posthumously so that she might secure the right to a grave in the Brotherhood's church and for the latter to retrieve her body in the skiff, accompanied by the Brotherhood's chaplain, twelve clergymen, and her parish priest. She wished to be dressed in the habit of Saint Francis and for twenty-five masses to be celebrated on the day of her death, to be distributed among her parish church, the church of the convent of Saint Anthony, the church of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, the church of Saint Joseph, and the church of Our Lady of the Good Death. She requested a chapel of masses (50 masses) for the souls of her parents, sisters, and

12 ACMRJ. Livro de Óbitos e Testamentos da freguesia da Sé: AP0155 (1746-1758). Testamento de Maria Josefa, p. 226.

nephews and another chapel of masses for the souls. She bequeathed a fifteen-year-old slave girl named Efigênia to settle any debts she might have, donated a slave to the convent of Santo Antônio, and in exchange, asked for a habit 'for the love of God,' citing her impoverished state at the end of her life. She did not mention that anyone else had written her will, implying that she had authored it herself.¹³

Despite the specificities of the life stories mentioned above, it is possible to identify some common elements in determining how the individuals wished their funerals to be conducted in pursuit of a good Catholic death (Reis, 1991; Rodrigues, 1997, 2008). They were members of the Brotherhood of the Rosary in Rio de Janeiro and requested that their bodies be carried by their brethren and taken to their graves on the brotherhood's skiff. Deceased between 1739 and 1757, the testators mentioned here did not make it explicitly clear at any point in their last wills that, despite their requests, those were years marked by tension. During that period, the brotherhood faced intense disputes with the powerful The Holy House of Mercy do Rio de Janeiro in defense of its right to use the skiff.

A skiff was a wooden support with hollowed-out sides and poles for carrying, in which the dead body was placed, enveloped in a shroud or funeral garment, to be transported from the house to the church for burial. This object enabled the conduct of a Catholic funeral procession, wherein those present at the wake followed the coffin on foot through the city streets to the burial site, so that the deceased could 'sleep in Christ' until the resurrection at the Last Judgment, just as Jesus had after His crucifixion (Rodrigues, 2022, pp. 216-217). This request is evident in the passages of the wills cited here, where the transportation of the coffin by the Brotherhood of the Rosary, accompanied by the parish priest and other clergy, is specified. The obligations of the brotherhoods required members to attend the procession 'dressed in robes, holding candles, torches, and the various emblems of the brotherhood,' in a ritual

13 ACMRJ. Livro de Óbitos e Testamentos da freguesia da Sé: AP0155 (1746-1758). Testamento de Josefa de Jesus Maria, p. 362v.

of solidarity with the deceased that ‘was associated with the notion that a good death would never be a solitary death, lacking ceremony’ (Reis, 1991, p. 144). Chapter 17 of the 1686 commitment of the Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary and Saint Benedict the Moor in Bahia guaranteed the use of the skiff for the burial of brethren, and Chapter 20 commanded that, should a brother or sister die, the brotherhood would organize their funeral, attended by all brethren with lit torches until the burial.¹⁴

The Commitment of the Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary and Benedict the Moor of Rio de Janeiro from 1759 addresses the subject of the skiff in its Chapter 20 but does not describe the ritual to be conducted, though it likely was not dissimilar from that of its Bahian counterpart, as evidenced in the wills mentioned.¹⁵

In addition to the presence of family members, relatives, and members of their brotherhood(s) with their clothes, torches, and candles, the funeral procession with the dead body in a coffin carried on the shoulders of the confreres with their robes was an excellent opportunity to “show off.” This aspect was not restricted to the religious associations of whites and freedmen since, from the outset, the black brotherhoods strove to bring their funerals into line with those of the white brotherhoods (Russell-Wood, 1981, p. 157; Reis, 1991, p. 145). As João José Reis states, “Funeral pomp was part of the ceremonial tradition of the brotherhoods, forming, alongside the saint’s feasts, an important source of their prestige” (Reis, 1991, p. 144).

In this respect, the funeral pomp of the black brotherhoods may be compared to the expenses they incurred on their festivals and the maintenance of their temples, providing prestige for the members of the

14 Many thanks to João José Reis and Lucilene Reginaldo for kindly sending us a PDF copy of this and the transcript of the 1686 compromise.

15 ARQUIVO HISTÓRICO ULTRAMARINO - CONSELHO ULTRAMARINO (Doravante AHU-CU): Códice 1950. Compromisso da Irmandade de Nossa Senhora do Rosário e São Benedito dos Homens Pretos colocada nessa sua mesma Igreja nesta Cidade de São Sebastião do Rio de Janeiro; novamente reformado, assim do antigo como dos Acórdãos das Mesas, e juntas neste ano de 1759 para o de 1760. Available from: <https://digitarq.ahu.arquivos.pt/viewer?id=1157523>. Accessed on: 10 Dec. 2023.

board, projecting their association among the community, and making it possible to attract new members (Aguiar, 2001, p. 365; Reginaldo, 2011, p. 198). The importance of this significant mode of transportation in the funeral processions is evidenced by the fact that, since the end of the 17th century, the blacks of the Rosário and the so-called “good men” of *Misericórdia* engaged in an intricate administrative and legal dispute over the ownership of skiffs in the funeral processions that traversed the streets of the city of Rio de Janeiro. Between 1744 and 1745, the brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary and Saint Benedict the Moor in the city of Rio de Janeiro requested assistance from the Portuguese Crown in resolving the issue.

Through two petitions sent to His Royal Majesty, the brothers sought authorization to maintain “their immemorial possession and use in which they have always been” to transport their “black brothers” to the grave in their coffin, claiming that they were in possession of it when the Holy House of Mercy prevented them from using it.¹⁶ The background to this dispute was the privilege held by the Holy House of Mercy of Rio de Janeiro of exclusive possession, use, and/or rental of tombs and skiffs in the city, since the beginning of the 17th century, not only for its members but also for those of the other brotherhoods, as we will now analyze.

THE HOLY HOUSE OF MERCY AND THE ORIGIN OF TOMB PRIVILEGES

The Holy House of Mercy in Rio de Janeiro, like its counterparts in other cities, had a monopoly on burial services in Portuguese America. This monopoly derived from the clauses in the 1516 statutes of the *Misericórdia* in Lisbon, which entrusted it with the care of charity burials. Not all religious associations were willing to deal with the burial of the

16 AHU-CU-017-01. cx. 58, doc. 13.578 e 13.579: Requerimentos (2) do juiz e irmãos da irmandade de N. Sra. do Rosário dos Homens Pretos do Rio de Janeiro, no qual pedem para conservarem o antigo e imemorial uso de conduzirem no seu esquife os irmãos que faleciam

poorest, in addition to the funerals of their members and their families (Russell-Wood, 1981, pp. 153-184; Sá, 1997, p. 109). Since its foundation by the Portuguese Crown in 1498, the brotherhood of the Holy House of Mercy has aimed to provide spiritual and material aid to the needy, linking itself to charitable works.

