

## Poor relief in eighteenth-century rural Spain: a case study of Catalonia

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### Introduction

This paper is part of a larger research project investigating the relationships between poor relief and the family in rural areas of southern Europe before the welfare state. Much historical writing and, particularly, current policy debates tend to describe both the family and poor relief in Europe in terms of north/south (or perhaps more accurately north-west/south-east) divides.<sup>1</sup> In these accounts, northern Europe was characterised in the past by a tendency to form nuclear households, late marriage for both sexes but especially women, high proportions of solitary households, particularly among the elderly, and high levels of migration. By contrast, while nuclear families were to be found in many areas of France, Spain, Portugal and Italy, extended family forms were more common than in the north, with couples continuing to live in the parental household after marriage, early marriage, at least for women and the elderly more often resident with kin. Above all, southern European families, past and present, are viewed as subject to much stronger ties of loyalty than northern ones, reflected in differences even today in the frequency with which the elderly reside with kin or in institutions, the proportions of young people leaving home at different ages and before marriage, and the proportion of solitary households to be found in the population.<sup>2</sup>

For David Reher and others, the strength of family forms and ties conditioned and still conditions the demand for welfare. A key concept here is Peter Laslett's idea of 'nuclear family hardship', whereby nuclear families, particularly the elderly, were more vulnerable to poverty than extended families who could call upon a wider range of kin for support.<sup>3</sup> Other historians, however, have disagreed that the extended family was cushioned from hardship.<sup>4</sup> Instead, it was often hardest hit in the early stages of the life cycle, when burdened with young children and often also with elderly parents.<sup>5</sup> This life-cycle difference is adduced as an explanation for the greater levels of abandonment of children in southern Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> Peregrine Horden and Richard Smith, 'Introduction' in *idem* (eds.), *The locus of care. Families, communities, institutions and the provision of welfare since antiquity* (London and New York, 1998), pp. 1-18; Pier Paolo Viazzo, 'Family, kinship and welfare provision in Europe, past and present: commonalities and divergences', *Continuity and Change*, 25,1 (2010), pp. 137-59.

<sup>2</sup> David Reher, 'Family ties in Western Europe: persistent contrasts', *Population and Development Review*, 24,2 (1998), pp. 203-34. For example, the recent *Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe* (SHARE), found that, in 2004, only 1% of Swedes and 4% of Danes in the oldest age group of the population lived with a child, compared with 23% of Italians and 34% of Spanish, with similar patterns evident in frequency of contact between kin. See [www.share-project.org/t3/share](http://www.share-project.org/t3/share).

<sup>3</sup> Peter Laslett, 'Family, kinship and collectivity as systems of support in pre-industrial Europe: a consideration of the 'nuclear hardship' hypothesis', *Continuity and Change*, 3,2 (1988), pp. 153-75; Margaret Pelling and R. M. Smith, 'Introduction' in *idem* (eds.), *Life, death and the elderly: historical perspectives* (London, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> Katherine Lynch, *Individuals, families and communities in Europe, 1200-1800* (Cambridge, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Paolo Viazzo, 'Family structures and the early phase in the individual life cycle. A southern European perspective' in J. Henderson and R. Wall (eds.), *Poor women and children in the European past* (London,

Not only are there perceived to have been differences in the demand for welfare in northern and southern Europe, but the supply of poor relief also tends to be described in terms of a north-south divide. Historians tend to make three claims for the superiority of poor relief in northern Europe and in particular England: first, that overall levels of expenditure were higher; second, echoing contemporary views, that relief was often better administered and distributed with greater discrimination, and third, that relief was more widely available in rural areas. According to estimates made by Peter Lindert, England and the Dutch Republic were the countries spending the highest share of national income (around 1.75%) on their poor prior to 1795.<sup>6</sup> The parlous state of French poor relief by this date has been stressed by several historians, perhaps most forcefully by Olwen Hufton, in her pioneering work on the subject:

For antiquarians and Catholic historians, it has always been possible to be impressed by the range of institutions, produced by the efforts of the pious, which characterised formal relief before the Revolution [...]. This [...] should not cloud the main issue, the total inadequacy of formal relief anywhere.<sup>7</sup>

Hufton's claim has been echoed by historians for other areas of Europe, but other historians have been less damning. Daniel Hickey concedes that the revenues of the *bureaux de charité* were "erratic" and that initiatives could be hard to sustain, but nevertheless argues that local elites could respond effectively to poverty, noting an increase in charitable donations for some areas over the eighteenth century, and greater expenditure upon outdoor relief.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, as has been noted by Marco van Leeuwen, the situation in France at the end of the eighteenth century should not perhaps be taken as typical either of earlier periods or of Europe as a whole.<sup>9</sup> The same caveat applies to Lindert's data, which also have the weakness that they cover government relief only, at a time when, in England at least, charity seems to have been flourishing.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Colin Jones questions if the sums transferred by formal poor relief could ever have surpassed those transferred through charity anywhere in Europe prior to the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup>

