

¶ Coloquios dos simples, e
drogas he cousas medicinais da India, e
alsi dalgũas frutas achadas nella onde se
tratam algũas cousas tocantes a medicina,
pratica, e outras cousas boas, pera saber
cõpostos pello Doutor garçia dorta : fisico
del Rey nosso senhor, vistos pello muyto
Reuerendo senhor, ho liçençado
Alexos diaz : falcam desenbar-
gador da casa da supricaça
inquisidor nestas
partes.



¶ Com priuilegio do Conde visó Rey.

Im presso em Goa, por Ioannes
de endem as x. dias de
Abril de 1563. annos.

The Matter of China in Garcia de Orta's *Colóquios dos simples e drogas da Índia* (Goa, 1563)

RUI MANUEL LOUREIRO*



he fabulous trading deals that could be achieved on the Chinese coast (or *negócios da China*) early on had attracted the attention of Portuguese noblemen and merchants who, after a first visit in 1513 to the island of *Tamão*, at the mouth of the Pearl River, never again interrupted their visits to China. Regular contacts with the Middle Kingdom, besides allowing access to the most valuable Chinese commodities (and especially silks and porcelains), had contributed during half a century to the collection of increasingly broader and more rigorous information about the Chinese world. Around 1563, in the same year that Garcia de Orta's *Coloquios dos simples e drogas he cousas medicinais da Índia* was published in Goa, the Portuguese had obtained permission from Chinese authorities to settle permanently in Macao, a hitherto unoccupied peninsula, located on the coast of the province of Guangdong. The rise of the modest Luso-Chinese port to fame and profit was then just beginning, and in a few decades Macao would become

one of the busiest port-cities in the South China Sea. The prominent role achieved by Portuguese navigation in the easternmost seas of Asia since the early decades of the 16th century and the insistent attempts to find a safe haven on the Chinese coast after the first contacts with Japan in 1542-1543, combined with powerful economic interests of certain sections of the population of Guangdong province, justified this unprecedented territorial cession by the Middle Kingdom, a state that was traditionally closed to the outside world and always keen on its territorial integrity, as well as totally averse to any foreign interference.¹

The oral and manuscript information reported by European observers active in Asia—and not only Portuguese, since they were often accompanied by collaborators from Italy and other European regions—met with a wide circulation in Europe, finding a place, after the mid-16th century, in several printed works relating to the Portuguese expansion.² Some of the travellers that in the first half of the 16th century visited the coastal regions of China prepared manuscript accounts conveying the essence of their experiences. Thanks to these *relations*, the image of the Middle Kingdom, which in the early years of the 16th century was still completely sketchy in Europe, with the passing of the years and the deepening of direct contacts became more defined and rigorous. The news sent from East Asia, by way of Malacca, had even allowed the formation among the Portuguese of a remarkably positive representation of Chinese reality, which after 1550 had found printed expression in the

Coloquios dos simples e drogas e cousas medicinais da India
(Goa, 1563).

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great chronicles of the Portuguese expansion prepared in Portugal by Fernão Lopes de Castanheda and João de Barros.³ The images then spread by these authors—who presented China as one of the most extensive and powerful Asian kingdoms, worthy of greater attention and admiration—gained a growing consistency over the next decade, thanks to the uninterrupted production of manuscript reports by royal officials, missionaries, merchants and adventurers, which confirmed and widened substantially all the news previously collected. Thus, the greatness of China's kingdom became a key topic of the Portuguese vision of the East, also finding an echo in printed works of various kinds, not directly related to the narration of political and military events of Portuguese expansion across the Asian world.

The most interesting example, undoubtedly, for the breadth and depth of knowledge it reveals, is Garcia de Orta's *Colóquios dos simples*, a famous treatise on natural history published in Goa in 1563, which was one of the first works produced by European typography in Asia.⁴ A significant amount of data gathered in this monumental work shows that the author was perfectly convinced that the Middle Kingdom stood in a rather unique place, in the context of the intensive collecting of news about the Asian worlds that was then underway in Portuguese circles, and in which, moreover, the Portuguese physician participated very actively. Garcia de Orta had lived in India for many years, since 1534, dedicated not only to the practice of medicine, a craft in which he served

viceroys, governors and even oriental potentates, but also to commercial activities, dealing especially with substances related to his medical projects. The pages of the *Colóquios dos simples* discreetly refer to ships that the Portuguese naturalist dispatched to several Asian destinations and that were certainly participating in the profitable exchange of goods, which were then making the fortune of many of his countrymen. This long Asian experience was also applied in the systematic research of information about the origin, distribution and use of the main 'medical drugs', the 'simple remedies' and 'other plants and fruits' of the East that are mentioned in the title of his treatise.⁵ Garcia de Orta, very explicitly, had led broad and in-depth inquiries into the Asian natural world, precisely with a view to drafting a natural history—and also moral history, as then one could say—of the East Indies.

In 1563, after nearly 30 years of residence in Hindustan, the former student of the universities of Salamanca and Alcalá published, in the printing press of Johannes von Emden, recently installed in Goa, a voluminous treatise on exotic botany, to which he gave the extensive title of *Coloquios dos simples, e drogas he cousas medicinais da India, e assi dalgũas frutas achadas nella onde se tratam algũas cousas tocantes a medicina, pratica, e outras cousas boas, pera saber* ('Colloquies on the simples and drugs and medicinal things of India, and also of some fruits therein found, where some things touching upon practical medicine are dealt with, and also other proper things to know'; hereinafter abbreviated to *Colóquios dos simples*). Using a significant specialised bibliography available at the time—and made up of a combination of classical, medieval and modern authors, Western, but also Eastern⁶—Garcia de Orta produced an absolutely innovative work, where information and interpretations carried by the traditional literature intermingled with news and surprises resulting from half a century of intensive first-hand contacts with the Asian world. But the *Colóquios dos simples* was much more than a simple treatise on natural history, because Garcia de Orta, rather predictably, when dealing with botanical and medical issues, also collected a vast store of news about 'some customs of this country'.⁷ That is, the illustrious writer, alongside his inquiries into the natural world related to medicine, could not fail to be interested in many of the social and cultural practices associated with the production, circulation and consumption of products

that he wanted to study. On the other hand, while reporting on certain clinical cases he had been involved in, Orta frequently summoned scenes of everyday life in India. Thus, his treatise, besides including reports on the simples and drugs, also contained valuable notes—not systematised—on many other aspects of Eastern reality. And in this context, one of the Asian regions that seems to have aroused greater interest in Garcia de Orta was precisely China, on the subject of which it is possible to find, in his monumental treatise, the most diverse allusions and references, which will be here analysed very briefly.⁸

The Portuguese naturalist, it is well known, never travelled east of Cape Comorin, and circulated exclusively along the western coast of India, from Cambay to Ceylon, along routes that are basically identified, although there still are some twilight zones relating to the dating of certain specific journeys. Thus, to document himself about the most eastern regions of Asia, from whence came many of the products that aroused his curiosity and interest, he had to resort to Portuguese and Asian informers and mediators well-acquainted with those places. Garcia de Orta, as a matter of fact, proceeded with great scrupulousness, because whenever he could not use his own observations, as in the case of China, he always tried to appeal to persons entirely deserving of credit, especially by the fact that they presented themselves as eyewitnesses and because they belonged to the most relevant social groups. This criterion, applied to the Chinese territory, immediately raises some problems, because until 1563, the printing date of the *Colóquios dos simples*, very few Portuguese had had access to the islands of the southern coast of China and to the port of Guangzhou (or Canton), a circumstance that greatly conditioned the obtaining of more consistent reports. However, when it came to market commodities, Garcia de Orta's countrymen would be relatively well-informed, through their role as indispensable middlemen in the trade between the Middle Kingdom and other regions of the South China Sea.

Many of the collaborators of Orta's huge enterprise of information collection and compilation, although presented as reliable informants, fully worthy 'of faith', are kept anonymous by the learned author. The Portuguese physician, however, explicitly identifies others.⁹ One of these informants was Diogo Pereira, 'a nobleman well-known in these parts', a regular visitor of

Drawing of Goa, in the manuscript *Roteiro de Goa a Diu* by D. João de Castro, 1540 (Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, Lisbon).



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the regions surrounding the South China Sea.¹⁰ Diogo Pereira was one of the wealthiest Portuguese merchants from Goa, where his brother Guilherme Pereira had a residence that was said to be the largest, after the palace of the viceroys, in the Portuguese-controlled territory. Holders of a huge fortune, the Pereira brothers had several merchant vessels, which navigated the Asian seas in all directions.¹¹ Diogo Pereira always maintained a close relationship with China, at least since the 1540s, and at the time of the publication of the *Colóquios dos simples* he was based in Macao, where he held the official post of captain-major (*capitão-mór*) of the Portuguese enclave.¹² The contacts that he established with China thus explain the relevance ascribed to him by Garcia de Orta, as a supplier of information and products of Chinese origin. And although his presence only becomes explicit in the ‘third colloquy of ambergris’,¹³ it seems certain that Pereira was at the origin of the reports on several other Chinese natural substances that appear in the *Colóquios dos simples*.

Most of the news about the Middle Kingdom found in the *Colóquios dos simples* may be related to commodities that were traded on the Chinese coast by the Portuguese and Luso-Asian middlemen. Garcia de Orta, in this sense, reveals a deep knowledge of the Asian trading geography, properly locating the source of several products, explaining the way they were obtained and packaged, stressing their therapeutic applications, clarifying the various names designating them and sometimes even listing their prices.¹⁴ Natural history and the world of merchandise, in the *Colóquios dos simples*, are absolutely inseparable. Manuscript accounts about Asian commodities often circulated in the Portuguese settlements in India, containing these kinds of reports, such as those that appear in the anonymous *Livro das cousas da Índia e do Japão* (‘Book on the things of India and Japan’), compiled in Goa around 1548.¹⁵ However, since the early decades of the 16th century no other text had analysed the subject so thoroughly, as the *Colóquios dos simples* now did. Meanwhile, Garcia de Orta, faithful to the purposes of his textual enterprise, concentrated his attention mainly on natural products, especially those that had some sort of medicinal use, neglecting other merchandise, even if it had higher exchange values. Let us look at some examples taken from the *Colóquios dos simples*.