Under royal patronage and because it comprised members of the nobility, it received a series of privileges, such as a monopoly on collecting alms and charity in prisons. In return, its organization revolved around 14 charitable works, divided into seven spiritual ones (teaching the ignorant, giving good advice, punishing transgressors with understanding, consoling the unfortunate, forgiving injuries received, bearing the shortcomings of others, and praying to God for the living and the dead) and seven corporal ones (ransoming captives and visiting prisoners, treating the sick, clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, sheltering travelers and the poor, and burying the dead). The brothers were to dedicate themselves to these works (Abreu, 2014; Araújo, 1999; Lopes, 2000; Russell-Wood, 1981; Sá, 1997). As Luciana Gandelman (2001, pp. 613-630) states, *Misericórdia* was a House in which charitable actions were articulated, guided by Christian precepts and the relations of the Ancien Régime. The notion of charity behind its actions presupposed the idea of inequality, and the resulting assistance was not understood as a right inherent to the individual. Being the target of charity depended on the establishment of personal relationships and recommendations (Sá, 1997, p. 110), meaning the establishment of asymmetrical and hierarchical ties (Abreu, 2014, pp. 22-37; Franco; Patuzzi, 2019, p. 9), which could even occur between members of the same group. As a result of these actions, *Misericórdia* obtained a series of privileges, such as those relating to funeral services. An Apostolic Sentence handed down on June 30, 1593, by Cardinal Archduke Albert of Austria, governor of Portugal during the reign of Philip II of Spain, recognized the privilege of only *Misericórdia* de Lisboa to use a tomb for burials carried out in the capital of the Portuguese Empire.¹⁷ According

17 AHU-CU-017-01. cx. 58, doc. 13.578 e 13.579: Requerimentos (2) do juiz e irmãos da

to the ruling, the Holy House, through its main institute, engaged in “all the works of Mercy and Charity, attending to the needs of the poor,” visiting and caring for the sick, marrying orphans, supporting a hospital for the miserable, negotiating the release of poor prisoners, having foster children and orphans raised at its expense, ransoming captives, accompanying those suffering from justice, and burying them and the more deceased, providing shrouds to the poor. To carry out these burials, it had “salaried men” and chaplains, as well as three tombs and a skiff to transport the corpses of the needy from the city of Lisbon. Because these actions were continuous and very necessary in such a large and populous city, it had “a Provider, a person of great quality, and six hundred noble and mechanical brothers who were involved in their general exercise.” According to the document, these practices did not exist and could not exist in any other confraternity, as they were instituted “for private things” and were only concerned with them.¹⁸

By reiterating the discourse of greater dedication to collective charity over individual interests, it became necessary for *Misericórdia* to be rewarded in the form of privileges. Therefore, in compliance with the Apostolic Authority conferred by His Holiness, the Archduke Governor of Portugal ordered the judges, stewards, and other officials, as well as the brothers and sisters of the other brotherhoods in the city, not to interfere or engage in ‘any of the aforementioned works of charity that the Brotherhood of Mercy exercises with the living, as with the dead, and with the sick and healthy.’ This command implied that they were not to have or use a tomb or coffin and should only accompany their dead with a raised cross. They could not carry ‘candles or any insignia similar to those of the brothers of Mercy, because they could never use them.’ They had to refrain from any activity that could harm *Misericórdia* and cause scandal, hatred, and dissension in that city, under penalty of excommunication, the absolution from which would cost one thousand

irmandade de N. Sra. do Rosário dos Homens Pretos do Rio de Janeiro, no qual pedem para conservarem o antigo e imemorial uso de conduzirem no seu esquife os irmãos que faleciam.

18 Idem.

cruzados for the Apostolic Chamber. Failure to comply would incur censures and penalties. Only the confraternities of Our Lady of Loreto of the Italians and St. Bartholomew of St. Guide of the Germans could retain the use of their tombs since Apostolic Bulls had erected them, but they were only to be used for 'their nation.'¹⁹ Almost a century later, *Misericórdia* of Lisbon renewed its statutes, and Chapter 35 of the 1618 commitment became more precise about the privileges of the funeral service, specifying the existence of a 'tomb service' of three classes: 'the first for the poor; the second for the highest persons; and the third for their brothers.' For the latter, the brotherhood was to accompany the tomb from the house to the burial site, with chaplains, senior brothers, and the provider himself, a distinction that was also extended to the brother's wife or widow and minor children.

The three tombs had to be covered with a large black velvet cloth. There was also a skiff for slaves, whose transportation was accompanied by a 'poor priest,' to whom the masters would give 20 réis and *Misericórdia* 200 réis. However, if the masters claimed poverty, they would pay nothing for the burial (Ferreira, 1894-1899, pp. 54-55). As part of the hierarchies typical of Ancien Régime societies, there was a differentiation of name and, obviously, status between 'tomb' and 'coffin.' The latter was intended for captives, and the former for the rest of society. This differentiation appears, for example, in the definitions given to the terms 'tomb' and 'coffin' by the dictionary writer Raphael Bluteau in the 18th century. The former is understood as a coffin, that is, an uncovered box or one with arches on top covered with a black cloth into which the body of the deceased is placed in order to put it in the grave, which the brothers of *Misericórdia* carry on their backs when they go to fetch or bury the dead (Bluteau, 1721, p. 324). The second is associated with the burial of 'poor people' (Bluteau, 1713, p. 295). Renato Franco and Silvia Patuzzi stated that the charity given to slaves was lower than that given to the poor, and the latter was not to be confused with the former (Franco; Patuzzi, 2019, pp. 9-13, 22). It is no coincidence that the tomb was complemented by a

¹⁹ Idem.

black cloth which was used to cover the body since at that time corpses were taken to the grave without a coffin, only wrapped in shrouds. In the case of the skiff, there is no mention of a cover.

Misericórdias replicated these privileges in the domains of the Portuguese Empire, such as those of Rio de Janeiro and Espírito Santo in 1605, Bahia in 1622, Olinda in 1672, and Paraíba do Norte in 1676. Created between 1550 and 1582, the *Misericórdia* of Rio de Janeiro was the second most important in America, after the *Misericórdia* of Bahia, as it was an institutionally complex entity, offering systematic charity services, as Renato Franco elucidates. It comprised the so-called principals of the land, as well as governors residing in the city, and played a leading role in assisting the impoverished of the city and its environs for almost three centuries (Franco, 2011, pp. 79-80, 123-124, 166-167). Its monopoly allowed the income generated from renting out tombs and skiffs, among other sources, to form one of the pillars of the institution's revenue (Franco, 2011, pp. 142, 160).

At the beginning of the 17th century, the *Misericórdia* do Rio requested and obtained the privilege of using and renting out tombs and skiffs to transport corpses around the city. The concession was granted by a charter issued on October 8, 1605, by King Felipe II, and was recorded in the book of privileges of the Holy House in order to mark for posterity that important distinction in relation to the other brotherhoods of Rio de Janeiro.²⁰

The justification for extending the privilege was similar to that originally obtained by the *Misericórdia* in Lisbon: the consideration for the exercise of charity. In the case of Rio de Janeiro, it was argued that the Santa Casa and its hospital had been established since the inception of the city's occupation, where the impoverished sick, both indigenous and foreign, were treated, as well as the soldiers, artillerymen, and sailors "of the garrison of the same city and those of the ships of war that go

20 AHU-CU-017-01. cx. 58, doc. 13.585: Alvará régio pelo qual se concederam à irmandade da Santa Casa da Misericórdia do Rio de Janeiro os mesmos privilégios de que gozava a Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa. Lisboa, 8 de outubro de 1605, anexa ao n. 13.578, imagens 13 e 14.

to fight the fleets, carrying on them the collection of the alms and goods left to the said Casa.” The Holy House expended the alms it received on the impoverished in its hospital, on needy prisoners, on the upbringing of some of those who were rejected, on the marriages of orphans, and on other works of mercy for which it utilized its funds.²¹

Russell-Wood’s data on the equal privilege obtained by the Holy House of Mercy da Bahia in 1627 aids in understanding the operation of funeral services. The institution possessed three “*essas cobertas*” [these covers] or tombs. The finest tomb was reserved for the brothers’ funerals, adorned with a shroud made of black velvet decorated with gold brocade and floral patterns. The remaining two tombs were leased to other brotherhoods or individuals, based on the financial means of the deceased and their relatives: one for 8\$480 réis and the other for 4\$480 réis. The latter also served for charity burials for the impoverished. Similar to Lisbon, there were the so-called *esquifes* [skiffs]; the *Misericórdia* in Bahia had three for lease: one for transporting slaves, costing 800 réis for the masters (reduced to 400 réis temporarily) and the other two for children or “little angels,” with the rental price ranging between 3\$200 and 2\$560. If the masters of the deceased captives or the parents of the dead children were notably impoverished, *Misericórdia* would bury them free of charge (Russell-Wood, 1981, p. 175). The *Misericórdia* in Bahia’s monopoly on the service of transporting corpses eventually led to conflicts with other brotherhoods, third orders, and ecclesiastical authorities. An instance of this was the dispute between the *Misericórdia* da Bahia and the Third Order of San Francisco at the close of the 17th century, culminating in a legal challenge that reached the House of Appeal in Lisbon in 1698. The contention was over the right to use its own tomb without paying the *Misericórdia* with the Santa Casa (Russell-Wood, 1981, p. 153; p. 166-172).

