Chapter 3

Garcia de Orta’s Colloquies: Context and Afterlife of a Dialogue

Ines G. Županov

Prolegomenon

In his famous short text, On Possibility of Generating Aesthetic Messages in an Edenic Language, Umberto Eco re-enacts a ludic dialogue between Adam and Eve in order to teach us a lesson about the connection between the language and the world. At the heart of the problem, the one that the first couple discovered to their detriment was the Divine trickery. They were victims of the ambiguously phrased prohibition. ‘From that moment onward’, Eco wrote, ‘the world history commenced’.1

1 Umberto Eco, The Role of the Reader (Bloomington, 1979), p. 103.

While keeping a safe distance from the prelapsarian moment and from Eco’s semiotic game, the truth is that the choice of a dialogical form signals the author’s intention of linking the ambiguity of the message to the production of history (or knowledge). It has been argued elsewhere that the way Garcia de Orta uses dialogue in the Colóquios is to simultaneously elucidate his objects and to camouflage his own self as a subject.2 He repeatedly claimed that the truth was painted ‘naked’ and yet it is impossible to distinguish clearly Orta the character, from Orta the author in the book.3 The reader is flooded with certain kinds of facts and left completely in the dark about other kinds of facts. A variety of inanimate things are displayed by way of description, with names affixed in a dozen languages, while the reader is invited to visualize and to walk through Orta’s house, to sit at his table and to look outside at the veranda, to meet his

1
2 Ines G. Županov, ‘The Wheel of Torments; Mobility and Redemption in Portuguese Colonial India (sixteenth century)’, in Stephen Greenblatt et al. (eds), Cultural Mobility, A Manifesto (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 24–74. Eco starts his chapter with Roman Jacobson’s argument that ‘the aesthetic use of language is marked by the ambiguity and the self-focusing character of the messages articulated by it’. Similarly, in this article it is argued that the use of a dialogue form is geared to produce ambiguity and to conceal authorial intention. Eco, The Role of the Reader, p. 90.
servant Antónia and taste delicious mangoes from his Bombaim garden, to ride a horse in the Goan countryside. There is a complete silence, however, on Orta’s family: his wife and daughters, his sisters and brothers-in-law, his mother, all residing in Goa, are not even mentioned in his book.

Equally intriguing is the fact that Portuguese historiography forgot about Orta for three centuries before he was exhumed and then encased, entombed and transformed into a prototype of a Victorian gentlemen-scientist by the learned Conde de Ficalho.4 Orta’s nineteenth-century persona appeared uncanny in light of Augusto Silva Carvalho’s discovery of Orta files in the archives of the Inquisition, followed by Israel Revah’s reconstruction of his New Christian family tree.5 In fact, until recently the all too few studies of Colóquios tended to focus on Orta’s medico-botanico-pharmacological knowledge, staking out certain priority claims for national science or emphasizing his protean role in establishing civilizational dialogue. These were all very valiant efforts by historians such as Jayme Walter, Charles Boxer, Luis Filipe Barreto and others.6

By approaching Colóquios from a social and cultural history perspective,7 it is clear that the text and its destiny cannot be separated from the context, time, milieu and the destiny of its author. In a word, it is impossible to analyse the Colóquios without taking into account the long shadow of the Inquisition under which it was produced. The chronology of the publication and the posthumous auto da fé of the author confirmed a thesis that the Colóquios played the role of Orta’s lifesaver, or at least the last bulwark against the Inquisition onslaught on him and his family.8

Although this sociopsychological hypothesis about why Orta wrote his book is still compelling, it does not explain all. Two questions, mutually interrelated, need to be addressed: Orta’s literary choice of a dialogue and the publication of the book in Goa. Since we lack archival documents and hard facts, it is necessary

---

4 Conde de Ficalho, Garcia da Orta e o seu Tempo (Lisbon, 1983).
to take a roundabout way, by closely reading, along and against the archival grain, both the text and the context. And this is what I propose to do in this chapter.

As shown by Umberto Eco, a dialogue, as a literary genre, is a particular semiotic game, and a discursive conceit, one that Orta seems to have temporarily mastered in order to win the immediate battle. In other words, a dialogical form helped Orta win the game as a person and save his life, but in the afterlife, at least for three centuries, he lost it as an author, and he lost it in prose. Orta was a victim of a successful translation of the Colóquios into a Latin prose by Carolus Clusius (Charles de l’Ecluse) (Aromatum et simplicium aliquot medicamentorum apud Indos nascentium historia, 1567), which in many ways substituted itself to the Goan original and was widely disseminated throughout early modern Europe by way of vernacular translations and editions.9

While the dialogue was not a commonly used form for wider dissemination of medico-botanical knowledge in late sixteenth-century Europe, it was an efficient temporary tool in the hands of a particular Goan circle of learned humanists who were part of a European humanist culture of the early sixteenth century.10 By fashioning his text as a dialogue, Orta emphasized and flagged his membership to this particular local group of literati and erudites. It was his humanist friends, most of whom appear in one way or another in the text, who most probably made the decisive push for the book to be printed.