The first such product is ambergris, regularly consumed by the Chinese, because, according to Orta’s



Goa's market, illustration from the *Itinerario* by Jan Huyghen van Linschoten (Amsterdam, 1596).

informers, ‘it is very useful in the conversation with women’, besides being beneficial ‘to the heart and brain and the stomach’.¹⁶ Traditional Chinese medicine, in fact, attributed important properties to ambergris, for its alleged stimulant and even aphrodisiac effects, and also as a component of longevity elixirs. And, as the Portuguese physician declared, ‘what is marvellous is the fact that in China they value it much more than in any other Asian market’.¹⁷ Moreover, it has been suggested that one of the reasons that explains the exceptional authorisation granted for the installation of the Portuguese in Macao would have been the high demand of ambergris then existing among the Cantonese mandarins. Any Chinese civil servant posted in Guangzhou who could ensure the purchase of this rare product, and later could send it on to the imperial court in Beijing, would have immediate benefits in his career within the official civil service.

And the Portuguese, omnipresent in the main maritime routes that linked China to the western part of the Indian Ocean, from whence came the largest portion of ambergris supplies, then appeared in the eyes of the Chinese mandarins as the ideal partners.¹⁸ But, according to the findings of Diogo Pereira himself, the Portuguese, as well as the Chinese, were unaware of the true origins of this substance.

Garcia de Orta, with some sense of humour, said that ‘it is better to have a good store of this remedy than to know about its origin’, although he declines to comment on whether its use was part of his clinical practice. Incidentally, this is one of the many puzzles of the *Colóquios dos simples*: in many of the chapters, the careful reader will continue to be ignorant of whether or not the author uses the drug or simple he is discussing. But Orta was well aware of the high value of ambergris, even advancing some of the then current notions

that it derived from ‘whale sperm’, from ‘dung of sea animals’, or from a product emanated by underwater sources.¹⁹ On this theme he quoted several authorities, not all of them first-hand readings, in a procedure regularly used throughout the *Colóquios dos simples*, to demonstrate a solid knowledge of the literary medical culture of his day and age: Aetius of Amida, a Byzantine physician of the 6th century; Serapion, or Yuhanna ibn Sarabiyun, a Syriac physician of the 9th century; Avicenna, the famous physician of Uzbek origin, active in the transition from the 10th to the following century; Averroes, a 12th century philosopher and physician, native of Cordoba; and Giovanni Manardo, an almost contemporary Italian doctor.²⁰ But none of these authors provided reliable information about the true origin of ambergris, only details of its therapeutic use and suggestions about its provenance. Ambergris, in fact, is a substance produced in the intestines of sperm

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whales (*Physeter catodon*), that is expelled and appears floating in many parts of the Asian coast, from East Africa to the island of Timor, and namely in the vicinity of the Maldives. These ambergris pieces, as reported by Garcia de Orta, were eagerly sought throughout the East, for use in perfumes and also ‘in food, as a medicine’.²¹ Its demand on the Chinese coast, however, exceeded all expectations. The Portuguese naturalist, meanwhile, warns that the ambergris traffic in his own day was becoming compromised because of the excessive amounts of the product that the Portuguese merchants conveyed towards China: ‘it will be worth less, over there, on account of the greed of those who want to sell it there’—an observation that seems to justify the association between the commerce of this valuable commodity and the establishment of the Portuguese in Macao.²²

Portuguese ships also transported to the Chinese ports appreciable amounts of aromatics used in China

in numerous rituals of everyday life. Since the first decades of the 16th century, the Portuguese had found that all kinds of incense, produced from plants grown mainly in insular and mainland Southeast Asia, were constantly present in Chinese life, in religious ceremonies, in artistic events, in worship rituals for ancestors, in medical prescriptions, and even in daily household practices, related for example to the counting of time.²³ Thus, commodities such as benzoin, costus, catechu, styrax balsam, eagle-wood, and sandalwood were regularly a part of the cargo transported towards the Chinese ports from Malacca by Portuguese vessels. The Portuguese physician was well-acquainted with this trading movement, and he devoted several chapters of his natural history treatise to materials used to produce odoriferous substances, where references to China abound.

This takes place, first of all, in the colloquium on ‘benzoin’,²⁴ a very aromatic resinous substance,

extracted from trees of the *Styrax* genus in various parts of Southeast Asia, and particularly in the islands of Sumatra and Java, and also in Siam. Orta begins by observing that nothing in particular could be learned in ancient literature about this Asian product, introducing his famous phrase ‘do not scare me with Dioscorides or Galen; because I will say nothing but the truth and what I know’.²⁵ This means that he was expressly emphasising the innovative nature of his textual project, capable of recording first-hand information that would go beyond the knowledge of classic authorities—such as Dioscorides and Galen, Roman physicians of Greek origin, that were active respectively in the 1st and 3rd centuries—who had become popular in Europe since the later years of the 15th century, with the rediscovery and diffusion of many classic texts by European humanists and its diffusion through the printing press.²⁶ Immediately afterwards Orta invoked several contemporary writers—such as the Italian traveller Ludovico Varthema, the Italian physician Antonio Musa Brasavola, and the French doctor Jean de la Ruelle²⁷—but in order to correct or criticise them on their information regarding the source, characteristics and uses of benzoin. Describing the various parts of the tree that produces benzoin, the Portuguese physician further commented that this aromatic product was exported to China from Malacca, and in the latter city sometimes it was mixed with liquid styrax or *roçamalha*, an odoriferous substance originating from Asia Minor. Benzoin, in fact, was used by the Chinese since ancient times, not only in fumigations, but also in the composition of balsams, ointments and syrups.²⁸

The Chinese were also major consumers of costus (*Saussurea costus*), an aromatic root that was harvested on the slopes of the Himalayas and subsequently transported to the Indian coast. Portuguese ships carried this ‘great merchandise’ to Malacca, where the Malays called it *putchuk* (*pucho*, in Portuguese) and from thence took it to the Chinese ports, where it was used in perfumes, incenses, and also in drugs. Garcia de Orta stresses that ‘it gives great fragrance and smell’, and it is so strong that ‘it penetrates the noses of some people, causing headaches’.²⁹ The Portuguese naturalist takes this opportunity to address critical remarks to a wide range of authors who had referred erroneously or wrongly the false varieties of costus, since the product only existed in the northernmost regions of Hindustan.

Thus, authors previously quoted as Galen, Serapion, Avicenna, and also others, such as his contemporaries Andres de Laguna and Pietro Andrea Mattioli—both of them editors of Dioscorides’ work—are successively criticised, on the basis of information gathered by Orta from Persian and Indian physicians.³⁰ Meanwhile, Pliny, the famous Roman naturalist of the 1st century, and the Italian physician Matteo Silvatico, active in the 14th century, are also called into play by the author of *Colóquios dos simples* on the subject of costus.³¹

Most of the news about the Middle Kingdom found in the Colóquios dos simples may be related to commodities that were traded on the Chinese coast by the Portuguese and Luso-Asian middlemen

To justify the existence of a single species of costus, the Indian one, Garcia de Orta uses an extremely interesting explanation: ‘And it should be enough to justify the existence of a single costus that the Chinese, such a discreet and learned people, use a lot of this remedy’. The main interlocutor of the author of the *Colóquios dos simples*, the fictitious doctor Ruano, is rather surprised with this assertion, identifying the Chinese with the ancient Scythians of classical geography: ‘You call on such barbarous and ferocious people, since they are the Asian Schytians?’³² The answer of the Portuguese physician is peremptory, and results in an extensive praise of the Chinese and their culture,³³ which will be worth to comment upon. The Portuguese author begins by presenting the Chinese as ‘very subtle in buying and selling, and also in mechanical crafts’, information that had previously been conveyed by other Portuguese reports. Then he points out that the Chinese ‘in letters are not bellow any others, because they have written laws, in accordance with the common law, and other very fair laws’. Which means that China stood out from the multitude of other Eastern nations in that it had a set of written and extremely elaborate

‘Jente de tera da China’, drawing from the Codex Casanatense 1889, ca. 1548 (Biblioteca Casanatense, Rome).



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Chinese junk, illustration from the *Itinerario* by Jan Huyghen van Linschoten (Amsterdam, 1596).