Still in Bahia, part of the disagreements and conflicts that arose were due not only to the privileges held by the Santa Casa but to the fact that it had made concessions to the brotherhoods of black mulattos,

21 Idem.

allowing them to use their own coffins at the funerals of their brothers. According to Russell-Wood, the first to obtain the privilege, in 1649, was the Brotherhood of Our Lady of Amparo, formed by captive and free mulattos, on the condition that the *Misericórdia* would bury all the freed brothers that the use of the tomb did not mean that the brotherhood owned it and that the Santa Casa could withdraw the privilege at any time (Russell-Wood, 1981, p. 173). In 1656, the Brotherhood of Our Lady of Guadalupe, made up of mulatto slaves, obtained the same privilege after claiming it, as did the Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary. The latter, however, had its privilege revoked in 1694 because it included non-brotherhood members, whose records had been falsified by the brotherhood's clerk. After accepting that it did not own the tomb, the association resumed the privilege of using it to take only its dead brothers to their graves. However, conflicts continued in the first half of the 18th century, when the Brotherhood of the Rosary represented itself to the King so that it would have the privilege of its own tomb and that it would be covered. In 1722, *Misericórdia* won another case, safeguarding its privileges; but in 1736, the blacks of the Saint Benedict brotherhood obtained the King's consent to have the privilege of using their tomb, provided that it was exclusively for the burial of their brothers and that they notified *Misericórdia* before the burial. Despite the contrary position of the Holy House during the judicial process, it lost, for the first time, the power to influence the monarchical decision (Russell-Wood, 1981, p. 174).

Despite the defeat, the fact remains that, unlike the refusal to permit white brotherhoods the use of tombs, the *Misericórdia* da Bahia granted this privilege to four black and mulatto brotherhoods. According to Russell-Wood (1981, p. 174), this grant was a method of absolving the moral obligation to bury all slaves in Bahia.²² However, these brotherhoods represented a minority within the group of captives, as membership was a distinction typically reserved for free and white individuals

22 On the intense repercussions of this obligation instituted in 1693 by the government authorities, see: Russell-Wood (1981, p. 176) and Franco; Patuzzi (2019, p. 6-14).

(Campos, 2004, p. 176). This distinction was also significant for slaves and their masters, particularly if the captives held some position within the association (Reis, 1991, p. 151; Reginaldo, 2011, p. 215). Slaves' inclusion in one of the black brotherhoods necessitated a material investment and the accumulation of relational capital by the captives, sometimes in conjunction with their masters. Fragoso (2007, pp. 109-111) notes that the analysis of sponsorship relationships between captives by their masters and relatives highlights the recreation of differences and hierarchies among the slaves. Consequently, the black brotherhoods also served as venues where hierarchies typical of societies influenced by the political culture of the Ancient Régime were replicated (Engemann; Assis; Florentino, 2003, pp. 197-199; Rodrigues; Soares, 2023, p. 371; Soares, 2019, pp. 129-130, 376; Soares, 2000, p. 165). This situation was evident in the Brotherhood of the Rosary of Rio de Janeiro due to the conflicts it experienced in the 17th and 18th centuries over the privilege of using the skiff.

THE ROSARY BROTHERS OF RIO DE JANEIRO AND THEIR “IMMEMORIAL” POSSESSION OF THE SKIFF

Created in 1639, the Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary united with the blacks of the Brotherhood of Saint Benedict in 1668 and shared a side altar with the latter in the parish church of São Sebastião at the top of Morro do Castelo. In 1676, the church was elevated to the status of Cathedral of the newly created Bishopric of Rio de Janeiro, and in 1684, it became the site of the installation of the Cabido, a collegiate body of priests who were responsible for conducting the most solemn liturgical functions of the Cathedral. The Cabido was tasked with ensuring solemn worship in the Cathedral through the daily participation of its members in the recitation of the canonical hours in choir and at masses, especially those presided by the Bishop as well as undertaking the role of assisting in shepherding the bishopric (Araújo, 1820, p. 224; Barbosa, 2020, p. 45; Costa, 1886, pp. 27-31; Leão Filho, 2021, p. 4).

The Cabido represented the highest Catholic ecclesiastical hierarchy in the city of Rio de Janeiro. As life in the Cathedral was consolidated, the canons began to increasingly restrict the religious activities of the Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary, demanding its titles, commitments, and a list of objects of worship on its side altar (the implements). The actions of the black brotherhood had to be reported to the Cabido, only carrying out their activities with its authorization. Perhaps as a result of these pressures, the brotherhood drafted a commitment, approved on March 22, 1669 (Costa, 1886, p. 4), which we have not located²³ and access to would allow us to identify mention of the possession of a skiff. In any case, considering that since 1605, the *Misericórdia* of Rio de Janeiro had a monopoly on the use of tombs, it is believed that from the inception of the Brotherhood of the Rosary in the 1640s until the end of the 16th century, the blacks may have received permission from the *Misericórdia* to use their own skiffs, potentially following a similar path to that which occurred in Bahia.

This hypothesis is based on the fact that in December 1687, the brothers of the Rosário received a notice from the Holy House of Mercy to cease using the skiff with which they used to lead their members to the grave, implying that they likely had authorization to do so, since it is illogical that, after requesting the monarchical authorities for the privilege of using tombs and skiffs, the *Misericórdia* of Rio de Janeiro was oblivious to the blacks of the Rosário using the object to lead their brethren to the grave. Confronted with the prohibition imposed by the *Misericórdia*, Antônio Mendes, judge of Our Lady of the Rosary; Pedro dos Reis, judge of Saint Benedict; together with Agostinho Rodrigues and Thomas de Barros, respectively, treasurer and attorney of the brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary and Saint Benedict, petitioned to maintain the use of the skiff, ready to sign a term of obedience to the conditions established by the Holy House for the maintenance of this

23 The Brotherhood of the Rosary church suffered a terrible fire in 1967, which destroyed not only the wooden objects inside, such as altars and baroque images from the 18th century but also practically all the historical documents inside (Marcier, 1967, p. 11).

use. To finalize the agreement, they attended the Consistory of the Holy House of Mercy on December 14, 1687, and signed a document committing themselves to using the skiff solely for the burial of their black brethren. For the burial of ‘more black people’ or even white individuals, they were required to first assure *Misericórdia* that they would be transporting them, in addition to paying the ordinary alms for the Santa Casa tomb, in the amount of one cruzado (400 réis), for each instance they used the skiff.²⁴