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1994), pp. 31-50; Sandra Cavallo, 'Family obligations and inequalities in access to care in northern Italy, seventeenth to eighteenth centuries' in Horden and Smith (eds.), *Locus of care*, pp. 90-110.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Lindert, 'Poor relief before the welfare state: Britain versus the Continent, 1780-1880', *European Review of Economic History*, 2 (1998), pp. 101-40.

<sup>7</sup> Olwen Hufton, *The poor of eighteenth-century France* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 173-4. See also Colin Jones, *Charity and Bienfaisance: the treatment of the poor in the Montpellier region, 1740-1815* (Cambridge, 1982).

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Hickey, *Local hospitals in ancien régime France: rationalization, resistance, renewal, 1530-1789* (Montreal, 1997), pp. 100-33, 185-7.

<sup>9</sup> Marco van Leeuwen, 'Giving in early modern history: philanthropy in Amsterdam in the Golden Age', *Continuity and Change*, 27,2 (2012).

<sup>10</sup> Joanna Innes, 'The "mixed economy of welfare" in early modern England' in M. Daunton (ed.), *Charity, self-interest and welfare in the English past* (London, 1996), pp. 139-80.

<sup>11</sup> Colin Jones, 'Some recent trends in the history of charity' in Daunton (ed.), *Charity, self-interest and welfare*, pp. 51-63, here p. 52.

Moreover, as van Leeuwen also notes, any assessment of poor relief as “inadequate” depends on what poor relief was intended to achieve.<sup>12</sup> Taken as the sole means of support for families, poor relief was probably inadequate everywhere, except perhaps England, but there was rarely the expectation, again, except perhaps under the English poor law, that relief was intended to be a permanent source of income that covered all a household’s needs.<sup>13</sup> Rather, in most instances, it was conceived of as a supplement to other sources of income, part of Hufton’s “economy of makeshifts”, or as a means to survive a short-term crisis. Poor relief can also be seen as fulfilling other functions, such as providing social cohesion, social discipline and strengthening community bonds, effects which are harder to quantify but no less important.

Finally, the confidence with which some historians have denied or minimised the role of rural poor relief is, at present, the result of taking a relative lack of evidence to be a reflection of reality. As Paolo Viazzo commented some years ago, the comparative history of European poor relief is “plagued” by the problem that evidence was usually available for rural areas in the north and urban areas in the south.<sup>14</sup> He called for a move away from the excessively urban focus of research into poor relief in southern Europe, proposing instead an investigation into local-level welfare provision and family support. It is certainly the case that evidence of poor relief practices in southern Europe is far easier to obtain for the large welfare institutions of the cities. Nonetheless, those historians who have so far heeded Viazzo’s call have been able to demonstrate that rural poor relief was certainly not inexistent in southern Europe, and that further efforts to ferret out evidence from archives would be well repaid.<sup>15</sup>

This paper is thus part of an overall project which aims to investigate the extent of provision and evaluate the role of poor relief in rural southern Europe, using Catalonia as an initial case study. Catalonia makes for an interesting case study in many ways. First, it stands out from the rest of southern Europe over the eighteenth century in being a dynamic, commercialised and industrialising region with rapid population growth.<sup>16</sup> Second, it was a region of extended family forms, centred round impartible inheritance customs, and strong family ties. Third, as elsewhere in Europe, rapid population growth and the increasing proletarianisation of a large sector of the population, in a region still vulnerable to harvest failure, made the problem of poverty an increasingly urgent one. How to deal with such a problem exercised the Spanish Crown and elites, religious and secular alike, and prompted numerous new measures and proposals for reform of existing charity. Hitherto, however, the main focus has been on how these measures were introduced in urban areas. Despite

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<sup>12</sup> van Leeuwen, ‘Giving’, pp. 302-3.

<sup>13</sup> Indeed, some historians question even how generous the English poor law was. See in particular Steve Hindle, *On the parish? The micro-politics of poor relief in rural England c. 1550-1750* (Oxford, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Viazzo, ‘Family structures’.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Brian Pullan, ‘Charity and poor relief in early modern Italy’ in Daunton (ed.), *Charity, self-interest and welfare*, pp. 65-89.