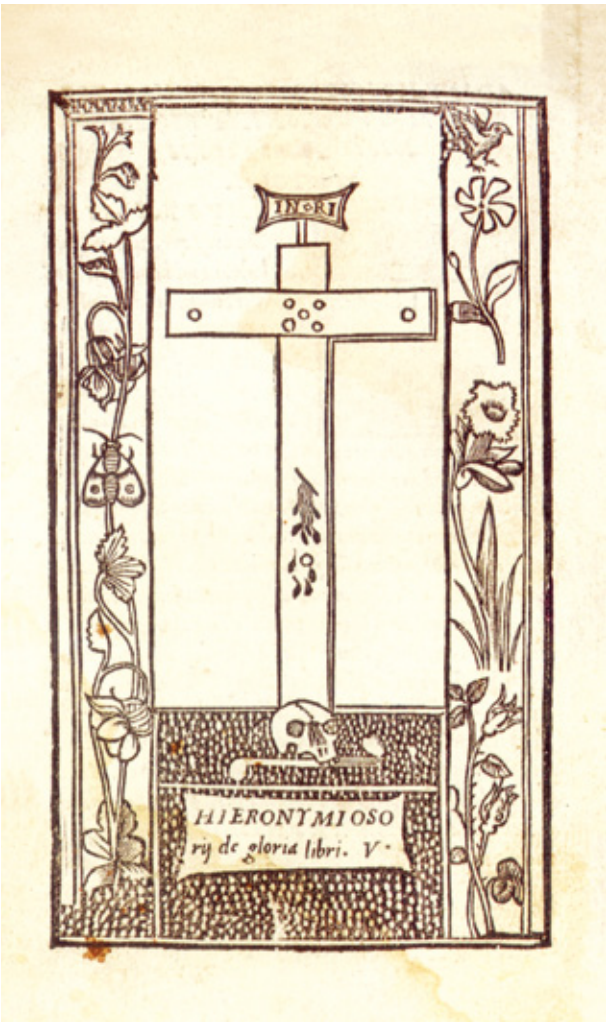
laws, the application of which, incidentally, had already been experimented with at first hand by Portuguese observers. It is almost certain that Garcia de Orta was here referring to the celebrated case of the two junks owned by Diogo Pereira that in 1548 had been captured off the coast of the Chinese province of Fujian, and whose crews had been imprisoned and subjected to a rigorous judicial process in China. The episode gained some notoriety through a manuscript report prepared by Galeote Pereira, one of the Portuguese prisoners who had managed to return to Goa as a free man, and who may even have contacted the Portuguese naturalist.³⁴ But the informer of Orta could also have been his friend Diogo Pereira.

The praise of Chinese laws continues with the enigmatic reference to ‘a book about them that may

be found here in India’. This means that Garcia de Orta would have handled or heard of a Chinese legal code that existed in Goa, brought from China by one of the many Portuguese travellers who had visited that Asian empire. One of the norms contained in that book—manuscript or printed, we do not know—had been transmitted by someone to the author of the *Colóquios dos simples*: ‘one of these laws, which I was told about, is that a man can not marry a woman that he met when she was married to another man’. This reference is rather curious, referring perhaps to potential Jesuit informers, since it is known that members of the Society of Jesus were then involved in an intense process of information collection about China, where they intended to open up one of their missions. They were following in the footsteps of St Francis Xavier,

who died in late 1552 on the island of Sanchoão, off the coast of Guangdong province, where he had landed shortly before, intending to enter the Middle Kingdom. And a briefing on matrimonial law greatly interested the Jesuits, that could somehow be related to this curious book about Chinese laws.³⁵

The description of the Chinese that is included in the colloquy on costus ends with several interesting allusions. The first regards the ‘paintings that are done’ by the Chinese, where ‘chairs and men lecturing are painted’. Regardless of the represented figures, the reference testifies the import by the Portuguese of Chinese works of art, certainly silken textiles decorated with paintings of everyday scenes.³⁶ The ‘men lecturing’ were, of course, Chinese scholars, a social group that had immediately caught the attention of Portuguese observers, and in particular of the missionaries of the Society of Jesus, who were finding with admiration that in the Middle Kingdom access to positions of power was reserved for those scholars who were able to succeed in a complex system of periodic examinations. Garcia de Orta himself mentioned this singular feature of Chinese reality: ‘in those parts scholars receive degrees and honours, and they are those who rule the kingdom and the land’.³⁷ The second reference alludes to the ‘art of printing’, so old in China that ‘there is no memory among them of who invented it’.³⁸ One of the surprises of the first meeting of the Portuguese with China was precisely to witness the existence in that empire of books printed by xylographic means. The Jesuits, notably, had been particularly impressed by the enormous profusion of printed books and the incredible antiquity of Chinese typography. It was even speculated if the invention of Johannes Gutenberg would not have been in any way influenced by the Chinese, considering that 16th century European geographers, unaware of the exact topography of vast regions of Asia, conjectured about the proximity between China and Germany. These assumptions appeared in several Portuguese printed books that Garcia de Orta may have read. On the one hand, the treatise *De Gloria* by D. Jerónimo Osório, published in Coimbra in 1549, where, in a curious and novel information about China—which incidentally shows remarkable similarity to the passage commented on here from the *Colóquios dos simples*—the Portuguese humanist refers to the ‘printing of books’ with ‘metallic types’, a recent practice in Europe, but that in the Middle Kingdom had been used ‘for almost endless

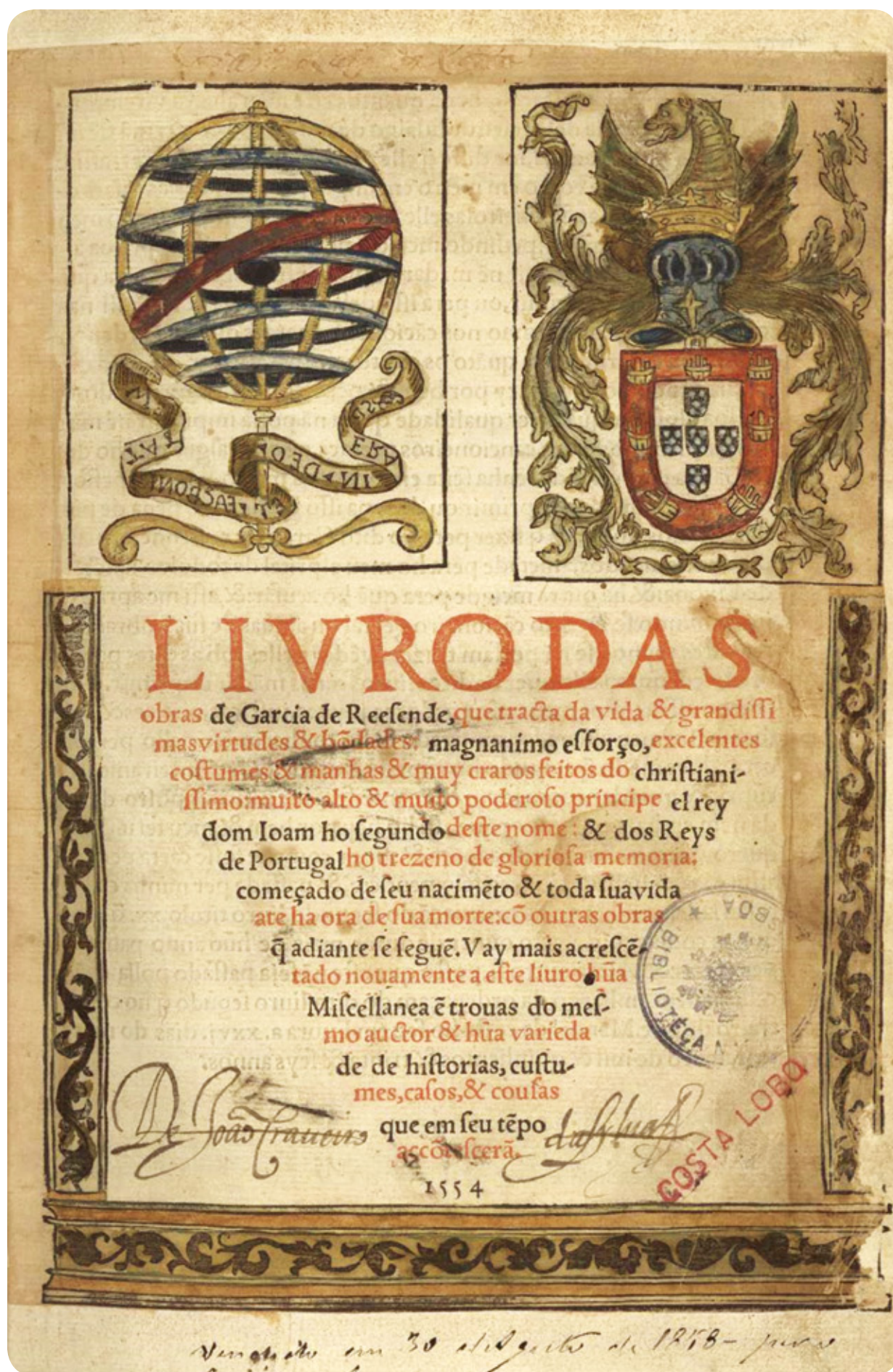


Front page of the treatise *De Gloria* by Jerónimo Osório (Coimbra, 1549).

centuries’.³⁹ On the other hand, the *Miscellanea* by Garcia de Resende, published posthumously in Évora in 1554, where the celebrated Portuguese poet and chronicler, on the subject of the invention of printing, introduced the note ‘Others claim that China was / The first inventor’.⁴⁰ Of the two works, it is at least certain that Orta knew the second, which he mentions explicitly as ‘a treatise on a mixture of things’, an accurate definition of the original title.⁴¹

Catechu (*cate*, in Portuguese) was a product extracted from a tree then common in several northern regions of Hindustan (*Acacia catechu*), which came to Goa by way of Cambay, as reported by Garcia de Orta. This simple was used as a food additive, as a dye, and also as a drug, ‘for the throat and for roundworms and for diarrhoea’.⁴² It was also transported by the

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Front page of the *Livro das obras de Garcia de Resende* (Évora, 1554).