In the transfer of the document signed by the members of the Rosário and Saint Benedict, it was not explained what had prompted the notification from *Misericórdia*. However, it is possible to conjecture that it was due to non-compliance with the conditions under which the Holy House had permitted the black brotherhood to utilize the skiff, if one considers the subsequent dispute that emerged between the two associations in 1698, this time with explicit mention of the non-adherence by the Rosário brotherhood to the conditions stipulated by *Misericórdia* for the continued usage of the skiff. The initiating event took place on July 9, when the judge, clerk, treasurer, and other members of the Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary of the Blacks utilized the skiff to inter Ângela Almeida, a white woman who had abruptly perished ‘from a blow to her head.’ It remains unclear whether she was a member, but they purportedly transported and interred her ‘without any permission from the said Santa Casa’ and without remitting the 400 réis. The case was subsequently referred to the Rio de Janeiro Ombudsman’s Office and six months later, following the conclusion of the proceedings, a verdict was issued on January 13, 1699, sentencing the Brotherhood of the Rosary to relinquish possession of the skiff to the Holy House of Mercy and to bear the costs of the case. The document rendering the verdict does not clarify whether the Holy House of Mercy entered into

24 AHU-CU-017-01, cx. 58, doc. 13.583: Termo que fizeram os irmãos pretos das irmandades de N. Sra. do Rosário e São Benedito sobre poderem usar de esquife para sepultar os seus irmãos. Rio de Janeiro, 14 de dezembro de 1637[sic.], anexo ao n. 13.578, imagens 11 e 13. Até que sinalizemos em contrário, esta e as próximas citações textuais se referem a esse documento.

a new agreement to grant the skiff's use to the members of the Rosário and S. Benedito, nor has any information been uncovered regarding the implications of this legal defeat for the Rosário brothers at the start of the 18th century.²⁵

The last quarter of the 17th century was a period in which the Brotherhood of the Rosary endured opposition from *Misericórdia* and the Cabido in sustaining its daily practices. Tensions with the capitulars intensified when, in addition to the previously mentioned demands, it was decreed that the Brotherhood of the Rosary and Saint Benedict should compensate the Cabido for conducting its sacred rites, including securing burials for the deceased members who were laid to rest in the graves owned by the parish situated within the cathedral. This led the sodality to seek exemption from this fee, receiving a favorable ruling from chanter João Pimenta de Carvalho, on November 12, 1687, who awarded monocratic authorization (without consulting the Cabido's collegial body), exempting the brotherhood from paying the alms of one *pataca*, 320 réis, for each tomb opened in the factory's graves. This measure reportedly displeased the rest of the Cabido, who, as a result, intensified their claims against the Brotherhood of the Rosary due to the economic losses that the exemption would incur for the parish factory (Barbosa, 2020, pp. 35-36; Leão Filho, 2021, p. 4).

The exemption secured by the brotherhood was the catalyst for the escalation of conflicts with the Cabido, culminating in pressure from the Cabido on the bishop to dissolve the brotherhood. In response to these developments, the Rosário members sought an alternative chapel for relocation or to construct their own church, which became feasible from 1700 onwards, through the donation of land by Dona Francisca de Pontes, a devotee of Our Lady of the Rosary, located in Campo de São Domingos, in an area that was still undeveloped in the city (Barbosa, 2020, pp. 35-36; Costa, 1886, pp. 7-8; Leão Filho, 2021, p. 4). The brotherhood petitioned the King for a permit to build its church and was granted authorization by the charter of January 14, 1700, which

25 Idem

also included permission to celebrate the divine offices with priests of its choosing, exempting it from the obligation to notify the Cabido of its activities, from having a chapter chaplain, and from remunerating for the use of the graves in the Cathedral factory at the summit of Castelo hill until its chapel was erected, decisions that rendered the brotherhood autonomous of parish jurisdiction during this period, 'as it is not just that having constructed a church capable of burying the brothers in it and a cemetery where those who are not interred should be subjected to the aforementioned levies.'²⁶

In 1708, the land was consecrated, and the cornerstone was laid to commence the construction, during which the brotherhood succeeded in raising over seven thousand cruzados through donations. This funding was bolstered by financial support from Governor Luiz Vahia Monteiro, who had served as the brotherhood's judge in 1728, and by a donation of a chapel at the rear of the church under construction, owned by João Machado Pereira. According to Joaquim José da Costa, the completion date of the church's nave remains uncertain; however, by 1736, religious ceremonies were already being conducted in the main chapel (Costa, 1886, p. 58).

The inauguration of the church by the African members of the Rosary and Saint Benedict brotherhoods coincided with the mid-18th century expansion of the network of temples constructed by brotherhoods of African descent in the city of Rio de Janeiro. This period overlapped with the mining boom, which was economically beneficial for both free African descendants and freedmen in the parish of Sé (Tostes, 2018, pp. 135-136). An illustration of this phenomenon is the black freedman Manoel do Santos Martins, who was a member of the brotherhoods of Santo Elesbão and Santa Efigênia. In his 1751 will, he disclosed having loaned money to his brotherhood for its temple construction. Remarkably, this brotherhood had acquired the land in

26 ACMRJ. Alvará ao que representou a irmandade de Nossa Senhora do Rosário e São Benedito dos Homens Pretos, 14 de janeiro de 1700. Série Associações Religiosas: notação AR001, f. 01, cited by Barbosa (2020, p. 36).

1745 with the support of its members and had secured construction permission for its church in 1747 (Oliveira, 2008, p. 259). Demonstrating similar dedication and concern for her brotherhoods' churches, the African freedwoman Cristina de Almeida, from Costa da Mina, who passed away in 1751, bequeathed 10\$000 to support the construction of both the church of Our Lady of the Rosary and Our Lady of the Conception e Boa Morte, as mentioned earlier in this article.²⁷

The establishment of its own church enabled the Brotherhood of the Rosary and Saint Benedict to claim a measure of independence within the association. However, it was not long before conflicts arose with the Cabildo, as the latter chose the brotherhood's newly erected church as the Cathedral's seat. This decision was made following Cabildo's resolution to move from the hilltop of the Castle to the floodplain, closer to the majority of colonial churches and institutions, citing structural issues in the Church of Saint Sebastian. A contentious coexistence with the Cabildo ensued from 1737 to 1808, at which point the chapter members relocated from the Rosario church to the new Igreja da Sé, situated in the former Carmelite Convent.²⁸

Throughout the seventy years of striving to regain control over their temple until the early 19th century, the brothers of the Rosary and Saint Benedict contended with the Cabildo for autonomy to manage their temple and its rituals. In this endeavor, they began to directly appeal to the king, engaging in extensive petitioning and advocacy to secure the independence of their temple's administration and ceremony practices (Barbosa, 2020, pp. 48-108). As a result, they likely pursued historical requests with *Misericórdia* regarding the skiff's use, employing political communication with the Portuguese Crown to achieve their objectives, similar to their interactions with the Cabildo.

27 ACMRJ. Livro de Óbitos e Testamentos da freguesia da Sé: AP0406 (1737 – 1740). Testamento de José Dias, p.221v; Livro AP0155 da Sé (1746-1758). Testamentos de Francisca Vieira, p. 28v, e de Cristina de Almeida, p. 207v.

28 Several studies have already delved into this process which, as it is beyond the scope of our analysis, we will not develop here (Costa, 1886; Barbosa 2020; Leão Filho, 2021).

THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE ROSARY AND RECOURSE TO THE CROWN IN DEFENSE OF THE PRIVILEGE OF OWNING A SKIFF

For the Brotherhood of the Rosary, maintaining the transportation of the deceased bodies of its brethren in their own skiffs was an important issue. The visibility of the procession of some confreres through the streets of the Parish of Sé expressed the prestige of the brotherhood in relation to other associations and, in particular, in relation to other religious associations of black and brown individuals. However, it is possible that within the brotherhood, whether or not the brethren had access to the skiff was also a differentiating factor. One way in which we might be able to approach these questions is by analyzing the death records because if the wills allow us to observe the brethren's wishes, the deaths allow us to see whether or not what was requested was carried out. One observation to be made, however, is that the obituaries only allow us to get close, since the records we analyzed do not mention the term "coffin" or "tomb" in the description of the deceased parishioner's funeral.

Despite the absence of these objects in the parish records of the Parish of Sé, it is possible to consider their presence in occasional records mentioning that the deceased was commissioned by the parish priest and other priests and "accompanied" or "led" by them to the grave "on a platform" or "in burial." These instances are occasional, as they do not appear in most of the settlements, suggesting that a different kind of funeral took place, in which there was a funeral procession. The mention in the death certificate that the body was commended at the graveside in the presence of more than one priest was the so-called "solemn commendation," usually present at a pompous funeral. Such situations required, in addition to the alms paid to the parish priest or his curate, the payment for extra priests and the purchase of torches and candles, among other material and ritual elements of these funerals, generating an expense that set them apart from others held in the city (Reis, 1991, pp. 142-144; Rodrigues, 2022b, pp. 311-312).

As stated by Alcântara Machado, the pomp was in direct proportion to the accompaniment, with the "complete parade of clerics and

brotherhoods, with the scripts, crosses, and flags of the style,” with testators requesting “all the accompaniment that is possible. all the priests who are in this town. with the flag and wax that there is” (Machado, 1972, p. 208). In this sense, the mentions in the records of the terms that refer to accompaniment and/or procession will therefore be interpreted by us as a sign that there was a funeral procession and, therefore, use of the skiff, if we consider the statement at the beginning of this article about this being an object used differently at some funerals as a way of giving visibility to the prestige of certain deceased individuals. To identify this issue, we analyzed a sample of 2,380 death records from three parish books in the Parish of Sé between 1701 and 1758.

In terms of social markers, 76.51% (1,821) of the records did not mention the legal status of the deceased; 11.72% (279) were identified as slaves; 10.71% (255) were mentioned as freemen, and 1.05% (25) were referred to as free. Although the number of slaves was slightly higher than that of freemen, none of them went to the grave with any mention of having been accompanied or led in a procession or burial. The only sign of differentiation between the captives in our sample is that 1.43% of them had more than one priest present at the commissioning, while 64.87% were commissioned by one priest (usually the parish curate). In the case of those who had left captivity, 0.71% mentioned being accompanied or carried in a burial or float, 9.01% mentioned the deceased being commissioned by more than one priest, and 32.15% by just one priest.²⁹

Although it was not possible to identify which of the slaves and freedmen in the sample belonged to a brotherhood (as this information was not mentioned in the death records), it is very likely that a fraction of these individuals were affiliated with them. In our opinion, this affiliation would be precisely among the freedmen whose funerals included the two signs of distinction considered here: the accompaniment of the procession and the commissioning by more than one priest. As the data

29 ACMRJ. Livros de Óbitos e Testamentos da freguesia da Sé: AP0400 (1701-1710), AP0406 (1737-1740) and AP0155 (1746-1758).

suggest, maintaining the privilege of using the coffin by a brotherhood of blacks did not imply, in practice, that all the members would have access to it. This underscores the internal differences between captives and freedmen within the brotherhoods of blacks (whose membership, in itself, already represented a niche in that slave society), which were also expressed in the occupation of management positions within the association. It is very likely that ex-captives dominated the administrative boards of these brotherhoods, although more specific studies are needed on the issue of position occupancy between freedmen and captives within these groups.

When analyzing the mercenary devotion associated with Creoles in Minas Gerais, between 1740 and 1840, Vanessa Cerqueira Teixeira presents very interesting data on the Brotherhood of Mercy of the Parish of Antônio Dias, which confirms the impressions that Russell-Wood presented in a previous study. Regarding the highest office in the association in Minas Gerais, 64 freedmen were elected judges, while 28 slaves reached the position; 105 freedmen were elected table brothers, against 45 slaves who held the position. Regarding the position of treasurer, which required not only a mastery of formal writing but also the prodigality of resources to assist the brotherhood in facing financial difficulties, 13 freedmen held the position, while only one slave did (Russell-Wood, 2005, p. 206; Teixeira, 2022, p. 307). Although the rules of these brotherhoods did not explicitly state any differences between slave and freed brothers, differences did seem to exist, linked to the occupation of positions, in terms of access to the coffin.

The examples at the beginning of this article primarily concerned the manifestations of former slaves, although it is clear that testamentary documentation does not lend itself to the analysis of slaves, since they could not testify. However, we tend to believe that, in practice, the skiff was mostly used for the corpses of freedmen in the Brotherhood of the Rosary and Saint Benedict of Rio de Janeiro, and especially for a select group of freedmen who, considering the data from the wills cited above, had more material possessions and resources. This is evident not only in the assets they mentioned having (including captives) but also in

the mentions of their desire to have their corpse carried in the brotherhood's skiff and accompanied by several priests, as well as the 'hiring' of poor people to accompany the procession through the payment of alms (while José Dias did not specify the value of the alms, Francisca Vieira determined the distribution of 3\$200 réis). An approximation of the brotherhood's internal hierarchies is found in chapter 19 of its 1759 commitment, which made a distinction in the distribution of suffrages to the brothers and in the differentiation of their burial places within the church, as shown below: This brotherhood is obliged to have 24 masses said for the soul of any brother who has served as Judge of Our Lady or of Saint Benedict and, if they die during the time they are currently serving or afterwards, they will be buried in the Capela Mór next to the presbyters, and those who have served as Clerk, Treasurer, and Procurator of Judges of the Ramalhete will have sixteen masses, and they will be buried in the Capela Mór below the Judges; and those who have been at the Table will have twelve masses and will be buried below the Arch of the Cross, and the Kings and Queens will have 26 masses and will be buried at the mouth of the Arch of the Cross, and those who have not held any office will have ten masses said for their souls, and will be buried in the body of the Church.³⁰

The most prominent brothers who had served the brotherhood were given a greater number of masses. In addition, their graves were in or closer to the chancel and were hierarchized from then on. It was believed that this proximity to the main altar would facilitate the saints' intercession for the soul of the brother buried there, while at the same time marking the deceased's higher status. The further away from the high altar, the less prestige (Campos, 2004, pp. 172-178; Reis, 1991, pp. 174-181; Rodrigues; Soares, 2023, p. 366). Taking into account the tendency for the outcasts to occupy a greater number of positions, they

30 AHU-CU: Códice 1950. Compromisso da Irmandade de Nossa Senhora do Rosário e São Benedito dos homens pretos colocada nessa sua mesma Igreja nesta Cidade de São Sebastião do Rio de Janeiro; novamente reformado, assim do antigo como dos Acórdãos das Mesas, e juntas neste ano de 1759 para o de 1760. Available from: <https://digitarq.ahu.arquivos.pt/viewer?id=1157523>. Accessed on: 10 Dec. 2023.

were more likely to receive a greater number of masses and occupy the most prestigious graves in the temple. Similarly, the data from the death registers indicate a greater frequency of orders being given by more than one priest and the existence of a funeral procession among the former slaves of the parish of Sé in Rio de Janeiro.