9 Carolus Clusius, Aromatum et simplicium aliquot medicamentorum apud Indos nascentium historia (Antwerp, 1567). The European and Iberian afterlife of both Garcia de Orta’s and Cristovão da Costa’s medico-botanical work in books printed in Europe by Juan Fragoso, Nicolás Bautista Monardes, Carolus Clusius and others was studied by Teresa Nobre de Carvalho, O mundo natural asiático aos olhos do Ocidente. Contribuição dos textos ibéricos quinhentistas para a construção de uma nova consciência europeia sobre a Ásia, Unpublished Ph. D Dissertation, University of Lisbon (Lisbon, 2013). See also José Pardo Tomás’s contribution to this volume in Chapter 10.

10 Some of the naturalists in Europe did use dialogue that Orta probably knew about. Euricius Cordus published in 1534 a small dialogue, Botanologicon, in which he and his son Valerius, a naturalist in his own right, take a botanizing trip along the river Lahn in Marburg. Another scientific work concerning the production of metals by Georgius Agricola, De re metallica (Basel, 1556), that used a dialogical form in which a ‘learned miner’ converses with a traditionally trained physician, is not quoted in Orta’s Colóquios, although he may have known about it. On the other hand, Orta often quoted António Musa Brasavola’s Examen omnium simplicium medicamentorum (Lyon, 1537); also in a dialogue is Francisco Lopez Villalobos’s Libro intitulado Los problemas de Villalobos: [que] tracta de [cuerpos] naturales y morales; y dos dialogos de medicina (Medina del Campo, 1543). Nicolás Bautista Monardes also wrote a Dialogo llamado pharmacodilosis o delaracion medicinal (Seville, 1536) between a physician Nicolás and an apothecary. Without mentioning Orta, the Colóquios may have been the direct influence on Charles Boxer, Opera Minora II, ed. Diogo Ramada Curto (Lisboa, 2002). See also, Ângela Barreto Xavier and Ines G. Županov, Catholic Orientalism: Portuguese Empire, Indian Knowledge (16th–18th Centuries) (New Delhi, in press).
Briefly, the Colóquios, as a printed book with both texts and para-texts, is a curious canvas of Portuguese humanists in Goa gathered around the courtly table of the noble viceroy or governors. By projecting his literary flashlight onto this literary circle and public space, and by folding it into a humanist dialogue, Orta also tricked his readers into forgetting his private and family ties.

A Humanist Dialogue in Goa

Most of the scholars who studied Colóquios, at least from the late nineteenth century onwards, expressed surprise and amazement at its dialogical form, but took this fact as an epiphenomena or as an eccentric authorial choice. Those who started with dialogue in order to talk about a larger issue of cultural or civilizational dialogue usually connected this new or unexpected genre with the new content it proposed to reveal, but stopped short of reflecting on the literary genre itself. Conde de Ficalho seemed to have had some doubts about the choice of the dialogic form. However, Orta’s self-conscious use of the humanist dialogue could not have been an arbitrary choice and it was certainly not something completely new in the sixteenth-century Goan intellectual and learned arena.

Humanist dialogues, as literary works, were both a continuation of medieval philosophico-theological dialogues, and a self-conscious re-adaptation of the classical forms, typologized as belonging to Platonic, Ciceronic and Lucian variety, or in another type of classification to documentary or fictional. The popularity of this genre starting in the fifteenth century, and the upsurge in number of works composed in it in the sixteenth century by famous and unknown authors has been attributed to various causes, among which are: ‘the emergence of a new type of subjectivity; the expansion of print culture; the interest in utopias; and humanism and logocentrism.’ In one of his dialogues, Dialogi ad Petrum Paulum Histrum from 1406, Leonardo Bruni, a famous Florentine humanist and, according to some, the father of the humanist dialogue, wrote in favour of disputation or conversation for in it ‘the topic is placed as it were stage

11 See Nobre de Carvalho, O mundo natural asiático aos olhos do Ocidente, p. 35.
center and observed by many eyes, so that there is nothing in it which can escape or deceive the view of all." However, between 1406 Florence and 1563 Goa, humanist dialogue itself had gone through changes by appropriation and adaptation. Dialogue remained a preferred mode of reasoning and persuasion, but what was less and less true in the sixteenth century was its libertas discendi, not yet the freedom of speech, but a freedom to speak. Moreover, on the one hand, the antiquarian excitement which empowered the humanists and created the culture of critical thinking began to disintegrate, in a slow motion, and invisibly at first, under the excitement and challenges of the discoveries of the new worlds and new life forms. This is what is usually called the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns. On the other hand, the changing political atmosphere in Europe and in Portugal, and the religious rift cured, or intended to be cured, by Catholic Reformation brought about a new type of social organization in Southern Europe which was heavily dependent on clerical administration. Orta’s Colóquios were published precisely in the interstices of these fundamental changes in which the humanist elites of Orta’s ilk were reorienting their writing and activities to fit a new religiously inflected, colonial order. What is new and exceptional about Orta’s text appearing on the scene, suddenly and as a solitary object, in 1563 is not in the choice of its medico-botanico-pharmacological content. What is exceptional is the fact that Orta or, as I argue, his coterie of friends still managed to publish a book that was completely disconnected from the program of the Catholic spiritual renewal and discipline which would be associated with the printing press in Goa all through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