Portuguese to China's coastal markets, where, according to the *Colóquios dos simples*, it was 'spent in large quantities'.⁴³ The Portuguese naturalist, who describes the catechu-producing plant in detail, correctly points out that this substance was a component of betel, a chewing mixture widely used in India and Southeast Asia. The composition, in addition to catechu, included betel leaf, areca nut, lime and mollusc shells.⁴⁴ Orta seems convinced that betel was also used by the Chinese, 'so discreet and learned', a sure indication that catechu was a 'very good remedy'.⁴⁵ Once again, the greatness of China is invoked as an argument to highlight the value of a particular commodity. But the statement on the consumption of betel in China is not confirmed by other contemporary Portuguese printed sources, and could be due to a misunderstanding of the illustrious physician. However, at about the same time, the Portuguese João de Escobar, who in the year of publication of the *Colóquios dos simples* was living in Macao, wrote in his manuscript *Comentários* that Cantonese mandarins usually had with them 'the boxes of their betel'.⁴⁶

Were the Portuguese responsible for the introduction of the chewing mixture in China? Or was the Portuguese informer actually referring to another product, perhaps opium? The question is difficult to answer with the available data. However, it is worth noting that in later years areca nut was consumed in the southern regions of China and even cultivated on the island of Hainan.⁴⁷ Orta quotes several authors, Eastern and Western, classical and modern, on the subject of 'licium', a substance that he thought was identical to catechu. But in reality he and the quoted authors were referring to a completely different product, native of Lycia in Asia Minor.⁴⁸ As a contribution to the complete identification of Garcia de Orta's library, it is worth mentioning the authors quoted on this colloquy: Pliny, Dioscorides, Galen, Serapion, Avicenna, Andres de Laguna, Antonio Musa, and Mattioli, among the authorities previously registered. But there are also some new names: on the one hand, Rasis or al-Razi, a physician of Persian origin, from the 9th-10th centuries; on the other hand, some contemporaries of Orta, such as the Italian 'Friars' Bartolomeo da Orvieto and Angelo Paglia (16th century editors of the work of the Arabian doctor Yuhanna ibn Masawaih, also known as Mesue), the Spanish physician Fernando de Sepúlveda and the German botanist Valerius Cordus.⁴⁹

Portuguese merchants also conveyed to the Chinese ports some other products, which Garcia de Orta lists carefully. Liquid styrax (*Styrax officinale*)—a balsamic and aromatic substance originating from Asia Minor, known by the Portuguese as *roçamalha*—was consumed in moderate amounts. Brought to Goa through Eastern commercial networks, it was then forwarded to other Asian destinations by the Portuguese, and in particular to Malacca, where it was mixed with benzoin, and then dispatched to the Middle Kingdom, where it was much appreciated.⁵⁰ The same happened with cubebs (*Piper cubeba*), small grains originating from a Javanese plant very similar to pepper, which were taken 'from Sunda and Java' to China, where they were used as 'medicine', sometimes as an aphrodisiac, or to 'help Venus', at other times for 'the coldness of the stomach'. Garcia de Orta devotes some space to discuss this product, describing the plant minutely, according to information obtained from 'trustworthy Portuguese' who had spent time in that Indonesian region.⁵¹ And he calls upon a significant list of authorities, discussing whether they would have known and described the true Javanese cubebs: some have already been alluded to, such as Dioscorides, Galen, Serapion, Avicenna, Averroes, Matteo Silvatico, the Friars that published Mesue, Jean de la Ruelle, and Antonio Musa; another, not mentioned previously, was the Byzantine physician Johannes Zacharias 'Actuarius'.⁵² The answer of the Portuguese naturalist is almost always negative, in order to stress the enormous importance of his own inquiries in the reformulation of European / Western knowledge about the Asian natural world.

Finally, three other odoriferous commodities are associated by Garcia de Orta with China. One was eagle-wood, sometimes known as aloes-wood (and *lianaloés*, in Portuguese), a type of wood native to Southeast Asia (*Aquilaria agallocha*), which was used to produce incense. 'Linaloes in China is an highly valuable merchandise', as he writes, and the Portuguese, after buying it on the coast of Champa, where it was known as calambac (*calambuco*, in Portuguese), brought it to the port of Guangzhou, 'the most celebrated in all of China'.⁵³ Once again, the literary references to eagle-wood are reviewed by the author of the *Colóquios dos simples*, in an attempt to determine whether or not the ancient and modern natural history experts had known this scented wood. Garcia de Orta concludes that no previous author had explained properly the

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Esta embaixada
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cartas da China.

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A

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João de Escobar sobre a embaixada que
omuito alto, & muy poderoso Rey do
sebastião mandou a china //

Prologo

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que não he outra cousa virtude senão dar a de; &
aos homens; aquilo q deueias; o que se deue a de
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vontade e como isto assi seja o principal Regouar
do q se a de ter. e todos os nosos atos se escriptura, he
conformar se, com esta virtude: pelo que querendo
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de estillo bezaõ no dyscussão; a spixencia do q pro
meto; dando a cada hum o attributo de sua ualía & a
o tempo o merecimento do q nos promete / Galile

geographical origin, the name, the characteristics, or the best way to use the true eagle-wood. Dioscorides was alluding to a different kind of wood; the same happened with Avicenna; the information gathered by Pliny and Serapion was incomplete, as well as that collected by Averroes; and so on.⁵⁴ Other names mentioned in this colloquy are: Galen, Aetius, Rasis, Matteo Silvatico, the Friars that published Mesue, Fernando de Sepúlveda, Jean de la Ruelle, Antonio Musa, and Valerius Cordus, among authors previously identified. But new names appear, such as: Paulus of Egina, a Byzantine physician of the 7th century; Bartholomaeus Anglicus, a 13th century English physician; and Michele Savonarola, 14th century Italian doctor. And also some of Orta's contemporaries, such as the Spanish physician Bernardino de Laredo and the French physician Symphorien Champier.⁵⁵

In China, as one would expect, eagle-wood was used in incense manufacturing. The other odoriferous merchandise was white sandalwood (*Santalum album*). This precious wood was found exclusively 'in Timor, where there is the greatest quantity', as the *Colóquios dos simples* correctly refer, and the Portuguese had been transporting sandalwood to the Chinese ports since the early decades of the 16th century. As a matter of fact, they had for the most part replaced the Chinese junks that since ancient times had sailed to that island in the easternmost part of Indonesia in search of sandalwood.⁵⁶ The Portuguese naturalist had obtained detailed information about the Timorese tree—which he describes in some detail—through 'a merchant, who knows these lands'.⁵⁷ Widely used throughout the East in various applications, white sandalwood was consumed in China mainly for the production of incense, perfumes and aromatic oils.⁵⁸ The chapter on sandalwood, which distinguishes two other species of this precious wood, also includes a thorough review of the information available in natural history treatises to which the author had had access; Garcia de Orta endeavouring to correct all detected errors and misconceptions in relation to the differentiation of the three varieties of sandalwood, in terms of names, characteristics and geographical origins.⁵⁹ The quoted authors, all of them previously identified, were: Galen, Serapion, Rasis, Avicenna, Averroes, the Friars that

published Mesue, Fernando de Sepúlveda, Mattioli, and Antonio Musa.

One of the surprises of the first meeting of the Portuguese with China was precisely to witness the existence in that empire of books printed by xylographic means.

One of these authors, Antonio Musa Brasavola, mentioned earlier, was quoted as saying that 'we owe the sandalwood to the Portuguese, who bring it from the field of Calicut, where it is harvested'.⁶⁰ Orta immediately corrects this claim, explaining that when the Portuguese first arrived in India they disembarked at that Indian port-city, today known as Kozhikode, which was then an important commercial emporium, where merchandise from all over Asia could be found, including white sandalwood. This was probably the origin of the confusion of the Italian author.⁶¹ Meanwhile, in passing, Garcia de Orta mentions 'the factory of the Chinese called *Chinacota*', where in older times 'the Chinese had lived', and which still existed in the middle years of the 16th century.⁶² He was referring, of course, to the traces of the great Chinese maritime expeditions, which in the first decades of the 15th century visited many Asian ports, even reaching the east coast of Africa. Before the publication of the *Colóquios dos simples* in 1563, at least one contemporary Portuguese writer recorded information about these celebrated expeditions commanded by Admiral Zheng He, that took place between 1403 and 1433, under the orders of the Chinese Emperor Yongle.⁶³ Indeed, Fernão Lopes de Castaneda, in his *História do descobrimento e conquista da Índia pelos Portugueses* ('History of the discovery and conquest of India by the Portuguese'), published in Coimbra between 1551 and 1561, had written at least twice about the traces of the Chinese maritime expansion; first about the region of Martaban, in Burma, where pieces of artillery with Chinese inscriptions had been found,⁶⁴ and secondly about the region of Cochin (modern day Kochi), where in

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the 1530's some 'metal boards with engraved serpents and Chinese letters' where uncovered.⁶⁵ Garcia de Orta could have read the work of the Portuguese chronicler, who incidentally he may have known personally, as they coincided in India between 1534 and 1538.⁶⁶ But in the case of the reports concerning the Chinese expeditions it is doubtful that Lopes de Castanheda was his source of information.