This issue concerns the definitions of jurisdictions, privileges, precedence, and hierarchies. The dispute in which the Rosário brothers became involved with the Holy House of Mercy to maintain the privilege of using their own coffin reveals how the black brotherhood intended to assert degrees of autonomy in that slave society, defending privileges it had won, but also asserting its precedence over other black brotherhoods, as well as being related to the hierarchies within the sodalium itself. As João José Reis stated, among ‘the funeral accessories, the one in which the corpse was carried was the one that best defined the dignity of death and the dispute over the tomb symbolized deep social inequalities and tensions, “which even death could not erase”’ (Reis, 1991, p. 149). These issues are in line with Lahon and Reginaldo’s assertions that, in addition to their religious and mutual aid roles, the importance and form of the exercise of power carried out by the black brotherhoods acquired a significant differential in that slave society when they sought — and sometimes won — royal privileges (Lahon, 1999, pp. 129-130; Reginaldo, 2011, pp. 86-89).

By clashing with the Santa Casa over the use of their own coffin, the Rosário brothers in the city of Rio de Janeiro were also giving an account of these *intra-corporeal* hierarchies that reiterated privileges and naturalized the idea of difference. These local issues, by expressing the asymmetries that characterized a slave and corporate society, reiterated disputes between corporate institutions that ended up requiring regulation by the monarchy (Monteiro; Consentino, 2017, p. 447). We believe that this mediation by the Crown played an important role not only between institutions but also within them. Therefore, behind the conflict between the Brotherhood of the Rosary and the Holy House, a myriad of problems were unfolding in the 18th century.

Although we have no information so far on the consequences of the Rosário's legal defeat by the Santa Casa in 1699, we assume that somehow the Brotherhood of the Blacks continued to take its members to the grave in its skiff. The cases cited here of the Brotherhood's testators requesting to be buried in the Brotherhood's skiff indicate that, in those years of 1740 and 1750, the Brotherhood maintained the use of the object. The question is whether it paid the alms of 400 réis for the burial of the brothers, as required by Santa Casa. Although we do not have specific data on this, an excerpt from chapter 20 of the 1759 *Compromisso da Irmandade dos Pretos* [Commitment of the Brotherhood of Blacks] seems relevant to us, as it deals with the subject of the skiff by mentioning that as soon as 'this Brotherhood was founded, and its increase was established,' the brothers 'began to have their skiff, which they have always kept for more than sixty-six years, without paying any contribution to it,' which they ordered to be maintained.³¹

Having accounted for the period of use of the skiff without the payment of 'any contribution' that the Rosario brothers emphasized in their statute, we arrive at the end of the 17th century. This period coincides with the context analyzed above. This suggests that, as a result of the 1699 proceedings, the Brotherhood of the Blacks seems to have been pressured by *Misericórdia* to pay for the use of the skiff in the early years of the 17th century, repeating the conflicts experienced in preceding decades. To date, no documents have been found to indicate the resumption of the legal conflict. Possibly due to new attempts to interdict the Holy House of Mercy, the blacks of the Rosario reinforced their plea directly to the king, creating, it appears, a new dynamic of action in defense of the use of the skiff. This is evident in the subsequent requests sent to the king in the mid-1740s.

31 AHU-CU: Códice 1950. Compromisso da Irmandade de Nossa Senhora do Rosário e São Benedito dos homens pretos colocada nessa sua mesma Igreja nesta Cidade de São Sebastião do Rio de Janeiro; novamente reformado, assim do antigo como dos Acórdãos das Mesas, e juntas neste ano de 1759 para o de 1760. Available at: <https://digitarq.ahu.arquivos.pt/viewer?id=1157523>. Accessed on: 10 Dec. 2023.

On December 12, 1744, the Crown Prosecutor forwarded to the Overseas Council a request from the Judge and other brethren of Our Lady of the Rosary in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Addressed to King João V, they sought possession of some land, the delivery of documents, and ‘the maintenance of their privilege to have their skiff for the burials of their brethren.’ The request began with the statement that ‘countless years ago,’ they had established their fraternity of blacks, captives, and freedmen with a Royal license and confirmation. Subsequently, they ‘erected a very sumptuous temple to the Blessed Virgin,’ which incited envy among the Cabildo of Rio de Janeiro, leading to the occupation of their church. In this temple, the brethren’s engaged in devout exercises and solemn feasts for the benefit of their own souls and the manifest confusion of heathenism.’ This allowed them to attract ‘many brethren’ to this ‘pious congregation to partake in the effects of indulgences and exercises in life’ and, after death, ‘in prayers and supplications.’ They added, ‘from the very beginning, there was a coffin for the burial of the brethren, and this began either before the existence of the Holy House of Mercy or at least contemporaneously.’ However, ‘the brethren of the Holy House attempted to prevent them from having such a coffin.’³²

The blacks’ petition further stated that the ‘long-standing’ possession of the skiff by the ‘poor brethren of the Rosario’ typically exempted them from paying a cruzado each to the Holy House for their burials in the mentioned skiff. They expressed ‘surprise’ that the Holy House sought to prohibit its use ‘through a notification without employing ordinary means to convince such long-standing owners.’ Therefore, they requested the King to graciously grant them the preservation of the said skiff, ‘notwithstanding the contradiction of *Misericórdia*’ and the lawsuit it had initiated against the blacks, in recognition of the ‘just and long possession’ of the Rosario brethren, as the King was the ‘pious protector

32 AHU-CU-017-01, cx. 54, doc. 12.677: Requerimentos (3) do juiz e irmãos da irmandade de N. Sra. do Rosário dos Homens Pretos do Rio de Janeiro, em que pedem a posse de uns terrenos, a entrega de documentos e que lhe manter o privilégio de ter seu esquife para os enterros dos irmãos (1745), imagem 2. Until we indicate otherwise, this and the following textual citations refer to this document.

of the captives and humble' who promoted the 'cults of the Lady of the Rosary, encouraging through his generosity the growth and flourishing of such a pious congregation.³³The vocabulary used in the arguments of the Brotherhood of the Rosary was typical of the petitions that corporations, including confraternities, submitted to the Portuguese monarchy. They invoked rights perceived as precedents, even positioning their inception prior to the creation of the Holy House to justify the immemorial nature of the skiff's use, requesting the reaffirmation of privileges and regalia (Monteiro; Consentino, 2017, p. 439). They sought royal protection because the brethren were impoverished. Yet concurrently, these impoverished brethren claimed to have constructed a sumptuous church in honor of the Holy Virgin, coveted by the Cabildo, which consequently occupied it.

In essence, a rhetorical procedural vocabulary was employed wherein the notion of poverty was invoked as a category not necessarily synonymous with material deprivation. Poverty, in modern interpretation, was a means of distinguishing the deserving poor (who warranted assistance) from the unworthy poor — who were precluded from any support. Applying this perspective to individuals and institutions created a hierarchy through which assistance was not universally dispensed, asserting that only a select group among the impoverished warranted focus and aid (Franco; Patuzzi, 2019, p. 9). The Brothers of the Rosary presented themselves as meritorious poor, particularly since their church functioned as the cathedral for the parish, the epicenter of the city's primary parish, and housed the Chapter. Simultaneously, they recognized their significance within the city's corporate structure, understanding that to reiterate the ideal of 'the common good,' the king could act with liberality and charity towards them, even if it necessitated opposing the powerful Holy House of Mercy.

