

# *The Archives of the Inclusa*

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Hospital records can tell the historian much more than how the sick were cared for in the past. The patients in these institutions were usually poor—the rich could afford to die in their own beds. As a result, hospital records are a roll-call of the victims of indigence and its complications: ignorance, undernourishment and immorality. Since the poor leave few names and faces in history, with only the occasional saint or rebel emerging from the crowd, such records enable the historian to limn a few outlines in the grey, amorphous fog which has engulfed most of the poor in the past.

Such archives can also be an important source of information about other classes of society. Those caring for the sick cover a wide spectrum. As well as doctors, barber-surgeons, nurses, servants and religious to be found at the sickbed, there were background administrators who could be either government bureaucrats, or ecclesiasts, or members of the nobility of both sexes. From outside the walls came craftsmen and workers of all types who provided services and goods. Carpenters, plumbers, laundresses, gravediggers and delivery men—all participated in the life of the microcosm that was the hospital. They brought in, not only medicine and medications but, the basics of everyday life, such as food, clothing, oil, coal and furnishings. Despite the fact that in many cases the hospitals of the past could do little to save the lives of their patients, their archives can tell the social historian a great deal about life and death in earlier ages.

There were many different kinds of hospitals in Madrid in the eighteenth century. The General Hospital lived up to its name and treated anyone for just about anything, including insanity in the *sala de locos*. The hospital of Anton Martin gave mercury treatments to men with venereal, or the French, disease (diahrrhea was the English disease). The Irish, French and Italians each had their own hospital. Many of these institutions, however, were not hospitals in the modern sense of the word, but rather shelters for one of the various, disadvantaged groups of society. One of the most important of these was the Hospital for abandoned and illegitimate infants, El Real Hospital de Nuestra Senora de la Soledad y Angustias y de San Josef.

The Inclusa, as it was known familiarly to *madrilenos*, was dedicated to the care of the most pathetic of society's rejects, the *exposito*. These were infants, often newborn, who had been exposed in doorways, on church steps or at public fountains, when they had not been thrown down wells, or discarded in ditches

and fields, prey to wild animals and dogs. To forestall such barbaric practices, institutions like the *Inclusa* existed in all the major cities of Europe. Often there was a turn, or cupboard-like arrangement fitted into the outside wall. Here the child could be deposited and when a bell was rung the turnstile was rotated to bring in the child. This served to protect the pride and privacy of the individual forced by some sexual misadventure or by economic distress to reject a newborn infant. The squalling bundle was carefully examined for any notes or indications of identity in the unlikely event that the child might be reclaimed. Often, there was to be found tucked into the rags, a scrap of paper which gave the baptismal name and date, and occasionally the name of the parish as well. In some cases, the misery of the background was illuminated by scribbled details. They read, "mother dead," or "father will reclaim her on his return from the wars," but most often "*padres pobres*" summed up the situation. Sometimes it was a midwife, or a relative or neighbour who brought the infant, and their names and addresses were taken down. In fact, all available details including the hour and date, the sex and age, were recorded faithfully on a page with the child's name in the *Libro Rector* or *Entradas*. The page number was then inscribed on a metal disc which was fastened by a cord around the neck of the infant, and became his identity for as long as he remained a charge of the *Inclusa*. If death seemed imminent the newborn was baptized provisionally, otherwise it passed into the care of one of the *amas de la sala*, or resident wetnurses.

These nurses usually came from the same strata of society as the infant. Pay was only nominal, but the hospital provided bed and board. Unwed mothers welcomed the privacy and seclusion, and some married women were willing to give up their freedom in return for the meals. The hospital was often desperate enough to provide for her children as well. As soon as possible, the infant was dispatched to a nurse from Madrid or one of the surrounding towns. It was an accepted fact that women who were healthy could find better paying situations with private families. These women were the wives or widows of the poor, forced to stretch a scanty supply of milk between their own infant and the *exposito*, or to take on a new charge after having lost or weaned one of their own.

The relationship between the infant and its nurse is recorded in the *Salidas*. On these pages can be found the name, address, occupation of the nurse's husband and dates of pay, as well as the fate of the child. If the newborn survived its first few months and the dangerous period of weaning, it remained in the care of these women until the age of seven when it was transferred to an orphanage. On occasion, the child might pass through the hands of as many as six or eight nurses. The nurse brought it back because the weaning period was up and she could make more by taking out another nursling, or because the child was sickly and she wanted to disavow responsibility for its death, or simply because she was looking for one that was easier to care for. Obviously, for many nurses the infants were interchangeable. Occasionally, sentiment might outweigh mercenary considerations and the nurse made a permanent commitment and adopted the *exposito* "for the much love we bear him." But it was not unusual for a child who had been raised for seven years with the same family to endure a second abandonment which could only have been more painful than the first. However, in most cases the history traced on the pages of the *Salidas* is a brief one—the infant died.