<sup>16</sup> See Julie Marfany, *Land, proto-industry and population in Catalonia, c.1680-1829. An alternative transition to capitalism?* (Farnham, 2012).

acknowledging that ‘little is known of rural poor relief’, Henry Kamen has gone so far as to assert that ‘there is no doubt’ that the only ongoing provision in the early modern period was collections for the poor in churches.<sup>17</sup>

Kamen was wrong in his assertion. Poor relief in rural Catalonia included small local hospitals, providing shelter and a degree of medical care to local and transient poor; endowed charities (*causes pies*); almsgiving at funerals, after mass, on the doorstep of convents and wealthier houses; confraternities and guilds which paid funeral costs and sometimes more for members, but also sometimes provided charity for the poor; and public granaries (*pòsits* or *botigues de blat*) which loaned out grain for planting or consumption, to be repaid with interest.<sup>18</sup> The evidence is scattered and fragmentary for most of these, and much almsgiving in particular went unrecorded. This paper will focus on the endowed charities, for which more evidence does survive. It will also touch briefly on new attempts at the end of the eighteenth century to co-ordinate the collection and distribution of diverse funds under the auspices of charity committees (*Juntes de Caritat*).

### **Endowed charities (*causes pies*)**

*What did they do?*

The term *causa pia* was used for any endowment created to serve a pious objective. These could include charity, but the most common form was an endowment for masses to be said in perpetuity for the donor’s soul and the souls of those for whom he or she had an obligation to pray. Charitable endowments tended to take two forms. One was a dole of bread or clothing, to be distributed to the poor, usually on a fixed date once or twice a year, though Barcelona and Girona had important charities (*Pies Almoines*) with substantial endowments which distributed bread for several months of the year. The other was the dowry fund, whereby one or two young women a year would be eligible to receive a dowry. Usually, the dowry fund was restricted to the founder’s family, ensuring the provision of dowries for future generations despite any fluctuations in family fortunes. As such, dowry funds appear to have been more common among elite families. An extension of this idea, however, took the form of provision of dowries for poor women, not necessarily related to the founder, with one or two of those eligible chosen by lottery each year.

These charitable funds were created by a legacy in the founder’s will, and set up by his or her executors. They were usually administered by the parish priest or churchwardens, sometimes by town councillors and occasionally by the founder’s heirs. Ultimate authority over these funds appears to have lain with the bishop, who was supposed to inspect the accounts regularly. Each diocese therefore had to keep records of the endowments created and the accounts submitted. These records do survive

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<sup>17</sup> Henry Kamen, *The Phoenix and the Flame. Catalonia and the Counter Reformation* (New Haven, 1993), p. 203.

<sup>18</sup> For a preliminary discussion, see J.M. Puigvert, *Església, territori i sociabilitat* (Vic, 2000), pp. 188-94; M. Borrell, *Pobresa i marginació a la Catalunya il·lustrada* (Santa Coloma de Farners, 2002).

for some dioceses, but are not easy to use.<sup>19</sup> For the diocese of Girona, however, we have a possibly unique alternative source. Between 1772 and 1774, all parishes were asked to provide information on any charities for the poor, such as who had endowed the charity and when, for what purpose and what the level and nature of income was.<sup>20</sup> The reason behind the request was the founding of a new workhouse for the poor in the city of Girona, the *hospicio*, one of several such new institutions created by the Bourbon government from the 1760s onwards. The aim was for these workhouses to take in all those unable to live without begging, orphans and other groups deemed to be vulnerable, such as young women. In the case of Girona, the committee behind the *hospicio*, under the auspices of the reforming bishop, Tomás de Lorenzana, proposed that, since the *hospicio* would be taking in all the poor of the diocese, it should take over all charitable funds that had hitherto been distributed locally. Unsurprisingly, this proposal met with considerable resistance from some, though not all parishes. The replies thus tell us not only what charitable funds existed, but also something about the importance attached to these funds in some communities. For comparison, I have also consulted a sample of 29 registers of endowed charities for the diocese of Girona, spanning foundations from the thirteenth to the early nineteenth centuries.<sup>21</sup>

**Table 1: Endowed charities in the diocese of Girona**

Type	1772-4 returns		Registers <i>Causes pies</i>	
	Number	%	Number	%
Bread	88	77.9	20	29.4
Money	9	8.0	7	10.3
Clothing	2	1.8	1	1.5
Dowries	5	4.4	37	54.4
Education	2	1.8	4	5.9
Captives	0	0.0	1	1.5
Widows	0	0.0	1	1.5
Hospital patients	0	0.0	3	4.4
not specified	8	7.1	4	5.9
	113		68	

Table 1 provides the breakdown of endowed charities based on parish returns for 1772-4 and the sample of those registered with the diocese according to the purpose of the foundation. There were 113 endowed charities in 1772-4 and 68 in the sample from the registers. The columns add up to more

<sup>19</sup> The diocesan archives have limited opening hours, and standards of cataloguing vary. The registers of *causes pies* consulted so far in the diocesan archives of Barcelona and Girona combine all types of pious bequests, are rarely indexed, run to several hundred volumes and do not follow any logical or chronological order.