They claimed it was "strange" that the *Misericórdia* should attempt to prohibit the use of the skiff by non-ordinary means, perhaps understanding that they had not received royal approval. Unlike the

33 Idem.

approach at the end of the 17th century, the blacks decided to request the mediation of the Portuguese crown, perhaps to avoid being subject to the demands of local authorities, who had imposed the defeat of 1699 upon them. They presented their demands to the Crown, attempting to escape local conflicts, and hoped that the king's word would, as sometimes occurred, respond to their pleas as subjects. This indicates that the groups perceived as subaltern, in this case, in comparison to the *Misericórdia* brothers, dominated the social taxonomies of representation and employed them to defend their interests and the privileges they believed they were entitled to (Monteiro; Cosentino, 2017, pp. 444, 452). In the order given to this request, it is mentioned that the petitioners did not justify their ownership "in any way," meaning they did not present documentation to demonstrate the seniority they claimed to possess that would exempt them from paying for the use of the skiff. The monarchic order stated that, to grant the exemption, a letter should be sent to the governor of Rio de Janeiro so that he could take a position on the matter.³⁴

Possibly due to the incompleteness of the petition, months later, the Rosário brothers filed a new request with the king to retain the use of the skiff. The specificity of this new document is that, perhaps because they were unable to obtain a document attesting to their previous possession, they went to great lengths to emphasize the duration of time they had been using the object and the service they were providing to the Portuguese state by being brothers. To demonstrate their worthiness, they noted that the brotherhood "was erected immemorial years ago with the consent of the ordinary and the approval of Your Majesty" and "to better serve God, they erected and constructed their own church in which they practiced 'holy exercises for the benefit of their souls and the confusion of the gentility that continually comes from Africa and Guinea to that city.'" Their adherence to the King's religion was underscored when they mentioned that, "instructed in the Holy Faith, and

34 Idem.

baptized,” they immediately sought to join together to “exercise their natures,” showing “the zeal with which they served God and the Virgin Lady of the Rosary.”³⁵

According to them, “from the beginning of the erection of this brotherhood, they always had their own skiff in which they buried only their captive and outcast brothers in their church, without contradiction or prohibition from anyone, because they knew of their great zeal and great poverty,” while “in this immemorial possession meekly and peacefully,” a few years ago, the brothers of the Holy House of Mercy began to disturb them, “forbidding them the use of their skiff for the burial of their poor and miserable brothers on the grounds that they said it was theirs to bury in the tomb of the said Holy House” and charging them for the alms of the tomb by means of “force and serious violence,” “without taking into account the misery of the supplicants, who possessed nothing.” Because of their poverty, they begged His Majesty’s “Royal Piety” to grant them the same grace as he had not only to the brotherhoods of Our Lady of the Rosary in all the parishes of the city of Bahia but also to the brotherhood of St. Benedict in the same city,” as they stated in the document they appended to their petition.³⁶

On July 30, 1745, Alexandre de Gusmão and Thome Joaquim da Costa Corte Real, advisors to the Overseas Council, ordered that Manuel Amaro Pina de Mesquita Pinto, the Ombudsman General of the city of Rio de Janeiro, be informed so that he could consult with the Board of *Misericórdia* regarding the matter. This consultation occurred on January 18, 1746, after which *Misericórdia* began to draft its response to the Ombudsman General. If the Brotherhood of the Rosary of Rio de Janeiro included the Royal Provision of 1736, through which the brothers of Saint Benedict in the Convent of São Francisco in Bahia had been granted permission to possess a tomb for their deceased brothers, Mestre de Campo Mathias Coelho de Souza, the Provedor of the Holy House, ordered José Borges Reymondo — a Noble Gentleman of

35 Idem.

36 Idem.

His Majesty's House, a professed member of the Order of Christ, and a Citizen of the city of S. Sebastião do Rio de Janeiro — to translate the Provision along with a series of documents to be sent to the King. These documents included the Apostolic Sentence of 1593 in favor of the Holy House of Mercy of Lisbon, which recognized its privilege to exclusively use a tomb for burials within the city; the Charter of 1605, allowing the brotherhood of Rio de Janeiro to enjoy and use all Provisions and Privileges granted to the Mercy of Lisbon in 1593; the Resolution of December 14, 1687, by which the blacks of the Rosário and Saint Benedict agreed to pay for the use of the skiff; and a certificate from the court case pending between the brotherhoods of *Misericórdia* and Our Lady of the Rosary, related to 1698. These documents were included in the reply the Holy House sent to the Ombudsman of Rio de Janeiro on March 29, 1746.

In a particularly scathing text, he argued before demonstrating the 'falsity' of the claim of the Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary, it was necessary to assert the exclusive right of *Misericórdia* to deny any other brotherhood the use of a tomb for burials in the city of Rio de Janeiro. He emphasized that the Brotherhood of Mercy of this Holy House is the oldest in the city and thus has precedence in all matters due to its significant contributions to the common good through charitable deeds and pious works at its hospital, benefiting poor prisoners and others at considerable expense.³⁷ He recalled all the privileges that allowed it sole use of a tomb, beginning with citations in which Latin terms were used to bolster the argument. He asserted that these privileges precluded other brotherhoods and sisterhoods in Rio de Janeiro from owning tombs, contesting the impetrant brotherhood's (of the Rosary) claim of owning the skiff since its inauguration as incorrect.

According to the Holy House's response, by using this argument in its petition to the King, the Brotherhood of the Rosary was engaging

37 AHU-CU-017-01. cx. 58, doc. 13.588: Reply from the brothers of the Holy House of Mercy of Rio de Janeiro, on the aforementioned claim by the brothers of the Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary. Rio de Janeiro, March 29, 1746, attached to no. 13.578, image 17.

in deceit and should, therefore, be subjected to the penalties stipulated by the Kingdom's Ordinances. The claim of poverty by the blacks was also dismissed as falsehood, stating it was 'notorious that the said Brotherhood is rich and wealthy.' Conclusively, he posited that granting this request to the Rosário brotherhood would be unjust due to the harm it would cause to the Holy House and its contradiction to the law.³⁸

In a submission to the Overseas Council on October 8, 1746, Ombudsman Manuel Amaro Pina de Mesquita Pinto expressed that, based on the certificates included among the documents by *Misericórdia*, a dispute had arisen between the brothers of the Rosary and the Holy House over the use of a coffin or tomb. He noted that while the matter had not yet been settled 'by ordinary means,' where the rights of the parties to present whatever titles they deemed appropriate were respected, and it appeared to him that the brothers of the Rosary should 'be preserved in their possession' unless a final and irrevocable judgment convinced them otherwise.³⁹ This stance may represent a partial victory for the Rosario brothers. The exact nature of the dispute referred to is unclear. One possibility is that the Rosário brotherhood may not have been content with the legal defeat indicated in the sentence by the Ouvidoria Geral do Rio de Janeiro in 1699 and might have appealed to higher courts. However, there is no definitive evidence to support this hypothesis.

We believe that the Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary and the Holy House of Mercy continued to engage in legal disputes over the privilege of using skiffs. The last piece of information we have on this dispute is a request from *Misericórdia* to the Crown, dated February 1749, in which they requested that the ministers of Justice not take cognizance of any cases brought against the privileges of the Holy

38 Idem.

39 AHU-CU-017-01. cx. 58, doc. 13,581: Information from the Ouvidoria General Manoel Amaro Pina de Mesquita Pinto, regarding the aforementioned claim. Rio, October 8, 1746, attached to no. 13,578, image 5; DOC. 13,584: Certificate in which the clerk of the Ouvidoria General, Bento Luiz de Almeida, attests that an action is pending between the brotherhood of the Santa Casa da Misericórdia and that of N. S. do Rosário dos Pretos. Rio de Janeiro, October 9, 1746, attached to no. 13,578.