16 The Council of Trent was in particular important in these dynamics. See, Adriano Prosperi, Il Concilio di Trento: una introduzione storica (Torino, 2001).
Orta’s Colóquios is structured as a Ciceronian and documentary dialogue. It furnishes a forum for the discussion about important medical, botanical and commercial issues but also includes episodes of comic relief, jokes, teasing and light-hearted expressions of intimacy between the interlocutors. In the Ciceronian dialogue, the auteur has a license to speak in multiple voices and to manipulate the conversation towards his preferable definition of the situation, all the while concealing his own opinion.

The first thing Orta wants his readers to believe is that he has the monopoly over knowledge of Indian plants, medical substances and remedies. The dialogue helps him plant this claim into the minds of his readers with a great deal of persuasive pluck and without attracting professional animosities from other possible local claimants, such as other physicians and apothecaries and even religious specialists. He employs a whole crew of local helpers – from his servants such as Antonia, to slaves and local doctors, as well as servants of other Goans who come to deliver messages and requests for help from their masters – to show his own importance in the Goan social context of his time. His inquisitive alter-ego, Ruano, is there to ask the right questions that then open the way for other actors to come on the stage such as Nizamoxá, also called Nizamaluco, the sultan of Ahmednagar, and Sultan Bahadur Shah of Gujarat (Cambaya).

Some of them Orta claimed to have met in person, but also through them he met their physicians and many other people coming from all over West and Central Asia. All these characters seem to be embedded in each other’s stories or presences, in a manner of Russian dolls. In the tenth chapter of Colóquios dedicated to what seemed to be an insignificant fruit called ber of which there was and is not much to say, Orta provided a whole potted history of contemporary geopolitics of the subcontinent.

These kinds of historical and political digressions are legion in the Colóquios, although they are dispersed through the text and usually pop up unexpectedly.

In the tenth chapter, Orta makes us believe that it was at Ruano’s request that
he told these stories that could easily be taken for *patranhas* [fables] and, he wrote, ‘I don’t want to spend a chapter on things that are not about *sciencia*’. In the same chapter he also managed to put a price on his expertise in terms of local markets. Since he cured *Nizamoxá* and his son on a couple of occasions, he was paid 12,000 pardoas and was offered a rent of 40,000 pardoas a year if he accepted to visit him for some months. ‘I did not accept it’, wrote Orta, to which Ruano immediately responded, ‘Let us go somewhere more agreeable for the eyes’, which Markham, the Victorian translator of the book, translated as something like let’s change the subject, although since the whole conversation took place on a horse in the Goan countryside, it could have been interpreted as a casual remark to look for a nicer landscape. But Markham may have sensed the true meaning, which perhaps Orta wanted to make visible: that he disproved of such a huge sum of money for medical services and, especially, from an infidel king, and yet that he was worth it.

On a couple of occasions Ruano presses Orta to say more about both scientific things and those that were only tangentially related to them by invoking and conjuring up the Spanish audience. ‘I know many (people) in Spain who would be glad to know these things that you said’. However, right from the beginning, in the second chapter, we feel the ominous cloud against which *Colóquios* fought its uphill battle. ‘What hurts me most’, said Ruano, ‘that neither you nor me, we have no more professors and teachers to whom you could show your works in Salamanca and Alcalá, because they are dead or banned [desterrados] far from Spain’. It was only in a dialogue and put into the mouth of a ‘fictional’ character that one could get away with this kind of direct accusation against the Inquisition, that was already pumping religious steam into the Goan political and social atmosphere for at least three years, and that just next door to Orta’s house. Indeed, Orta continued to exercise his humanist right to *libertas dicendi* while it lasted.

But at the same time, dialogue also helped Orta to cover the fact that he had no monopoly of knowledge in Portuguese Asia. In fact, technically and *de facto*, only the Crown had the monopoly on imperial knowledge and on its dissemination. And even the Crown was not able to keep this monopoly intact from other European knowledge poachers. Without diminishing Orta’s achievements and immense erudition, the knowledge of Asian plants and medical substances mentioned in detail or casually in the *Colóquios* were common knowledge in Goa among the *casados* and the Portuguese officials, apothecaries, physicians...