Other Portuguese authors alluded at the time to the traces left in India by the expeditions commanded by Zheng He: first, Antonio Galvão, in his *Tratado dos Descobrimentos* ('Treatise on the Discoveries'); secondly, João de Barros, in the third 'decade' (or volume) of his *Asia*; and thirdly, Gaspar Correia, in the manuscript of his *Lendas da Índia* ('Legends of India'). In the first two cases, although both authors referred in some detail to the matter at hand, Garcia de Orta would not have had time to consult the works of Galvão and Barros, which were published in Lisbon in 1563, in the same year that the *Colóquios dos simples* came out of the presses in Goa. The slowness of maritime communications between Portugal and India would not allow for these two works to be available to him before 1564.⁶⁷ In the third case, the Portuguese physician could have had access to some version of Correia's manuscript, since he lived and wrote in India at least until 1563, where they could have crossed paths, because they frequented the same Portuguese official circles. And the *Lendas da Índia*, though with some mistakes, namely chronological, alluded in several passages to the 15th century maritime voyages of the Chinese. In the section dedicated to the first voyage of Vasco da Gama to India, for example, Gaspar Correia reported that in the town of Kannur (or Cananor) he had heard the story of the arrival from the parts of Malacca and China, 400 years before, of more than 'eight hundred vessels, large and small, with people of many nations, all laden with rich merchandise'. Many of these newcomers had settled in those lands, 'becoming natives'.⁶⁸ No specific mention of the Chinese was recorded. However, another passage of the *Lendas da Índia* confirmed that this would be people coming from China, since Gaspar Correia refers to '*Chinacota*, which means the fortress of the Chinese', adding that this place 'had been the settlement of the Chinese when they were in Calicut and in India'.⁶⁹ In a third section, dedicated to a military expedition led by Martim Afonso de Sousa against Repelim, in 1536, Gaspar Correia reports the discovery of a white marble

slab with inscriptions that recounted that 'four hundred and seventy [years] before, the Chinese came to India with a thousand junks laden with merchandise, and they were all over India', before going back to China forty years later.⁷⁰

The chronology of the composition of the *Lendas da Índia* is uncertain, but it is not impossible that Garcia de Orta had had access to the original manuscript or a copy thereof, as there are some similarities between the information both authors include in their works about the traces of the great maritime expeditions lead by Zheng He. The *Colóquios dos simples*, however, present a broader and more accurate view on this subject. Throughout the different colloquies, in fact, one may find multiple allusions—most often quite discreet—to these great Chinese maritime voyages, which established permanent trading posts in several Asian ports, including Calicut. As witnessed by the frequency and the content of his allusions, Garcia de Orta appears to have been well aware of the greatness and importance of this exploratory movement, which curiously coincided with the 15th century Portuguese expansion along the western coast of Africa. So, he notes that the Chinese had visited the coast of Hindustan in 'high board ships', called junks, 'a sort of long ships with similar stern and bow'.⁷¹ When referring to a visit he had made to the famous underground temple located on the island of Elephanta in the Bombay area, Orta speculates on the possibility that the Chinese were its builders, 'when they navigated to these lands', adding that 'it may as well be true, because it is so well built and the Chinese are so subtle'.⁷² In Calicut there was 'a factory, similar to a fortress, which today still remains, and it is called *Chinacota*, which means fortress of Chinese'. And in Cochin, according to Garcia de Orta, there existed a stone slab 'as a reminder and in memory of the arrival of the Chinese'. The memory of these voyages, according to the Portuguese naturalist, was particularly alive in Hormuz, where references in local chronicles testified to the arrival, in times past, of 'four hundred junks' in the same monsoon.⁷³

Still on the matter of imported products, Garcia de Orta notes that the Chinese markets absorbed large amounts of 'thure', a fragrant resin originated in Arabia and Somalia. *Thure*, of course, is the Latin name for incense, the product of several species of the genus *Boswellia*. It is somehow strange that the Portuguese

naturalist uses the Latin term in the title of his 'fifty-fifth colloquy of thure, which is incense, and myrrh', dedicated to these two odoriferous substances.⁷⁴ The colloquy in question is extremely brief, the author using news provided by 'Portuguese that lived long years in the land where it comes from',⁷⁵ as well as information collected in classical and modern authors, such as Dioscorides, Serapion, Avicenna, and 'our Castilians'.⁷⁶ In this last instance Orta was probably alluding to the Italian Pietro Martyr d'Anghiera, who had published in the 1520s a chronicle of the discovery of the New World, in which he referred to a type of

American incense.⁷⁷ Orta, this time, details the uses of the product, for he mentions that it was used in India for 'ointments and perfumes', besides being 'eaten against many diseases of the head and against diarrhea'. In addition, he highlights the extraordinary commercial value of incense in the Chinese markets: 'the largest quantity of all that is used is taken to China, in order to be sold'. According to the data available to the Portuguese physician, the Chinese were major consumers of incense: 'they spend a lot of it'. Moreover, the same thing happened with myrrh, another aromatic resin produced by several species of

Map of the Island of Mombay, in the manuscript *Livro de plantaforma das fortalezas da India* by Manuel Godinho de Erédia, ca. 1610 (Forte de São Julião da Barra, Oeiras).



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the genus *Commiphora* in Arabia and Somalia, which is also dealt with in this chapter of the *Colóquios dos simples*.⁷⁸

The *Colóquios dos simples* sketch a very complete outline of the Chinese imports, which, besides pepper,⁷⁹ mainly included aromatic substances, widely used in rituals of everyday life. But, in addition, Garcia de Orta also dedicates long pages to describing some of the more exotic products brought by the Portuguese merchants from the Chinese ports. His information, most of the times rigorous, was provided by Diogo Pereira and other men who had wide experience in trafficking with those Asian parts. While many of these reports were already circulating in the Portuguese fortresses and trading posts of Asia, in oral and manuscript letters and accounts, they had never before been systematised in printed form. Following the learned author's order, the first Chinese commodity highlighted in the *Colóquios dos simples* is camphor, 'much appreciated and used in medicine', which had been described by ancient authors, such as Serapion and Avicenna, in a rather confused fashion, and also by others, such as 'Aetius, a modern writer'.⁸⁰ Aëtius of Amida, already mentioned, was a 6th century Byzantine physician, author of a medical compendium which was published in the middle years of the 16th century, in a Latin translation by Janus Cornarius.⁸¹ Was the 'modern' reference an allusion to the recent edition of the work of that classical author? Or was it another of the many lapses that can be detected in the Portuguese naturalist's work?

The *Colóquios dos simples*, however, presented to European readers the first detailed description of this Asian natural product, starting by establishing a distinction between 'Borneo camphor', more valuable and rare, and scarcely known in Europe and also imported by the Chinese, and 'Chinese camphor', available and relatively well-known among Western physicians.⁸² While the first, apart from medical purposes, was used as a food additive, the second was used exclusively in pharmacy. Borneo camphor was the crystallised resin of a large tree (*Dryolealanopa aromatica*) that abounded in the north of that island, and which Orta describes in detail, using information that had been provided by 'a trustworthy man'.⁸³ The Chinese variant was also produced by a sturdy tree, but whose configuration the Portuguese physician could not guess, since none of his informants had

travelled through the Chinese regions where it could be observed. Chinese camphor, which in the markets was found in the shape of 'round loafs of bread, as large in diameter as a hand',⁸⁴ originated in 'Chincheo, where few [Portuguese] people go', but was bought by Portuguese traders in 'Canton, where most people go'.⁸⁵ This reference places Orta's information around 1550, because before that year Portuguese ships coming from Malacca or the Japanese archipelago usually traded in Fujian ports, in a region which was known in Portuguese sources as *Chincheo*, and that was completely avoided in the following years.⁸⁶ The Portuguese physician, meanwhile, makes it clear that the loafs of Chinese camphor that came to India were composed of a mixture of several products, including the two varieties of camphor, one Chinese and one from Borneo, since the latter was imported for that purpose by the Chinese themselves: 'kneaded and bunched together they make a good mix'.⁸⁷ Among other applications, camphor was used in perfumery, in antidotes to poisons, and also against eye problems.

Other ancient and modern writers are referred to in the colloquy on camphor, but always in a critical tone, such as Averroes and Manardo, already mentioned above, and also 'Andreas Belunensis', that is, the Italian physician and Arabist Andrea Alpago, active in the 15th and 16th centuries, editor and commentator of the work of Avicenna, whose information on 'camphor water' Orta corrects.⁸⁸ Two other contemporaries of Orta are mentioned in the section on camphor of the *Colóquios dos simples*, 'Ruelio and Mateolo Senense', that is, Jean de la Ruelle and Pietro Andrea Mattioli, both previously mentioned, and both editors of annotated translations of the work of Dioscorides. Apparently, about camphor, both naturalists had mentioned in their works 'a barbarian king whom they call king of China', as referred by Ruano, a remark that raises a reaction from Orta, who explains that the Chinese monarch 'is one of the most powerful kings in the world'.⁸⁹ Indeed, the author of the *Colóquios dos simples* would be well aware of the greatness of things in China, in fact in perfect harmony with other of his countrymen who by then were praising the Chinese world, both in manuscript reports and in works printed in Portuguese presses. In order to highlight the extraordinary importance of China in the context of Asia, Orta presents a brief list of the valuable commodities that came from that distant empire: 'beds made of silver, richly crafted silverware,

raw and woven silk, gold, musk, seed pearls, copper, mercury, vermillion, and porcelain'.⁹⁰

Two of the products included in this list of Chinese goods should be highlighted. On the one hand the seed pearls (*aljôfar*, in Portuguese), which are addressed in one of the chapters or colloquies of Orta's work;⁹¹ on the other hand musk, which curiously enough is just mentioned in passing, in the pages of the *Colóquios dos simples*, without any specialised or extensive approach. The Portuguese physician alludes in several passages to seed pearls that 'also come from China',⁹² but he stresses its poor quality, as opposed to those originating in the Persian Gulf or in the fisheries of Ceylon. The Macao emporium certainly played a role in the export of Chinese pearls—harvested particularly in the island of Hainan—to other Asian markets. Chinese physicians had long been using preparations that included calcined or powdered pearls, especially in antidotes for poisons and allegedly rejuvenating potions.⁹³ But Garcia de Orta has nothing in particular to offer about the use of this natural product in his own clinical practice, merely observing that 'the Moors use it a lot, in all cordial remedies, as we do ourselves', without adding further details.⁹⁴ Meanwhile, the silence of the *Colóquios dos simples* concerning musk is somewhat enigmatic, for the Portuguese naturalist merely indicates the region of Chiang Mai as a place of origin of this odoriferous substance,⁹⁵ appearing to have no notion that a significant part of the musk supplies that reached the Indian ports was coming precisely from China. Musk is a secretion produced by the musk deer, an animal that was mainly found in the mountainous regions of south-western China (hence the relevance of the reference to Chiang Mai). Thus, the port of Guangzhou was the main export centre of musk bags, which have been mentioned since the early years of the 16th century by Portuguese observers, either as perfume components or as an element included in drugs used as painkillers or tranquilisers.⁹⁶ Anyway, the fact that Garcia de Orta did not delve further on this product originating from China is rather remarkable in itself.