<sup>20</sup> The bulk of these replies are in Arxiu Històric de Girona (henceforth AHG), 676, 677 and 2340.

<sup>21</sup> Arxiu Diocesà de Girona (henceforth ADG), *Institucions causes pies*. There is another series of 250 volumes titled *Definicions de causes pies* and another of 30 volumes titled *Resolucions causes pies*. Endowments for the poor recorded in the *Institucions* can be identified via an online search, but not those in the other series, and the original volumes still have to be consulted for the details of each endowment.

than these figures because a few endowments had dual purposes, for example, the *causa pia* created to redeem captives was also intended to provide dowries. There are some discrepancies between the two sets of figures. First, only seven endowed charities can be identified in both sources. Given that the diocesan registers consulted represent only a small proportion of the total, it is unsurprising that many endowed charities in the 1772-74 correspondence have yet to be located in the registers, but the opposite is surprising, and suggests that many charitable foundations from the middle ages ceased to be active at a later date. However, the second, marked discrepancy is that dowry funds are the main purpose of endowed charity in the registers at over half of all charities, but account for under five per cent of existing charities in 1772-4. This discrepancy is harder to explain since the vast majority of dowry funds were relatively recent foundations, and in terms of income and administration, no different from other types of fund. The only other explanation is that parishes failed to mention the existence of dowry funds when asked by the bishop, either because they did not realise such funds were also eligible for inclusion in those being siphoned off to the workhouse, or precisely because they wished to protect such funds from being seized.

The endowed charities did not vary across the two sources in terms of their purpose. The dowry funds awarded one or two dowries a year, of 25 to 30 *lliures* (Catalan pounds) each, with the recipients chosen by lottery from those the administrators judged to be the most poor of the parish. Sometimes a lower age limit was set, often as low as 12, and never above 14, and usually the girls had to be baptised in the parish to be eligible, though sometimes those resident there as domestic servants could also qualify. As for the bread doles, all but eight of these were distributed only once a year. Distributions took place usually at the parish church on a significant date in the religious calendar. The most popular dates were Lent and Easter, accounting for two-thirds of all doles. The bread doles varied as to the amount stipulated. Sometimes, the requirement was to feed all the poor or even all the inhabitants of the parish, using as much bread as was needed. Other times, the requirement was more specific: either a fixed amount of grain was to be distributed, or loaves of a fixed weight. Some of the bread doles were administered by individual families, usually substantial peasants, rather than by the parish. These will be discussed below.

#### *Inadequate and indiscriminate?*

For contemporaries, at least, dowry funds were harder to attack than bread doles in a society firmly committed to the idea that the best provision that could be made for young women was marriage. In 1771, for example, by order of Charles III, the city of Barcelona used the funds it had allocated to official celebrations for the birth of a royal heir to pay dowries for four poor girls, chosen by lottery. As already noted, dowry funds were overwhelmingly the most popular form of charitable endowment in the diocese of Girona during the eighteenth century and parishes may have deliberately hidden the existence of these funds from the authorities in the 1770s. Nonetheless, the significance of dowry funds can still be questioned in that most endowments provided for only one dowry to be paid a year, regardless of the likely number of applicants. Moreover, most funds were subject to the

problem of falling income, described below. The Rabassa dowry fund in Banyoles, which paid dowries both to poor women and to women of the Rabassa family admitted that it was now unable to pay dowries, since its annual income was only 4 *lliures* and there were too many claimants.<sup>22</sup> Other, better endowed funds did continue to operate, but still only paying one or at most two dowries a year. The standard dowry of 25-30 *lliures* was not a generous sum, especially given inflation. Median dowries in the Girona region in 1770 were 100 *lliures* for the daughters of artisans, 150 *lliures* for the daughters of substantial peasant farmers and 55 *lliures* for smallholders and agricultural labourers.<sup>23</sup> Twenty-five *lliures* represented at least two years' wages for a domestic servant, however. It would have paid a year's rent for an apartment in a poorer street in Barcelona, or have been more than adequate to furnish a house, at least with second-hand goods, and it would probably have covered the price of a set of artisan's tools, a spinning wheel or possibly the rent for a spinning jenny, or the entry costs for taking on a plot of land on a sharecropping contract.<sup>24</sup> While hardly enough to keep a couple in comfort for their married lives or allow for significant investment, therefore, it was nevertheless probably a sufficient sum on which to marry. For this reason, perhaps, as well as the clearly deserving nature of their recipients, dowry funds do not appear to have been subject to the same fierce criticisms as other forms of relief.