---

22 Orta, *Colóquios*, vol. 1, p. 119.
23 Ibid.; *Colloquies on the Simples and Drugs of India by Garcia da Orta*, trans. Clements Markham (London, 1913), p. 68. ‘Let us turn to a subject more acceptable to our ears’.
24 Orta, *Colóquios*, vol. 1, p. 119.
and merchants. His emphasis on inductive method and first-hand experience meant in mundane terms that he was dependant on myriads of accounts brought to him by a variety of historical actors, his contemporaries in India. It has been established by historians, most recently Teresa Nobre de Carvalho, that Orta had at hand a wide variety of accounts by Portuguese officials and Italian travellers such as Duarte Barbosa, Tomes Pires, Ludovico Varthema, Giovanni da Empoli, Tomé Lopes, Simão Álvares, mentioned anonymously as a boticairo in the 26th chapter on pepper, and many others. For example, Orta seemed to have had access to the confidential letters, for which not all authors are identified, collected around 1546–48, and available today in the Codice de Elvas. These were official answers to questions regarding trade, bioprospecting and political information, prepared for D. João de Castro and perhaps also for Martim Afonso de Sousa. These were similar to relaciones geográficas initiated in 1570 by the Council of the Indies for mapping the Spanish empire. The person in charge of the Castilian project was also a physician and Erasmian, Francisco Hernández.

Orta’s Colóquios was obviously the result of the precocious Portuguese imperial mapping. It was summa of the knowledge of natural history and geography, collected in and for the empire. What Orta crucially provided were the scientific references from the old corpus of professional medico-botanico-pharmaceutical knowledge presided by the cherished ancients, Pliny, Dioscorides and Galen, as well as medieval Arabic knowledge of Avicena, Averoes, all the way until Ruellius, Nicolò Leoniceno and many others, including Orta’s contemporaries such as Amato Lusitano, Pietro Andrea Mattioli, Andrés Laguna, Leonhart Fuchs and so on.


28 Nobre de Carvalho, O mundo natural asiático aos olhos do Ocidente, p. 223.

29 On Francisco Hernandes de Toledo, see Simon Varey (ed.), The Mexican Treasury: The Writings of Dr. Francisco Hernández (Palo Alto, 2000).

30 A useful list of authors and their works used by Orta had been compiled by Conde de Ficalho, Garcia de Orta, pp. 284–97. Among them are Leonhart Fuchs, De historia stirpium (Basel, 1543); André Laguna, Annotationes in Dioscoridem (Lugduni [Lyon], 1554); Amato Lusitano (João Rodrigues de Castelo Branco), Index Dioscoridis (Antwerp, 1556); Pietro Andrea Mathioli, Commentarii, in Libros sex Pedacii Dioscoridis Anazarbei, de Materia Medica, Adjectis quam plurimis plantarum & animalium imaginis (Venice, 1554). According to Harold Cook, Jean de Ruelle (Ruellius) was an inspiration for Orta.
What Orta in fact does is an effort at systematization of the natural objects and substances, the bioresources, as it is common to call them today, by repackaging them into ‘scientific objects’ of sixteenth-century medicine and botany. Yet, Orta is not sure how to do it, but the dialogic form helps him hide his doubts and uncertainties, precisely by displaying them. For example, the alphabetical order that he imposed on them, discussed in the second colloquy, also appears as not coming from the author but from Ruano. In a sense Orta did not take the responsibility for the classification by providing arguments against it:

... what you say about the alphabetical order I don’t find it good, because it can happen that the things that are said in the beginning are not so useful and important, nor interesting to read. I have always heard that one has to confess to the confessor the most serious things first and that the best reasons have to be first stated during the lecture, and that when we inquire about some things, those that are most necessary need to be the first.31

And yet Orta employed the alphabetical order, which was in fact the easiest and the less philosophical of scientific choices. Galen, for example, orders his items according to his own pre-established botanical classification based on similarity,32 but he also used alphabetical order in his treatise, On the Mixtures and Powers of Simple Drugs.33 Some of Orta’s contemporaries whom he does not mention, however, such as Hieronymus Bock (Latin Tragus: 1498–1554) and later Andrea Cesalpino (1525–1603), refused to use alphabetical order in which the medieval herbals were commonly arranged, but tried to group plants to name his interlocutor Ruano since he was a humanist editor of the Dioscorides’s text, Materia Medica; Jean Ruel, Pedacii Dioscoridis Anazarbei de medicinali materia libri quinque De virulentis animalibus, et venenis canerabioso, et corum notis, ac remedii libri quattuor (Paris, 1516).

---

31 Orta, Colóquios, vol. 1, p. 22. Orta seemed to propose that the method for classifying sin is appropriate for classifying plants. His remark is ambiguously phrased, and can be read as a genuine proposal and a tongue-in-cheek statement.