Matters dealing with the practical rather than the personal side of the hospital are to be found in the *Gastos Ordinario y Extraordinario*. These account books list the items of everyday life of the Inclusa such as the salaries and rations of the staff, and record as well the luxuries of special feast days and processions. Such registers are a rich mine for the economic historian. Earl J. Hamilton's innovative study of the price revolution of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was largely based on hospital archives.<sup>1</sup> The work of Ernest Labrousse and his colleagues in France is another model of the use of long runs of salaries and prices to trace economic trends.<sup>2</sup> Less comprehensive, but also of interest are the petty cash notebooks kept by the *madre de la sala* who was responsible for the pay and rations of the resident nurses, for the supplies of medicine for sickly infants, and gruel for the older children. Even the chaplain totaled up his spiritual accounts. He left a ledger listing the masses celebrated at various prices for benefactors who saw their donation as a good investment for their souls. There is matter here for a study of the *mentalités* or religious practices and popular customs of the time. Out of such details as lists of purchases, tips to tradespeople and supplies for meals can be reconstructed the mundane daily routine of the hospital painstakingly recorded in the *Gastos*.

Yet, daily life is usually a mass of trivial items. How is one to deal with the overwhelming number of petty details to be found in such archives? Though different hospitals present different problems there are some basic similarities to be found in any set of hospital records, and these call for similar techniques. For instance, long series of prices of food, wine, salaries, linens, coal and oil; the totals of expenses and incomes; the yearly and monthly admissions and mortality figures, all lend themselves to quantification. In such cases a series of five or ten year runs at regular intervals could be computed to establish percentages and relationships between the various sets of data. The computer can perform much of the dog work and free the researcher to apply his intelligence to an analysis of the findings. Without the aid of the computer, the historian is seriously handicapped in the amount of material he can collect, let alone absorb and collate. Studies of hospitals in Limoges by J.P. Peyronnet,<sup>3</sup> and in Aix by Cissie Fairchild,<sup>4</sup> or the numerous shorter studies of this type to be found in the publications of "Annales, Economies, Sociétés et Civilisations," are models of the way in which the materials of hospital archives have been marshalled with the aid of the computer.

Once collected, the kind of questions asked of the data and the kind of answers found will vary with the hospital and the historian. In the case of the Inclusa the archives contain material bearing on the attitude of society toward the child and toward women. The data also opens the way to questions of demographic interest. For instance, what correspondence existed between the numbers of abandoned infants and their mortality figures, and the numbers of births and deaths of infants in the general population? What relationship existed between the fluctuating admissions and mortality figures of the Inclusa and the fluctuating grain prices? How many of these infants were illegitimate? Was the

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1 Earl J. Hamilton, *War and Prices in Spain, 1651-1800* (Cambridge, Mass., 1947).

2 Ernest Labrousse, *Histoire Economique et Sociale de la France* (Paris, 1970).

3 Jean Claude Peyronnet, *Les enfants trouvés de l'Hôpital général de Limoges au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1973).

4 Cissie C. Fairchilds, *Poverty and Charity in Aix-en-Provence 1640-1789* (Baltimore, 1976).

large increase in numbers of *expositos* at the end of the century a symptom of changing patterns of social behavior, or simply a sign of the worsening economic situation of the poor? Perhaps the most difficult problem presented by the material in the archives of the Inclusa is to understand its function in the society of the time. The appalling number of deaths in these foundling hospitals led more than one contemporary to suggest that they operated as an excuse for infanticide rather than as a prevention. It was the mortality record of the foundling hospital in London which led Thomas Malthus to his dismal conclusions on the inverse relationship between human and natural resources. What service ultimately, did the Inclusa perform for the government, for the poor, and for society in general?

Finally, the utility of hospital archives is limited only by the ingenuity, diligence, time and good luck of the researcher. Many hospitals are heirs to a long tradition and their records have much to offer the historian. The Instituto Provincial de Pediatría y Puericultura is the successor to the Inclusa. This modern pediatric hospital still shelters a few abandoned infants under the care of the Sisters of Charity. They came to Madrid in 1800 at the invitation of a group of noblewomen who had taken over the administration of the Inclusa. Until her death in 1977, the archives were the charge of Sor Iréne, who had arranged the vellum bound ledgers in chronological order going back to the Inclusa's founding as a Royal Hospital by Philip II in 1582. Sor Iréne had come to the hospital in 1917, only two years after the removal of the turn because a child had been decapitated in it. Not the least of the rewards of working in this archives has been contact with this delightful nun, with the administrator Dr. J. Matos Aguilar and his secretary, all part of a long history of dedication to the care of the weak and helpless. The Inclusa has suffered periods when it could do very little to save the lives of the infants in its care. Today, it can call upon the techniques of modern medicine, but it remains a charitable institution in the fullest sense of the word. Through the archives of hospitals such as the Inclusa the historian can touch the past and reclaim some remnants of a "world that was lost."

## Résumé

La mortalité infantile à Madrid au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle est l'objet de cet article. L'auteur démontre comment l'hôpital Inclusa, ayant reconnu un taux de décès alarmant chez les enfants de ville, prit certaines dispositions spéciales pour enrayer le mal.