By contrast, the bread doles can be criticised on grounds of both inadequacy and lack of discernment. The first obvious point is that these were mostly limited to a single occasion in the year. Moreover, the income available to most doles casts doubt on just how large the distribution would have been. Table 2 shows the distribution of all endowments in the 1772-4 Girona sample according to annual income where this is stated. In some cases, all or part of the income was in kind rather than cash. Where this was the case, I have calculated the equivalent value based on the average of the relevant grain, wine and oil prices on the Girona market for the years 1772-4.<sup>25</sup> The picture is rather damning. While the mean income was 80.2 *lliures*, the median was only 10.8 *lliures*, and nearly a third of these charitable funds had under five *lliures* per year. In 1772, five *lliures* would have purchased a *quartera* (72 litres) of grain, which is estimated to have provided about a quarter of the annual consumption of cereal for one adult male in Catalonia.<sup>26</sup> Without knowing the numbers attending, it is impossible to say how generous distributions could be. Some parishes, however, confessed that they could no longer meet the requirements of the original bequest. The parish priest of

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<sup>22</sup> AHG 677, Banyoles, 'Causa pia Casa Rabassa'.

<sup>23</sup> Rosa Congost and Rosa Ros, 'Change in society, continuity in marriage: an approach to social dynamics through marriage contracts, Catalonia (1750-1850)', *Continuity and Change*, 28.2 (2013).

<sup>24</sup> Barcelona rents taken from Elisa Badosa, 'Els lloguers de cases a la ciutat de Barcelona (1780-1834)', *Recerques*, 10 (1980), pp. 139-56.

<sup>25</sup> Prices are taken from Gaspar Feliu, *Precios y salarios en la Cataluña moderna* (Banco de España, 1991), vol. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Josep Colomé, Enric Saguer and Enric Vicedo, 'Las condiciones de reproducción económica de las unidades familiares campesinas en Cataluña a mediados del siglo XIX' in J. Martínez (ed.), *El nivel de vida en la España rural, siglos XVIII-XX* (Alicante, 2002), pp. 321-56. The authors base this estimate mostly on nineteenth-century data (see n. 14)

Bescanó reported that the loaves distributed in his parish every Easter by the Gironés family were now only 8 or 9 ounces in weight, instead of the pound stipulated in the original bequest, ‘because of the great crowd of the poor who attend’.<sup>27</sup> In Montcal, the administrators of the dole founded in 1582 by Joan Amat admitted that now the distribution of bread could not be done every year, but only whenever funds were sufficient.<sup>28</sup>

**Table 2: Annual income of all endowed charities where income known, 1772-4**

Annual income (Catalan pounds)	Number charities	%
<5	14	31.1
5-9.99	9	20.0
10-19.99	7	15.6
20-49.99	9	20.0
50-99.99	2	4.4
100-999	3	6.7
1000+	2	4.4
	<b>46</b>	

To a great extent, these funds had suffered from erosion of income over time. In the majority of cases, their income was in cash, derived from investment in *censals*. These were a form of disguised loan, whereby the creditor loaned a sum of money in return for an annual ‘interest’ payment (*pensió*) by the debtor. The debtor was under no obligation to pay back the capital by any given date and, indeed, many *censals* ran for generations, with credit and debt being inherited, or sometimes sold or transferred to other parties. Essentially, the *censal* was a form of long-term investment that guaranteed a fixed income to the creditor provided titles were not lost and that payments could be enforced. Details of who paid the *pensions* are not available for all charities, but where they are, in most cases, the *censals* were small loans to smallholders or artisans from the parish or surrounding area. In fact, many of those who were effectively funding poor relief were probably at risk of needing charity themselves, and administrators may have been reluctant to squeeze payments out of people they knew to be in need. Inevitably, therefore, many funds dependent on *censals* suffered a loss of income over the long run, as obligations to pay were tied to individuals who could die, move away or evade payment. The administrators of the Siurana charity admitted that titles had been lost and thus income could no longer be claimed.<sup>29</sup> To make matters worse, a government edict of 1750 reduced the interest payable on *censals* from 5% to 3%. Endowed charities thus experienced a 40% fall in income from *censals* overnight. The village of Crespià had to stop its bread dole after 1750, since the fall in interest rates effectively wiped out the available funds; what little income was still coming in had to

<sup>27</sup> AHG 677.