32 On difficulty and efforts at classifying plants, and managing the information increase, see Brian W. Ogilvie, The Science of Describing, Natural History in Renaissance Europe (Chicago–London, 2006).

according to different criteria, mostly on the basis of perceived natural relations.\textsuperscript{34} On the other hand, one of the most successful botanists of the period and the pioneer ‘of accurate representations of plants in histories of scientific illustration’, Leonhart Fuchs, whom Orta called ‘Lutheran heretic’, used alphabetical order.\textsuperscript{35} Eventually, Carl Linnaeus would provide the criteria, although as arbitrary as any other, in the eighteenth century, but the question was on the table in this period too.

It is possible that Orta knew about these different discussions in the medico-botanical European scholarly world, but he profited from the dialogic form to choose the alphabetical order and to grumble about it.

All through the Colóquios Orta creates dialogical and also agonistic situations to press his different points, which all shored up his authority, one of which is that the European erudites and scholars from the best universities are quite ignorant and that what is new knowledge in Europe, and especially in European universities, is old knowledge in Asia. More importantly, it was also knowledge that had already been known to Muslim and Arab medieval authors such as Avicenna, who had a much better idea of Asian substances than the Greek and classical authors, such as Dioscorides and Pliny.\textsuperscript{36}

This complaint about ignorant Greeks and ‘ancient’ authorities, as already mentioned, was neither new nor Orta’s personal opinion. It was a topos among Portuguese humanists who, as all humanists, worshipped the antique wisdom and achievements, but started their own quarrel between the ancients and the moderns on the basis of their experience of the empire and its global extension.

For João de Barros – and armchair humanist – and João de Castro – a chivalric humanist and an experienced Indiaman – Portuguese were better than the ancients precisely because they already knew more about geography, cultures

\textsuperscript{34} The first edition of Bock’s K\textit{r}eutterb\textit{u}ch appeared in 1539 unillustrated: Hieronymus Bock, \textit{New Kreutter Büch} (Strasbourg, 1539). He developed his own system of classification for 700 plants. His 1546 \textit{Kreutterbuch} was famously illustrated by the artist David Kandel.

\textsuperscript{35} Andrea Cesalpino’s \textit{De plantis libri XVI} (Florence, 1583), dedicated to the Grand Duke Francesco I de Medici, is considered one of the most important in the history of botany before Linnaeus.


and the natural world than the ancients had. They simultaneously presented Portugal as a classical setting, highlighting the continuity between Lusitanians and the ancient Greeks and Romans, as well as a mighty kingdom able to control the discovered and conquered exotic territories.

If antiquarian turn combined with the swift overseas extension provided the Portuguese humanists with an unprecedented optimism about the future of the empire and of the progress of sciences, by the time the Colóquios appeared in Goa in the middle of the sixteenth century, the situation was beginning to appear more complicated.

Again with the help of a dialogue, Orta advanced by providing contradictory arguments. Thus he endlessly complained about Portuguese lack of curiosity, lack of letters and penchant for doing things rather than studying. In particular, the Portuguese soldiers and merchants were driven only by desires to acquire riches and carnal satisfaction. Early in the Portuguese colonial experience in India, these and similar accusations became commonplace in official and private correspondence from India and in Portuguese literature. This is one of the faces of the literature on decadência for example. At the same time, Orta solemnly admitted that ‘today one learns more in one day with the Portuguese than was known in one hundred years with the Romans’.

It is precisely in between these, at first glance, contradictory claims that Orta flags his special competence, his special practical knowledge, which was perhaps appreciated in the Goan and overseas context. All through the chapters, Orta planted his claim that he can restore the bodily health of his patients and stimulate their vital desires and, as a special bonus, their sexual pleasure. He was.

---


38 Afonso de Albuquerque’s and João de Castro’s exploits in the Indian Ocean and in India were portrayed in the contemporary and later narratives as feats that surpassed the success of both Alexander the Great and Augustus. The same heroic space had initially been occupied by Henry the Navigator, who had been described as worthier than Romulus, Caesar and Cicero, José Manuel Garcia, ‘D. João de Castro: Un homem de guerra e ciência’, in Francisco Faria Paulino (ed.), Tapeçarias de D. João de Castro (Lisbon, 1995).


of course, talking only about male sexual pleasure, which was connected to the idea of imperial fertility, natural and political in particular. If he pays occasional lip service to the Christian pessimist tradition which kept the umbilical cord between sin and illness unbroken, he did so with little conviction.