Another of the products highlighted by the Portuguese naturalist is the lesser galangal (*Alpinia officinarum*), 'brought from China' to India, to be subsequently transported 'to Portugal', which Orta carefully distinguishes from greater galangal (*Alpinia galanga*), which originated from the island of Java, 'neither so odoriferous nor aromatic'.⁹⁷ The Chinese

variety is a very aromatic rhizome, spontaneous in the southern regions of China, used since long in food preparations, as well as a drug, especially against digestive problems.⁹⁸ As the Portuguese physician claimed, it was 'a most necessary remedy',⁹⁹ which he prescribed for 'stomach problems and bad breath'.¹⁰⁰ The plant is described in some detail in the *Colóquios dos simples*: 'it is a plant or bush measuring two spans, with leaves as myrtle, and the Chinese claim that it grows without being planted'. Orta was certainly using data supplied by one of his informers who had first-hand experience of China, but he also had in Goa access to both plants, 'dried as well as fresh'. Among other information, he even mentions the Chinese name for lesser galangal, 'lavandou'.¹⁰¹ Several literary authorities are called upon on the discussion on galangal, but the Portuguese naturalist concludes that all went 'groping' for this species, which prior to the arrival of the Portuguese in Asia would have been incompletely known in Europe.¹⁰² The authors quoted include Dioscorides, Serapion, Avicenna, Matteo Silvatico, Andrea Alpago, the Friars that edited Mesue, Antonio Musa, and Manardo, already mentioned. A new author is also quoted, 'Lioniçeno', the Italian physician Niccoló Leoniceno, active in the 15th and 16th centuries.¹⁰³

The Chinese drug that seems to have aroused more interest in Garcia de Orta is undoubtedly the root-of-china (*Smilax china*), to which he devotes several pages.¹⁰⁴ This precious oriental merchandise was then considered a very effective antidote against the '*morbo napolitano*',¹⁰⁵ which has been identified with syphilis, a disease that was then common in many parts of Asia. The author of the *Colóquios dos simples* reports that the drug had been known in India only in 1535, the year immediately following his arrival in the East, thanks to an anonymous Portuguese, 'much honoured and rich', that had been cured by it,¹⁰⁶ and had subsequently divulged it. This date makes perfect sense, since it coincides more or less with the return of Portuguese ships to the Chinese coast, which took place in the early 1530s, after about a decade of no contacts whatsoever with China, following the failure of the embassy of Tomé Pires in 1521.¹⁰⁷ Since then, the root-of-china had been commonly used in the Portuguese outposts in Asia, also being regularly shipped to Europe. Until then, Europeans treated venereal diseases with guayacan, a plant drug coming from the New World, which was brought to India on board Portuguese ships.

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Garcia de Orta himself mentions that his first trading venture after arriving in India from Europe was the selling for a generous price of a portion of ‘guayacam’ that he had brought from Portugal.¹⁰⁸

Although Garcia de Orta does not discuss the origins of the ‘Neapolitan disease’, the starting point of syphilis continues today to be discussed, and one of the hypotheses claims that it may have been diffused from America, in the wake of the first voyages of Christopher Columbus.¹⁰⁹ Spanish observers who contacted the New World had rapidly identified the guayacan wood, native to American territories, as a possible remedy for that disease, so that its import into Europe proceeded swiftly. The first treatise defending the use of this wood in the healing of the ailments associated with syphilis was published in 1519 in Germany, by Ulrich von Hutten, an author who, by the way, is implicitly referenced by Orta himself. In fact, when dealing with guayacan, the Portuguese physician alludes cryptically to ‘a German gentleman’ who had written ‘a book praising it’.¹¹⁰ The fact that the German author was

an active militant of Protestantism explains the careful silencing of his name in the pages of the *Colóquios dos simples*. The rapid spread of knowledge about the root-of-china in Portugal can be documented in a work of fiction composed by Jorge Ferreira de Vasconcelos in 1542-1543, and printed in Coimbra in 1555, which includes a character whose husband travelled to China, where he had ‘profited in certain merchandise’ that is immediately identified with the root-of-china.¹¹¹ One of the first European users of this wondrous drug, apparently, seems to have been Emperor Charles V, who had healed his gout with it, as Garcia de Orta is keen on mentioning, alluding no doubt to his contemporary Andreas Vesalius, who in 1546 had published a letter on the subject.¹¹² Two other literary authorities are quoted regarding the root-of-china, both translators and commentators of the work of Dioscorides: on the one hand, the Spanish scholar Andres de Laguna, who is usually quoted in a critical way by Orta; on the other hand, the Italian physician Pietro Andrea Mattioli, who is usually quoted in an apologetical way in the pages of the *Colóquios dos simples*: ‘I agree with what Mateolo Senense has to say’.¹¹³

But the Portuguese naturalist was certainly the first European to give a detailed description of the plant to which he applies the Chinese name of ‘lampatam’, a probable error of transcription for *ling fan tuan*,¹¹⁴ one of the Chinese names for *Smilax china*. Incidentally, the colloquy on the root-of-china stands out from many others by the sheer abundance of news on practical applications of the drug and the description of various clinical cases occurred with the author.¹¹⁵ Garcia Orta explains in detail how to use the root-of-china in treating various kinds of diseases—cleaning the liver, healing kidney and bladder ulcers, and even treating tuberculosis—and not only in cases of sexually transmitted diseases, detailing the other therapeutic compounds used in each specific case, and even the specific diets advised to each patient. He reports, for example, the episode which occurred with one of his friends, who fell ill in Malacca and ‘was cured by a Chinese, who gave him this root mixed with boiled chicken’.¹¹⁶ The Portuguese physician includes in the *Colóquios dos simples* a clear description of the entire plant, and not just the root, that would have been provided by one of his informants, certainly Diogo Pereira. And he even comes up with some recommendations on how the drug should be

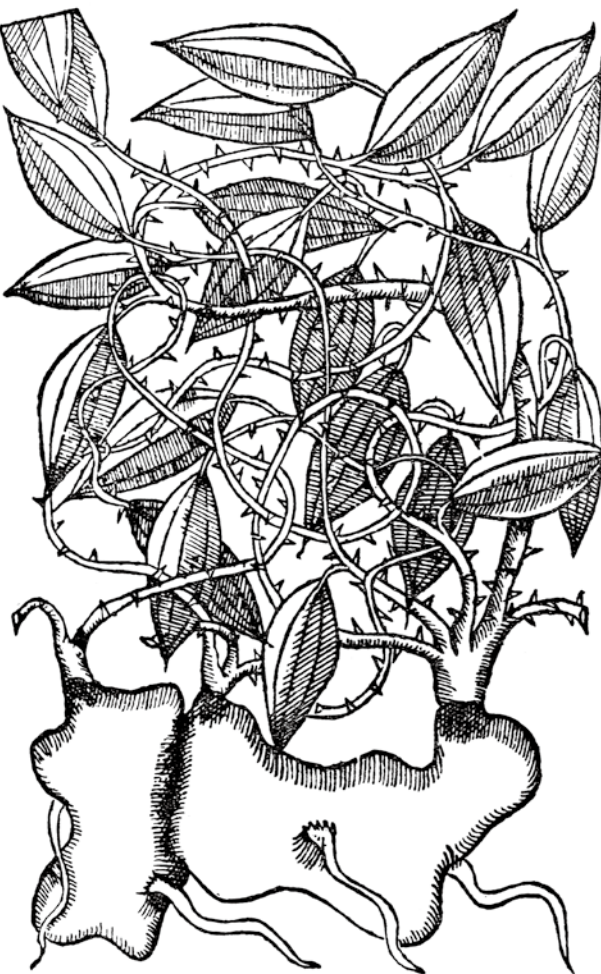
Portuguese fidalgo, drawing from the Codex Casanatense 1889, ca. 1548 (Biblioteca Casanatense, Rome).



stowed inside ‘Martaban jars with a high neck’, to be transported to Europe.¹¹⁷

Finally, the *Colóquios dos simples* include a chapter on rhubarb (*Rheum officinale*), which is extremely short, the author apologising for that fact, claiming to have been unable to collect more detailed information. Uniquely, no literary authorities are mentioned, a rather unusual procedure in Garcia de Orta’s methodology, since the plant appeared referenced in works of classic and modern naturalists. Anyway, Orta distinguishes two distinct paths through which the Chinese rhubarb reached the Asian and European markets. On the one hand, the caravan routes that came from Central Asia, across from Samarkand, and brought the product to the island of Hormuz, controlled by the Portuguese since the opening years of the 16th century. This rhubarb, which was then transhipped to India, was of a much better quality, similar to the one that was sent to Europe by land routes that crossed Western Asia. On the other hand, in recent years the rhubarb was also acquired by the Portuguese at the ‘port of Canton’, to where it was brought from the Chinese hinterland. However, due to the long sea voyage that it had to bear, rhubarb arrived in India ‘completely spoiled by the sea’.¹¹⁸ Thus, Garcia de Orta confesses a preference for the leaner variety coming by way of Hormuz. This root was widely used throughout Asia, especially as a purgative.¹¹⁹ But the author of the *Colóquios dos simples* acknowledges his ignorance in respect to the live plant, because he only knew the dried roots, expressing the hope that very soon ‘everything will be better known’ about this natural product, ‘because China is already so conversant with the Portuguese’.¹²⁰ He was alluding, of course, to the very recent establishment of his countrymen on the Macao peninsula.