<sup>28</sup> AHG 691, *Causa pia de Joan Amat de Montcal*.

<sup>29</sup> AHG 677

be assigned to masses for the donor's soul.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, in a period of rapidly rising prices, the purchasing power of an income from fixed rents in cash was declining.

The picture that thus emerges is of a form of charitable giving that had made sense in the medieval period, when funds might have been sufficient to provide a reasonably generous dole, particularly if the poor could take advantage of different bread doles offered on different dates by parishes within walking distance, and could combine these with other types of almsgiving. By the late eighteenth century, with rising prices and fears of vagrancy, their function appeared both more limited and a threat to public order. Indeed, this perception formed the justification for appropriating these funds to the new workhouse. The workhouse committee even attacked the Girona bread charity (*Pia Almoina*) on these same grounds of inadequacy, despite this charity being rich enough to distribute bread at least twice a week for four months of the year. Bread doles were easy to attack on other grounds. For some parishes, the crowds that gathered for bread distributions, often from outside the parish, were perceived as a danger to public order. The authorities of Castellfollit de la Roca petitioned the bishop in 1677 to commute their bread dole to a dowry fund on the grounds that fights often broke out between soldiers at the local barracks and those queuing for bread outside the church, 'causing riots amongst the poorer sorts of this town [...] with much shouting by those who received this charity'.<sup>31</sup> In addition, the bread dole was not sufficiently discerning: many rich households also received the dole. In Girona, it was claimed that households sent their servants along to the bread charity instead of paying them full wages. In Palafrugell, the *Pia Almoina de Pere Barceló*, one of the richer charities, stopped its bread dole from 1776, distributing the funds in cash, grain or bread to poor households instead, 'since many went to the bread dole who had no need of help, to the detriment of the truly poor, as often tends to happen with these general charities'.<sup>32</sup> The parish priest of Sant Jordi Desvalls questioned if a bread distribution that was offered to the entire parish could really be considered 'charity'.<sup>33</sup>

Given all this, it is surprising that so many parishes continued to collect income, keep accounts and other records and go to the trouble (even if it was just once a year) of buying grain, having it milled and the flour baked into bread, and then distributing it. Even more surprisingly, some parishes fought hard to keep their funds from being appropriated by the *hospicio*. Many protested in their initial replies to the bishop or dragged their heels when asked for information or to produce documents. Palafrugell, Sant Feliu de Guíxols and Sant Llorenç de la Muga went to the trouble and expense of hiring notaries to fight their case. That of Sant Feliu de Guíxols went all the way to the Council of Castile, the supreme authority in the kingdom. Despite public order issues, it was clear that

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<sup>30</sup> AHG 676, letter from the village councillors of Crespià dated 6<sup>th</sup> April 1772.

<sup>31</sup> ADG, *Institucions causes pies*, vol. 18, fols 121v-126r.

<sup>32</sup> AHG 728, *Pia Almoina de Pere Barceló de Palafrugell*, accounts for 1776-9, unfoliated.

<sup>33</sup> AHG 677, Sant Jordi Desvalls

the bread dole was often an occasion for community gatherings and thus strengthened and reinforced community ties, particularly in those places where the bread dole was in the hands of local families. Witness statements submitted with the petition to keep their funds from Sant Llorenç de la Muga testified to the benefits of the charity in providing outdoor relief to families as well as the bread dole, but also stressed the symbolic importance to the community of the annual dole.

Nonetheless, it is significant that those parishes that fought hardest to keep their funds were often those using those funds in more effective ways, undoubtedly because they had more substantial endowments. Banyoles and Camprodon were both using their charity funds to pay for schoolteachers, the latter at least with the permission of the bishop, though this did not stop their funds being requisitioned. Palafrugell, Sant Feliu de Guíxols and Sant Llorenç de la Muga were all providing payments direct to needy households instead of or alongside bread doles by 1770. Sant Llorenç had been making such payments since the end of the seventeenth century at least (the surviving accounts do not go further back). Sant Feliu de Guíxols had amalgamated what were originally two foundations (indeed, there was confusion by 1772 as to which rents belonged to which foundation) and gave outdoor relief to households in need as well as distributing bread. The town councillors put up a strong fight to keep their funds, arguing amongst other things that local funds should be used for the poor in the locality, not siphoned off to the city. Similar arguments were voiced by the town councillors and parish priest of Palafrugell, who petitioned the king to be allowed to keep their funds. They argued that very little was spent on the bread dole, rather, funds were used to help labouring households through periods of difficulty when sickness prevented them from working and to supplement the wages of sailors. They pointed out that it was both unjust and illogical that such families should be reduced to begging in order to obtain relief, given that the objective of the workhouses was to prevent begging.