This is why the pages of the Colóquios abound in aphrodisiac stimulants to be extracted from tropical plants and substances, and they are laconically prescribed without moralizing. Amber, asafetida, bhang (hashish), benzoin, opium and many other substances contribute to ‘conversation with women’, ‘to lift the member’, ‘to increase coitus’ and so on.\(^\text{42}\) Not only do they increase venereal pleasure, they also increase commercial profits. In addition opium and bhang (and soap) represented a significant part of the state revenues from tax farming. An important tip for merchants in Europe (and metaphorically perhaps even tongue-in-cheek for missionaries) planning to trade in Asia was not to import useless items such as raiz angelica [angelic root] or raiz do Espirito Santo [root of the Holy Spirit], which was reputed to repress sexual desire, since no Indian would want to buy it.\(^\text{43}\) Substances that change the consciousness, from perfumes to dangerous drugs and poisons, according to Orta, seem to have been especially appreciated by the local population. Their effects liberated otherwise constrained bodies (and minds) to do unimaginable things. The ill-fated Sultan Bahadur confided to Martim Afonso de Sousa that when he wanted to travel the world, to Portugal, Brazil, Turkey, Arabia or Persia, he simply took a bit of bhang.\(^\text{44}\) On the other hand, Orta is quite cautious about the use of narcotics as can be seen in his comment on feeding datura, a dangerous hallucinogenic drug, to the servants in order to ridicule them.\(^\text{45}\)

This was obviously considered as useful knowledge for the Portuguese living in the tropical empire and for those who were planning to start their careers overseas. Clusius, Annibale Briganti and Antoine Colin, the translators to Latin, Italian and French, preserved religiously all the tips about apetiti veneri.\(^\text{46}\)

It is hard to imagine that Orta experienced and experimented with all the hallucinogenic drugs, opiates and poisons on his own. Although he may have

---

\(^\text{43}\) Ibid., p. 105.
\(^\text{44}\) Ibid., p. 97.
\(^\text{45}\) Ibid., p. 296.
\(^\text{46}\) Antoine Colin, Histoire des droges, espiceries, et de certains medicamens simples, qui naissent e's Indes et en l'Amerique, divisé en deux parties. La premiere comprise en quatre livres: les deux premiers de Mr. Garcei du Jardin ... (Lyon, 1619). Annibale Briganti, Dell’istoria de i semplici aromati, et altre cose; che vengono protate dall’Indie Orientali pertinenti all’uso della medicina. Parte prima divisa in Libri IIII. Di Don garzia da L’Horto (Venice, 1589). Both books were translations of the Clusius's Latin publications. All mention of ‘venereal pleasure’ was excised in the Victorian English translation by Clements Markham, Colloquies on the Simples & Drugs of India by Garcia da Orta (London, 1913).
been tempted, given his angry response to Ruano who inquired if Orta tested
the effects of datura on his ‘blacks’. ‘It is against my conscience’, he retorted.47
Expressed in a humanist dialogue, this matter is left in suspension and doubt.
From these and similar stories scattered all through Colóquios it is clear that
what Orta and Ruano call ‘practical’ knowledge as opposed to ‘speculative’ or
‘school’ knowledge48 was already practiced and known by the people inhabiting
Goa and the greater India, from the Middle East to China, and in the Indian
Ocean. Orta’s particular expertise as a physician was in prescribing drugs and
remedies. In the case of Paula de Andrade, poisoned by datura, he instructed
her servant ‘to rub her legs very hard and continuously with some coir and
apply a clyster, also administering an emetic for which I will write prescription’.49
However, these prescriptions are not always precise. Orta rarely discloses the
exact dosage of medical substances and the exact procedure of treatment.
Physicians probably never did, although Orta and his friends insisted so much
on the difference between truth and error, and on the purity of truth. Dimas
Bosque, another physician from Goa, writes about Orta that ‘he treats pure truth
in pure style; because truth is enough’.50 If Orta is telling pure truth, ‘without
rhetorical color’ as he boasted in another place, he is not telling all the truth.51 It
is because Orta’s text was not only and simply about knowledge. It was perhaps
primarily about self-fashioning and self-presentation, and a last-minute apology
for humanist dialogue and libertas discendi not just for his own sake but for the
whole group of Goan humanists that was about to be swept away.

Orta’s Humanist Circle in Goa

If Orta’s Colóquios is important for its knowledge-content, it is crucially
important for revealing how learned men performed science in the first half
of the sixteenth century in the Portuguese empire. As Stephen Shapin wrote,
scientific knowledge in the early modern era had a human face, and the virtues
and qualities of the scientists and those who participated in the construction
of knowledge validated (or not) its content. In the Colóquios, not only in the
main text, but also, and significantly so, in the paratexts features the whole
social spectrum of men of science in the largest possible sense of the word. Some,
however, counted more than others and the discursive violence lurks behind the
disputes that may have taken place even within the Goan scientific arena.
The Colóquios is in this respect a condensed Who is Who manual of the Goan humanist world in which Orta operated and reflects both local priorities and political choices, and cosmopolitan gestures. In the first place it reaffirms, and with a premonition of changes that were already taking place, the tacit pact between humanists such as Orta, Dimas Bosque, Luís Vaz de Camões, Tomé Caiado, all of whom speak out from and for the Colóquios in the introductory paratexts and their protectors who belonged to the highest Portuguese aristocracy.