On several occasions, Garcia de Orta refuses to speak about the Middle Kingdom in his *Colóquios dos simples*, claiming that ‘he terra em que ha tanto que contar que he nunca acabar’ (‘there is so much to know about this land that it would be a never-ending story’).¹²¹ However, throughout his work he keeps introducing notes and reflections on this important Asian power, revealing the breadth and solidity of his knowledge. He knew rather well the commercial traffic that linked China to other parts of maritime Asia, and he knew what were the most coveted imports in the Chinese markets and which were the most abundant and valuable exports. He had an expanded notion



Drawing of the root-of-china by Cristóvão da Costa, in the *Tratado das drogas* (Burgos, 1578).

about the features and applications of the main Chinese products that arrived at the Indian ports. And he had a clear grasp of the proverbial industriousness of the Chinese people. Thus he claims that the Chinese are ‘very subtle men’, whose ability in ‘mechanical crafts’ exceeded that of all other peoples.¹²² He knew that in ancient times, in a not too distant past, imposing Chinese maritime expeditions had crossed the Asian seas, and he was aware of the numerous traces the Chinese had left behind in India and the surrounding regions. He also had some understanding of Chinese social organisation, namely of the great importance attributed to the class of the scholar-officials.

His numerous observations have one common characteristic: a frank and full admiration for the *cousas da China* (Chinese matters). Garcia de Orta, in his treatise on natural and moral history, stands out as

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one of the first Portuguese writers to understand—and to convey in a printed form—the real importance of the Chinese world in the broader Asian context. And his words regarding the Chinese ruler, whom he characterises as ‘one of the greatest kings that is known in the whole world’, on whom it would be necessary ‘to write a large volume’ to be able to take due account of his vast domains,¹²³ seem to announce the famous *Tractado em que se cõtam muyto por estênso as cousas da China* (treatise on which are extensively reported the

matters of China), which Gaspar da Cruz published in Évora in the beginning of 1570. Moreover, it is not impossible that Orta crossed paths—and even exchanged views—with the Portuguese missionary, who was in Goa several times after visiting the coast of China in 1556.¹²⁴ All in all, the remarkable profusion of news on China and the special emphasis given to them in Garcia de Orta’s work confirm the revolutionary character—in so many aspects—of the monumental treatise of the Portuguese naturalist. **RC**

NOTES

1 On the origins of Macao, see Loureiro, 1997a.
2 Portuguese contacts with China in the first half of the 16th century, as well as the resulting written reports, are extensively studied in Loureiro, 2000.
3 On Lopes de Castanheda and China, see Loureiro, 2000, pp. 452-457; on Barros and China, see Loureiro, 2000, pp. 449-452, and also Boxer, 1992, pp. 83-87.
4 I use for all quotes Orta, 1987; all translations from Portuguese are my own. On Orta, among a wealth of titles, see: Loureiro, 2008, pp. 135-145; Costa, 2012, pp. 74-81; Pimentel & Soler, 2014, pp. 101-120; and above all Carvalho, 2015.
5 Orta, 1987, Vol. 1, p. 19.
6 On Orta’s library, see Ficalho, 1983, pp. 281-305; and Loureiro, 1997b, pp. 17-30.
7 Orta, 1987, Vol. 1, p. 19.
8 For a first approach, see Loureiro, 2000, pp. 603-608.
9 On Garcia de Orta’s network of informers, see Loureiro, 2008, pp. 135-145, and also Loureiro, 2012, pp. 41-72.
10 Orta, 1987, Vol. 1, p. 52.
11 Diogo Pereira is conveniently studied in Alves, 2010, Vol. 1, pp. 89-119.
12 See Loureiro, 1997a, pp. 31-34.
13 Orta, 1987, Vol. 1, pp. 45-52.
14 See Oliveira, 1963, pp. 789-797.
15 Calado, 1960, pp. 1-138. I have suggested elsewhere that Garcia de Orta may have been responsible for the organisation of this interesting manuscript codex that gathered valuable information about the Asian world (Loureiro, 2012, pp. 61-62).
16 Orta, 1987, Vol. 1, p. 52.
17 Ibid.
18 About Macao and ambergris, see Jin & Wu, 2007, pp. 244-279.
19 Orta, 1987, Vol. 1, pp. 45-46.
20 For basic information about these authors, see: Keyser & Irby-Massie, 2008, pp. 38-39 (Aetius); McGinnis, 2010 (Avicenna); Fakhry, 2001 (Averroes); Green, 1983, pp. 584-597 (Manardo). It is not always clear if Orta is referring to Serapion or the Pseudo-Serapion, an

anonymous Arab author of the 13th century, about whom nothing transpires; the works of both authors were published in Garcia de Orta’s epoch; see Pormann, 2004, pp. 233-262 (Serapion) and Dilg, 1999, pp. 221-231 (Pseudo-Serapion).
21 Orta, 1987, Vol. 1, p. 51.
22 On ambergris, see Kemp, 2012; and regarding the trade of this commodity, seer Borschberg, 2004, pp. 3-25.
23 Concerning the use of incense, and fumigant products in general, in the Chinese world, see Bedini, 2005.
24 Orta, 1987, Vol. 1, pp. 103-110 (‘benjuy’). On benzoin, see Lourido, 2011, pp. 1261-1272.
25 Orta, 1987, Vol. 1, p. 105 (‘Não me ponhais medo com Dioscorides, nem Galeno; porque não ey de dizer senão a verdade e o que sey’).
26 On Dioscorides, see Riddle, 2013; and on Galen, see Mattern, 2013. Concerning the Renaissance rediscovery of these classical authors, see Ogilvie, 2006, pp. 25-138.
27 About the Italian traveller, see Varthema, 2004; regarding the two doctors, see Green, 1983, pp. 658-701 (Brasavola), and Green, 1983, pp. 598-657 (Ruelle).
28 See Laufer, 1919, pp. 456-467.
29 Orta, 1987, Vol. 1, pp. 256-257.
30 Ibid., pp. 255-267. On Laguna, see González Manjarrés, 2000; concerning Mattioli, see Greene, 1983, pp. 798-806, and also Findlen, 1999, pp. 369-400.
31 On Pliny, seer Murphy, 2004; and on Silvatico, an understudied author, see Bottiglieri, 2013, pp. 109-134.
32 Orta, 1987, Vol. 1, p. 260 (‘Aleguaes com gente muyto barbara e fera, pois sam os Scitas Asianos?’). Regarding the Renaissance image of the Schytians, an ancient nomadic people of Iranian origin, see Meserve, 2008, pp. 68-116.
33 See the complete quote, which is here presented in a fragmentary mode, in Orta, 1987, Vol. 1, p. 260.
34 See Pereira, 1992; for an analysis of this episode, see Loureiro, 2000, pp. 422-439, where the relevant bibliography is quoted.
35 Orta, 1987, Vol. 1, p. 260. On the relations of the Society of Jesus with China, in this period, see Loureiro, 2009: 95-112. Regarding

the Chinese ‘book of laws’ that existed in Goa, nothing is found in contemporary sources. It will be worth mentioning that the ‘Emformação da Chyna’, one of the accounts collected in the *Livro que trata das cousas da Índia e do Japão*, probably compiled under the direction of Garcia de Orta, includes a paragraph about Chinese matrimonial practices, but with a rather different type of information than the one included in the *Colóquios dos simples* (see Calado, 1960, p. 115). On this ‘Emformação’, see Loureiro, 2000, pp. 406-416.
36 Orta, 1987, Vol. 1, p. 260 (‘nas pinturas que fazem vem pintadas catedras, e homens que estão lendo’). On the ‘*panos da China*’ (Chinese textiles), see Ferreira, 2006, pp. 119-139.
37 Ibid. (I correct an apparent mistake of the author).
38 Ibid.
39 Ramalho, 1985, p. 175. On Osório and China, see Torrão, 1991-1992, pp. 449-460.
40 Resende, 1991, p. 362. For a recent synthesis on the invention of printing, see Chow, 2007, pp. 169-192.
41 Orta, 1987, Vol. 2, p. 399.
42 Ibid., p. 72.
43 Ibid., p. 69.
44 Regarding the news about betel in contemporary Portuguese sources, see Loureiro, 2007, pp. 49-63.
45 Orta, 1987, Vol. 2, p. 71.
46 Loureiro, 1997a, p. 155 (‘boçetas de seu betre’).
47 See Schafer, 1967, pp. 133 e 175.
48 Orta, 1987, Vol. 2, pp. 71-74. On ‘licium’, see Warmington, 1928, pp. 205-206.
49 On the quoted authors, see Pioreschi, 2004 (Rasis); Le Coz, 2004 (Mesue and his reception); Folch, 1951 (Sepúlveda, a rather forgotten author); and Greene, 1983, pp. 368-418 (Cordus).
50 Orta, 1987, Vol. 1, p. 107. On styraz, see Lourido, 2011, pp. 1261-1272.
51 Ibid., pp. 287-288.
52 On Actuarius, which appears to be a Byzantine title rather than a family name, see Pioreschi, 2004, Vol. 4, pp. 91-95.
53 Orta, 1987, Vol. 2, p. 50.
54 On the huge list of authorities quoted in the colloquy on eagle-wood (‘linaloes’), see the observations of the Count of Ficalho (Orta, 1987, Vol. 2, pp. 65-67).
55 On the mentionned authors, see: Pioreschi, 2004, pp. 65-80 (Paulus of Egina); Keen, 2007 (Anglicus); Crisciani, 2005, pp. 297-324 (Savonarola); Boon, 2012 (Laredo); Copenhauer, 1978 (Symphorien). Orta further quotes two authors which are not immediately obvious: ‘Acacio Felici’ and ‘Isac’ (Orta, 1987, Vol. 2, pp. 53-55). The first one is certainly Cassio Felice or Cassius Felix, Latin writer of the 5th century (see Keyser & Irby-Massie, 2008, pp. 208-209); the second appears to be Isaac Judaeus, prolific Egiptian writer, who lived in the 9th-10th centuries (see Levin & Walker, 2013).
56 Orta, 1987, Vol. 2, p. 281. On the sandalwood trade, see Ptak, 1987, pp. 36-45.
57 Orta, 1987, Vol., 2 p. 284.
58 See Ptak, 2011, pp. 1330-1331.
59 Orta, 1987, Vol. 2, pp. 282-287.
60 Ibid., p. 285 (‘o sândalo aos Portuguezes o devemos; que o trazem do campo de Calecut, onde se colhe’).
61 Ibid., pp. 285-286.
62 Ibid., p. 286.
63 There is an extensive bibliography about Zheng He’s voyages; see Ptak, 2006, pp. 3-33, where the essential references are quoted; and also Alves, 2005, pp. 39-55.
64 Castanheda, 1979, Vol. 2, pp. 20-21, book V, 1553.
65 Ibid., p. 799, book 3, 1561.
66 On Lopes de Castanheda, see Avelar, 1997.