Elsewhere in Catalonia there are other examples of poor relief being provided in more targeted ways. The parish of Alpens in the diocese of Vic, in central Catalonia, had a fund endowed by Magdalena Vila to provide relief to the sick poor of the parish. The surviving accounts are unusual in naming the recipients.<sup>34</sup> We can therefore see patterns whereby the same individual received several payments over the course of a few weeks or months, suggesting longer-term help, as well as one-off payments. For example, in 1705, Gabriel Comella, described as a *treballador* (a labourer, but possibly with a small plot of land of his own) and Margarida Ferrer, a widow, both received single payments of 15 and 8 *sous* respectively, while Maria Domas received handouts of grain in July and December of 1704, followed by several small cash payments over the summer of 1705, and Josep Vicens, another *treballador*, also received several payments over the summer and autumn of 1705 totalling 2 *lliures* and 17 *sous*. The charity continued to make payments to the sick poor up to 1833. Payments vary in size, suggesting an assessment of need was being made. Similarly, the parish of

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<sup>34</sup> Arxiu Episcopal de Vic (AEV), Arxius Parroquials, Alpens, M2.

Monmell in Tarragona, to the south, distributed grain and cloth not as a general dole but to specific households.<sup>35</sup> Further archival research is likely to reveal more examples. It may be the case that these examples of funds being used more effectively represent those parishes where charities were better endowed. It is worth remembering, however, that other parishes may have been supporting their poor through other forms of charity, such as almsgiving, which the sources fail to capture for the most part.

### **Charity committees (Juntas de Caritat)**

By the late eighteenth century, reformers were urging for all charitable funds, both endowed charities and casual almsgiving, to be channelled in more efficient ways to clearly deserving recipients. One variation on this theme was the creation of the *hospicios*, as already mentioned, with funds going to indoor relief. Alongside this, however, were projects for outdoor relief, embodied in the creation of the *Juntas de Caridad* or charity committees. Barcelona had a short-lived committee in 1763-4, set up as an ad hoc response to harvest failure and high prices, which ran soup kitchens for the poor.<sup>36</sup> In 1778, however, the first proper *Junta de Caridad* was set up on a permanent basis in Madrid, with sub-committees for each neighbourhood in charge of holding door-to-door collections as well as administering other forms of charitable giving.<sup>37</sup> Funds were to support both indoor and outdoor relief. A law of 1785 urged the setting-up of further committees in all provincial and district capitals.<sup>38</sup> Barcelona established a second committee in 1799, again in response to the crisis caused by high prices, and ran soup kitchens and other charitable activities until 1803, when it transferred its efforts to setting-up and running a new workhouse, the Casa de Caridad.

Although envisaged as urban institutions, it seems any parish could establish a charity committee. A recent study has highlighted the work of the Junta de Caridad set up in 1799 in the town of Vilafranca del Penedès under the auspices of a local enlightened lawyer, Manuel Barba i Roca, with the aim of undertaking a long-term reform of local administration of poor relief.<sup>39</sup> Within two years, it was running a regular soup kitchen for poor families throughout the winter months and a school for poor girls, as well as providing outdoor relief for an unstated number of households. The emphasis was very much on self-help and efficiency: labourers were relieved by employing them to plant potatoes and other vegetables for the soup kitchen, and girls were provided with clothing that would enable them to find work in domestic service. In 1804, the *Junta* offered a prize, advertised in the Barcelona newspapers, to anyone who could invent a machine for pureeing potatoes for Rumford

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<sup>35</sup> Arxiu Històric de l'Arquebisbat de Tarragona (AHAT), Arxius Parroquials, 6.90 Monmell, 'Llibre de la causa pia'.

<sup>36</sup> Pierre Vilar, *La Catalogne dans l'Espagne moderne*, 3 vols (Paris, 1962), vol. 2, pp. 410-18; Antoni Simon, 'Barcelona i Catalunya durant la crisi de subsistències de 1763-1764' in *La població catalana a l'edat moderna. Deu estudis* (Bellaterra, 1996), pp. 193-210.