The connection between arms and letters had already been established in an exemplary humanist dialogue, The Book of the Courtier by Baldassare Castiglione (1478–1529), who dedicated it to his patron Miguel da Silva (1480–1556), a bishop and ambassador of the king of Portugal to Rome. The same model of an ideal courtier was also an inspiration for many of the governors of the Estado da Índia, from Nuno da Cunha and Martim Afonso de Sousa to João de Castro (1500–48). However, while the European aristocracy, Italian or French nobles in particular, staged their prowess in the Mediterranean, the Portuguese had an immense arena, in Africa, Asia and Brazil, to express chivalry and pluck.

The singularity of the Portuguese nobility’s humanist experience, in comparison to Italian, British, French and German, is that the Portuguese and Spanish Antiquity Turn occurred alongside the building of the overseas empire. Invoking the ancient Greeks and Romans as the measure of achievements in science, literature and politics was a topos repeated already from the end of the fifteenth century and after the voyage of Bartolomeu Dias to the Cape of Good Hope in 1488. At the same time and even more so when they finally discovered India, the Portuguese saw themselves as not only the successors of the Romans, but as the protagonists of the new golden age. Portuguese humanists were joined in this patriotic propagandist campaign and it is within this context that we have to assess Orta and his book. It was showcasing what the humanists, in this case physicians and natural historians, saw themselves as doing and what the Portuguese and Spanish aristocracy expected of them.

52 On Orta as a cosmopolitan man in the context of the sixteenth-century Indian Ocean, see Michael Pearson’s contribution to this volume in Chapter 2.
54 See Angela Barreto Xavier and Ines G. Zupanov, Catholic Orientalism: Portuguese Empire, Indian Knowledge (16th–18th Centuries) (New Delhi, in press).
can do for the empire and they invoked their close relationship with the 1
aristocratic patrons. In the dedicatory letter and in the poem dedicated to 2
Martim Afonso de Sousa, his protector, Orta likened him to a great hero of the 3
Antiquity. Moreover, he regretted not being able to turn himself into Homer or 4
Virgil in order to write about Sousa’s heroic deeds, but instead fought his own 5
idleness by writing the Colóquios. In a word, Orta’s work was a substitute for a 6
heroic epic. Moreover, it was under Sousa’s advice and order that wrote Orta his 7
’short treatise’ and this valorous noble was the only person capable of shielding 8
it from ‘idle people and biting tongues’.56
9
Orta’s dedication to his protector is matched by Luís Vaz de Camões’s 10
dedication to the Vice-roy Dom Francisco Coutinho, third Conde de Redondo 11
(died 1564). In a similar way, Camões makes connections between the discovery 12
of the secrets of Medicine and heroic deeds of Achilles. ‘Help who helps against 13
death/ and you will be just like [that] strong Greek’.57 Finally D. Francisco 14
Coutinho was the one who bestowed Orta with the three-year patent or 15
copyright on Colóquios.58
16
The Colóquios swarms with references to the viceroy and governors. 17
Predictably those who were alive were given more space than those who were 18
dead. For example, João de Castro who wrote himself two dialogues on natural 19
history, The Treatise on a Sphere in Questions and Answers and Geography: a 20
Dialogue (1535), must have been a huge inspiration to Orta.59 He was also a 21
perfect ‘chivalric scientist’, a type recently identified by Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra 22
in the sixteenth-century Iberian world.60 And it is possible that his nautical and 23
geographical knowledge was too important to be published during his life time. 24

57 Ibid., p. 9.
58 Ibid., p. 3. Within a period of three years, whoever reprinted the Colóquios without
permission had to pay a fine of 200 cruzados either to Garcia de Orta or to whoever made a
complaint, of which half would be given to charities.
59 João de Castro, ‘Tratado de Esfera por Perguntas e Respostas’, in Armando Cortesão
and Luís de Albuquerque (eds), Obras completas (Coimbra, 1968), vol. 1, pp. 15–108. João de
Castro, ‘De geografia por modo de dialogo’, in Armando Cortesão and Luís de Albuquerque
(ed), Obras completas (Coimbra, 1968), vol. 1, pp. 100–114. For other dialogues written in
Portugal and in Spain in the same period see Roger Friedlein, ‘El diálogo renacentista en la
Península Ibérica’, in Klaus W. Hempfer, Gerhard Regn and Sunita Scheffel (eds), Text Und
60 Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, ‘Crusading and Chivalric Epistemologies; Iberian
Influences on Early-Modern European Science’, in William Eamon and Victor Navarro
Brotóns (eds), Más allá de la Leyenda Negra: España y la Revolución Científica/Beyond
Cañizares-Esguerra, Nature, Empire, and Nation. Explorations of the History of Science in the
This may help us understand why it was possible to print Colóquios right at that very moment in Goa and never again. Precisely, perhaps, because the knowledge and information it contained was a common knowledge. Wrapped in classical and modern medico-botanical erudition and philology, it was not disclosing any strategic secrets. In fact, Orta plays with his readers, again by using Ruano’s words, about the destiny of his book, right in the first and the second chapter. It was to be written only for Ruano and maybe for some selected Spanish doctors, and maybe by chance it may be printed.\textsuperscript{61} Obviously, knowledge considered important by the Portuguese Crown was that which was not widely disseminated and Orta wanted his readers to believe that his book belonged to the same category. But, of course he knew it didn’t.