House, asking that any pending cases be filed. This request indicates that *Misericórdia* was pursuing action to reaffirm its privileges to use tombs and skiffs in the city, even in 1749, and that there were still legal proceedings against its privileges.⁴⁰

The request began with a reference to all the aforementioned documents that ratified the privileges of *Misericórdia* do Rio de Janeiro over the funeral service. It mentions the existence of many brotherhoods and sisterhoods in the city, noting that there were only eight ‘of blacks and browns’ in various churches: Our Lady of the Good Death, of the Conception, Saint Dominic, Saint Benedict, Our Lady of the Rosary, of Mercy, Assumption, and Lampadosa, of which, of which, wanting to use a coffin, Our Lady of the Rosary and Saint Benedict were notified in 1687 that they could not do so. However, among the brothers of the board of the Confraternity of Our Lady of Mercy, some individuals were ‘passionate and opposed’ to the tranquility of the Holy House, who filed several lawsuits with the General Ombudsman’s Office, ‘in very serious disquiet’ for the derogation of the sentence that determined that the brotherhoods should obey the privileges of *Misericórdia*. Although we have not identified any documents on this case of the Mercês brotherhood, the *Misericórdia* Request states that the General Ombudsman issued a ruling in favor of this brotherhood, against which, it seems, the Holy House appealed in the Bahia Court of Appeal. According to the petitioners, the same legal instruments were brought by the judges and other brothers of the Rosário brotherhood, despite the fact that they had signed the term to which they had submitted in 1687 and were now ‘free to use their coffin.’ As a result, the Holy House of Mercy filed a lawsuit against the Rosário — apparently the one from 1698 — and won. At this point, the petition mentions that ‘even so, not discouraged,

40 AHU-CU-017 01 - cx. 62 – doc. 14.599: Request from the governor and brothers of the board of the Brotherhood of the *Misericórdia* of Rio de Janeiro, in which they ask that the ministers of justice should not take cognizance of cases brought against the privileges of the Holy House, and that those that were pending should be archived (1749).

they appealed to Your Majesty next to derogate them [*Misericórdia's* privileges] in their favor.⁴¹

They must have been referring to the petitions that the Brotherhood of the Rosary sent to the King in 1744 and 1745 since the text mentions, “the petitioners were heard in the said petition, and their reply, they proved with documents the injustice of it,” and how much “the opponents against the Holy House lacked reason and truth, who for their stubborn vengeance were embroiled with these brotherhoods of blacks and browns so that they could wage war against it.” According to *Misericórdia*, they all brought “unjust demands against it, stubbornly wanting to use tombs not only for blacks and browns but also for whites, who are not their brethren, when the Santa Casa de *Misericórdia*” was “ready with tombs to give burial to all who need to be buried, according to their fortune, or their luck, as is privately granted to it.”

In order not to jeopardize the assistance that the *Misericórdia* provided to the poor, she, therefore, appealed to His Majesty, asking that the latter, “as protector” of the Holy House, would do her the mercy of ordering its ministers not to take “cognizance in their judgments of any cause that might be brought against its privileges, so that it would not be disturbed by demands” in its “praiseworthy and holy ministry.” He asked that the cases that were on trial should remain “in the form in which they have been in perpetual silence and that those who disturb this peace” should pay the poor of the *Misericórdia* a penalty of one silver mark. It also requested that “ministers who do not maintain this provision be reprimanded in their residence.⁴²

The order located on the left-hand side of this request reads, “This Request should be excused immediately so that the Suplicados may follow their causes and [applied?] that run to a greater extent.”

⁴³ Unfortunately, we have not yet been able to access the archives of the Bahia Court of Appeal or even those of the General Ombudsman’s

41 Idem.

42 Idem.

43 Idem.

Office in Rio de Janeiro to find more details or developments in these cases. Despite this, the important point to note is how the disputes over the privilege of using skiffs between the brotherhoods of Our Lady of the Rosary and the Holy House of Mercy entered the legal structures of the Portuguese Empire, passing through the Ombudsman's Office at the local level and the Overseas Council, together with the Crown Prosecutor's Office, at the external and broader level.

IN CONCLUSION

Among the elements of the Catholic funeral practiced by different social segments in colonial Rio de Janeiro during the 17th and 18th centuries, in pursuit of a "good death," there were ways of highlighting social differences. In that slave society with traces of the Ancien Régime, hierarchies were present in various ways on the occasion of death and the search to demonstrate social distinction was made explicit in the funeral pomp. This was evident in the procession or accompaniment and in the number of priests present at a funeral. According to João José Reis, by imitating Christ's burial procession, the Catholic funeral procession theatricalized the Christian's journey after death towards reunion with the victorious God. In this sense, it was part of "a decompression ritual that was all the more effective the greater the diffusion of signs, the more gestures and symbolic objects it was capable of producing. And the more people could accompany it" (Reis, 1991, p. 138).

A procession in which the deceased was carried through the streets of the parish where he lived, in the skiff of his brotherhood, and accompanied by the parish priest, several other priests, religious brotherhoods in their opes, the poor, family members, relatives, neighbors, and onlookers carrying torches, candles, among other symbolic elements, was an occasion for the maximum display of funeral pomp. In addition to the eschatological meanings that the mobilization of all this apparatus had, in obtaining the maximum intercession for the soul of the deceased in search of salvation, this was an opportunity for the brotherhood to show its prestige in the community, to compete for deference with others, and

to attract new members. These desires allow us to understand why they generated fierce disputes over the possession of the coffin by the sodalities, in order to make the funeral pomp feasible, given the monopoly on the use of the object by the Holy House of Mercy granted by the Portuguese Crown since the end of the 16th century.

The disputes over possession of the skiff also included the black brotherhoods, such as that of Our Lady of the Rosary in the city of Rio de Janeiro studied here, in a process that dated back to the 17th century. We were able to observe that, since the end of that century, its members sought to safeguard the use and possession of the skiff, confronting the powerful Holy House of Mercy and its monopoly, a situation that lasted several decades and culminated in the middle of the following century in a process that went through various instances of the administration of the Portuguese Empire on both sides of the Atlantic, in the 1740s, in an intense exchange of correspondence and monarchical decisions in defense of the “immemorial use” of their skiff. To this end, they resorted to various strategies to assert the antiquity of the object’s use, while insisting on disobeying the ban on outsourcing the use of the skiff, by renting it out to non-members and even whites, a practice that was repeatedly condemned by *Misericórdia*, which tried in vain to ban it.

The notes presented here, rather than being conclusive, are intended to provide a glimpse of possible paths for the study of the brotherhoods of blacks, attempting, in some way, to connect it with advances in terms of thinking about the dynamics of the functioning of colonial empires. In this way, we believe, like Boxer (1981, p. 263) and Russell-Wood (1981), that the brotherhoods were institutions that allowed us to gain a broader understanding of the workings of the republics in the space of conquests. Although Boxer was later accused of a certain exaggeration in equating the Chambers with the brotherhoods, it cannot be disregarded that he noted the important role that these institutions played in the conquests, especially the *Misericórdias* and the royal privileges they obtained, which implied the imposition of a royal monopoly, such as the service of transporting corpses for both the elite and the poor and captives.

The study developed here sought to demonstrate that the exercise of these privileges crossed social segments and was closely pursued by black brotherhoods. These, like the Rosário in Rio de Janeiro, not only realized the importance of demonstrating their projection in the city through the use of skiffs in replicating the pompous funerals of the 'good men' elite, but also used the dispute over possession of the coveted funeral object to maintain internal hierarchies, which privileged freedmen and officeholders. They were adept at mobilizing a legal discourse in defense of these privileges, presenting themselves as deserving of the Royal Grace to serve the 'poor captives,' even though, in practice, they earmarked the use for some special members.

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Received: 21 Apr. 2024 / Revised by the author: 17 Jan. 2024 / Accepted: 16 Sept. 2024

Responsible editor: Ely Bergo de Carvalho