<sup>37</sup> J. Soubeyroux, 'El encuentro del pobre y la sociedad: asistencia y represión social en el Madrid del siglo XVIII', *Estudios de Historia Social*, 20-21 (1982).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Ramon Arnabat, *Manuel Barba i Roca (1752-1824). Entre l'humanisme i la Il·lustració* (Vilafranca del Penedès, 2006), pp. 127-61, 269-79.

soups, the soups having been eulogised by Barba i Roca the previous year as an economical means of feeding the poor.

Even more intriguing, however, is the example that has come to light of the small village of Batea in south-west Catalonia, which founded its charity committee in 1786.<sup>40</sup> Accounts survive for only two years, 1786 and 1789. What is striking, however, is that both years the committee ended in credit; in 1789 with almost double the funds available at the start, simply through bequests and collections in church. In 1786, only 3% of expenditure went on indoor relief in the small local hospital. Of the rest, 43% was spent helping 37 households through short-term periods of illness and paying for food, and the remaining 53% was spent on daily pensions to a crippled artisan, a poor widow with four children, another two widows and a young woman. In addition, the relatives of two orphan children were being paid to look after them and they were being educated. Most interestingly, the committee had brought two local girls back from the Barcelona Misericòrdia hospital, along with an unnamed orphan boy, and was paying them to teach cotton spinning and carding to others, as well as apprenticing the boy to a rope-maker. The accounts for 1789 are even more impressive. Again, expenditure on the hospital was minimal: just 4.5% including the salary of the warden. The bulk of expenditure had gone on outdoor relief, either temporary help with illness or regular pensions to widows, orphans and labourers “burdened with children”, including milk for two babies, but also on the school for poor children. A new expense had been the purchase of five oilskins to loan to local families to carry olive oil up from the olive press to their houses.

These are, of course, just a few examples of poor relief at the local level in southern Europe. In the absence of additional evidence, it is impossible to say as yet how often local poor relief was generously funded and sensitively administered; and how often communities struggled to amass resources or lacked the individuals capable of administering them efficiently. Poor relief in southern Europe could share many of the merits of English poor relief in terms of helping poor households to survive without splitting them up or interning their members. It clearly could, in some places, such as the example of Batea, function well.<sup>41</sup> The difference is that, in England, local efforts were sanctioned and given structure and direction by a national scheme of legislation, based on a system of compulsory taxation that effectively avoided the danger that some parishes would offer relief and others not (the “free rider” problem).<sup>42</sup> A key question for further research into poor relief in southern Europe is therefore how far the absence of a system based on compulsory taxation affected the ability of parishes to raise revenue for the poor. This brings us back to the question of the relative generosity of poor relief across Europe. It would appear that government relief expenditure at least was greater in England and the Dutch Republic than elsewhere. It remains an open question, however, whether

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<sup>40</sup> The description of this committee and its surviving accounts are to be found in the Arxiu de la Diputació de Barcelona, *llogalls* 12 and 13.

<sup>41</sup> Hickey also stresses the extent of local dynamism that existed in France. Hickey, *Local hospitals*, pp. 122-33.

<sup>42</sup> Richard Smith, “Charity, self-interest and welfare: reflections from demographic and family history” in Daunton (ed.), *Charity, self-interest and welfare*.

greater generosity was the result of more efficient systems of raising revenue, a greater willingness to give to charitable causes, or of greater levels of overall wealth in these societies.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has sought to present an agenda for future research into differences in poor relief provision across Europe, using Catalonia as a case study to test the notion that southern poor relief was restricted to urban areas and supposedly inadequate both in terms of expenditure and the indiscriminate manner in which it was administered. The paper has questioned the view that poor relief in the south was restricted to urban areas, pointing to the evidence for a wide range of welfare in the countryside. It has also suggested that Hufton's view that rural poor relief was "inadequate" may be unfair: not only is our knowledge of rural poor relief too thin to endorse such a claim but, more importantly, assessments of the adequacy of welfare depend very much on the degree to which poor relief was supposed to subsidise the household economy.

The paper has focused mainly on endowed charities in the form of dowry funds and bread doles, using a set of parish returns for the diocese of Girona, combined with other sources. Both types of endowed charity had clear limitations in terms of the extent of relief provided. As with Hufton's assessment of French poor relief, however, the end of the eighteenth century may not provide the best standpoint from which to evaluate the provision of poor relief. Prior to the economic difficulties of the later eighteenth century, the picture may have been less sombre. Even in the 1770s and 1780s, some parishes did manage funds effectively and sensibly, including channelling relief in different directions from that of the original bequest, and reorganising almsgiving through charity committees. How typical such parishes were and how effective their efforts could be in the absence of a legislative framework such as that of the English poor law is a question that merits further research.