On Galvão and China, see Loureiro, 2000, pp. 600-603; and on his career, see Loureiro, 2004, pp. 85-102.
68 Correia, 1975, Vol. 1, pp. 69-70. On Gaspar Correia and this episode, see Subrahmanyam, 1998, pp. 41-54.
69 Ibid., p. 186.
70 Correia, 1975, Vol. 3, p. 770. It is worth mentioning that Martim Afonso de Sousa had been the protector of Garcia de Orta during his first years of residence in India, and that the Portuguese physician had traveled with him in the expedition to Repelim: ‘do que eu sam testemunha de vista’ (Orta, 1987, Vol. 1, p. 205). On Martim Afonso, see Pelúcia, 2009.
71 Orta, 1987, Vol. 1, pp. 204-205.
72 Orta, 1987, Vol. 2, p. 341. Concerning Elephanta, see Biedermann, 2013, pp. 35-52.
73 Orta, 1987, Vol. 1, pp. 204-205. The reference to Hormuzian chronicles, probably in Persian language, is rather interesting. See Kauz & Ptak, 2001, pp. 27-75.
74 Orta, 1987, Vol. 2, p. 351. On incense and myrrh, see Groom, 1981.
75 Orta, 1987, Vol. 2, p. 351.
76 Ibid., p. 354.
77 See the note on this topic by the Count of Ficalho (Orta, 1987, Vol. 2, pp. 356-357). On Pietro Martyr, see Gerbi, 2010, pp. 50-75.
78 Orta, 1987, Vol. 2, p. 352.
79 Pepper, the most importante spice in the context of Portuguese trade in Asia, is treated by Garcia de Orta in great detail, although not without some misunderstandings (Orta, 1987, Vol. 2, pp. 241-250). But is respect to China the Portuguese physician only mentions, correctly, that a large part of the pepper production of Java was exported to the Chinese ports: ‘at least twenty large ships take pepper to China’ (ibid, Vol. 1, p. 289). He does not add other details about the mechanics of this valuable trade that was then enriching many of his fellow countrymen. See Loureiro, 2000, pp. 374-391, and the respective bibliography.
80 Orta, 1987, Vol. 1, p. 151.
81 *Aetii Medici Graeci Contractae ex Veteribus Medicinae Sermones XVI* (Venice, 1549).
82 Orta, 1987, Vol. 1, p. 152. According to Garcia de Orta, a pound of Borneo camphor (about half a kg) was worth as much as a ‘quintal’ (about 60 kg) of the Chinese variety (ibid., p. 152).
83 Ibid., p. 155.
84 Ibid., p. 152.
85 Ibid., p. 156. On camphor in general, see Donkin, 1999. Specifically on the Borneo variety, see Nicholl, 1979, pp. 52-74; on Chinese camphor, see Schottenhammer, 2010, pp. 117-149; on the camphor trade in Orta’s day, see Ptak, 2000, pp. 142-166.
86 Regarding Chincheo, see Loureiro, 2011, pp. 333.
87 Orta, 1987, Vol.1, p. 157.
88 Ibid., p. 158.
89 Ibid., p. 159.
90 Ibid. Regarding Chinese commodities on the Goa-Lisbon route, see Loureiro, 2010, pp. 81-94.
91 Orta, 1987, Vol. 2, pp. 119-132.
92 Ibid., p. 120.
93 On the subject of pearls, see Donkin, 1998.
94 Orta, 1987, Vol. 2, p. 122.
95 Ibid., p., 29.
96 On musk and its trade, see Borschberg, 2003, pp. 90-99.
97 Orta, 1987, Vol. 1, p. 353.
98 See Simoons, 1991, pp. 370-373.
99 Orta, 1987, Vol. 1, p. 353.
100 Ibid., p. 355.
101 Ibid., pp. 353-354. Lesser galangal is known in Chinese as *gao liang jiang* 高良姜; Orta’s transcription could correspond to some regional dialect, and bears some resemblance with the Cantonese designation, *laam goeng*.

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102 Orta, 1987, Vol. 1, p. 354.
103 On Leonicensio, see Hirai, 2011, pp. 19-45.
104 Orta, 1987, Vol. 2, pp. 259-273.
105 Ibid., p. 259.
106 Ibid., p. 260.
107 The anonymous author of one of the accounts included in the *Livro das cousas da Índia e do Japão* mentions: ‘eu fuy a Camtão ao porto Velhyo, omde paguey os dereytos na era de trymta e três’, that is, ‘I went to Canton, to the old port, were I paid taxes, in the year of thirty three’ (Calado, 1960, pp. 114-115). On the embassy of Tomé Pires to China (1517-1521), see Loureiro, 2014, pp. 23-36.
108 Orta, 1987, Vol. 2, p. 260.
109 See Guerra, 1978, pp. 39-61. It should be noted, however, that Chinese sources testify to a serious epidemic of syphilis in the Guangdong área in the last years of the 15th century, before the arrival of the Portuguese in India, thus questioning the American origin of the disease and its spreading in Asia by the Portuguese (see Gulik, 1987, pp. 384-385).
110 Orta, 1987, Vol. 2, p. 262. A mention to Ulrich von Hutten, *De Guaiaci Medicina et Morbo Gallico liber unus* (Paris, 1519). See, on this author, Grafton, Shelford & Siraisi, 1995, pp. 82-85. Regarding guayacan, see Monardes, 1989, pp. 44-47 and 109-114.

111 Vasconcelos, 1951, p. 123.
112 Andreas Vesalius, *Epistola rationem modumque propinandi radices Chynae decocti, quo nuper inuictissimus Carolus V Imperator usus est* (Basel, 1546). On Vesalius, see O’Malley, 1964.
113 Orta, 1987, Vol. 2, p. 262.
114 Ibid., p. 269.
115 Ibid., pp. 259-270. On the root-of-china trade, see Borschberg, 2006, pp. 103-115.
116 Ibid., p. 266.
117 Ibid., pp. 269-270 (‘em jarras martavans de colo alto’).
118 Ibid., pp., 275-276.
119 Regarding rhubarb, see Foust, 1992.
120 Orta, 1987, Vol. 2, p. 277.
121 Ibid., p., 161.
122 Orta, 1987, Vol. 1, p260.
123 Ibid., p. 159.
124 On the Dominican and his work, see Loureiro, 2009, pp. 113-128.

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In Search of Another Japan
Jesuit Motivations Towards Continental Southeast Asia
in the Early 17th Century

TERESA SENA*



INTRODUCTION

Based on my research on the resettlement of the Jesuit Mission in Siam in 1655 I defend the view that the Jesuit approach to continental Southeast Asia was a result of a global strategy of the Province of Japan. In fact this early 17th century missionary expansion had much more to do with the Jesuits' religious and commercial links to Japan and to the spiritual assistance to the overseas Japanese than to any specific project directed towards the region. This led to a readjustment of Jesuit geographical targets and strategies, including the balance of domestic and external conflicts and criticism, and to an adjustment of the Society's administrative and directive structures in the Far East, to be understood alongside the interests of the Portuguese Crown (united to the Spanish from 1580 to 1640) and *Padroado* as well as those of Macao's official and private agents.

Besides Siam, I specially refer to today's Vietnam that, according to the designations¹ used by coeval Portuguese and Jesuit sources, included the principalities

of Tonkin (North Vietnam) ruled by the Trinh, Cochinchina (Central Vietnam), under the Nguyễn, and the Indianised kingdom of Champa (South Vietnam) of Malayo-Polynesian origin; to the less studied Khmer Cambodia, and even to the kingdom of Laos. On the West coast, the Burmese nations of Arrakan, Pegu, Burma and Ava, where a more offensive practice of territorial conquest was occasionally followed, were much linked to the Portuguese activities in the Bay of Bengal and lay beyond the limits of the Jesuit Province of Japan. Due to constant military and political instability resulting from perennial territorial and dynastic disputes, fluctuations in foreign trade policies or occasional conflicts and incidents, the Jesuit presence in such areas was often discontinued. Mainly through the Japanese network, they explored the interdependencies and complementariness of those different locations, and later on, benefiting from Siam's political stability and commercial revitalisation, re-established the Jesuit Mission of Ayudhya (1655-1767) which aimed to become the headquarters of Jesuit missionary activity on the Indochina peninsula, after the Portuguese lost Malacca to the Dutch in 1641.

GENERAL FRAMEWORK

Fulfilling the Jesuit religious, commercial and even institutional goals the above-mentioned 17th century rapprochement towards continental Southeast Asia was strictly linked with the Japanese mercantile and expatriate communities found there and with

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