The second reason for printing the book was that it was supported by the humanist clique around Orta, among whom Luís Vaz de Camões profited to place his first poem for publication. It is also possible that Orta would not have been able to do this by himself since he was, as described already in 1559 by the Jesuit Luís Fróis, too old and ‘decrépito’.\textsuperscript{62} And this humanist clique was still able to muster support of the nobles such as D. Francisco Coutinho, third Conde de Redondo, who died in 1564. To that we may add, and this is purely speculative, that the printing press in the hands of João de Endem or somebody in charge of selling books may have had their own reasons for wanting to publish the book and sell it in Europe.

By looking at the books coming out of the printing press after Orta, it is clear why there were no more books of this kind. The humanist preoccupation with the science related to the natural body was replaced with the Catholic Reformation’s obsession with the spiritual body and with the soul: as if Orta’s words turned prophetic when he said that the ‘the worst sins had to be confessed first’.\textsuperscript{63} The books printed just before and after the Colóquios were about sins and confessors written by the archbishop of Goa, D. Gaspar de Leão Pereira, who declared war on Portuguese tropical sins under the banner, already lifted by Francis Xavier, carrying the moto: ‘For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul’.\textsuperscript{64} D. Gaspar simply overwrote Colóquios.

\textsuperscript{61} Orta, Colóquios, vol. 1, pp. 19–36.
\textsuperscript{62} Luís Fróis reported in his letter to European members, written in Goa around 12 November 1559 that Orta participated in ‘conclusoens da medicina e philosophia’ held that year in the Jesuit college of São Paulo. Orta was described as ‘hum velho já quasi decrepito, dos milhores letrados que caa há nestas partes’. In Joseph Wicki (ed.), Documenta Indica (Rome, 1954), pp. 293–4.
\textsuperscript{63} Orta, Colóquios, vol. 1, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{64} In a letter to João III, the king of Portugal in 1548, St Francis Xavier advised the king to meditate on mt. 16, 26 – ‘Quid potest homini si universum mundum lucretur animae vero suae detrimentum patiatur’ – a quarter of an hour every day. José Wicki, ‘La Sagrada Escritura en las cartas e instrucciones de Francisco Xavier’, Manresa, 24 (1952): 259–64.
García de Orta’s Colloquies

with his own spiritual medicine in the book that was also a dialogue, *Desenganos de perdidios* (1578), in order to, as he would write, convert back the flesh into the soul again.\(^{65}\)

Far from Goa, the Colloquies acquired a second life in Europe, beyond control of his author, of the Inquisition and of the Estado da Índia. It was Clusius who famously translated the *Colloquies* into Latin and published it in an illustrated volume, a year before Orta’s death, entitled *Aromatum et simplicium* (Antwerp, 1567) that went into several (refurbished!) editions.\(^{66}\) Clusius took almost everything from the *Colóquios* except the dialogic form. Neither did Cristóvão da Costa, the author of the second (and the last) first-hand pharmaco-botanical treatise on Asian plants and remedies, *Tractado delas drogas, y medicinas de las Indias Orientales*, published in the sixteenth century in Burgos, appreciate the form of a dialogue. ‘And so, his (that is, Orta’s) work deals with various medicines, and plants, and other things concerning human health [la salud humana], but also deals with others that are useless, and without profit for it (that is, health), because he was forced to deal with them in following a style of a Dialogue’\(^{67}\). Those who speak have a tendency, according to Costa, to amuse themselves and to spill out of the principal topic. Instead of a dialogue, Costa preferred to include pictures [*pinturas*] and drawings of the plants, especially those he asserts to have seen with his own eyes. However, another virtuoso of medico-botanical knowledge, Nicolas, was inspired enough by Orta’s work to include at the end of the third part of his *Historia Medicinal*, a ‘*Dialogo del hierro*’. In general, however, and after the volumes of Clusius’s publications, the genre of botanico-medical and simply botanical books firmly adopted the Latin prose and thus discarded doubts and uncertainties, or spelled them out clearly, regarding the empirical world of Asian plants. It was the translation from a dialogue into the prose, in addition to translation into Latin, considered as a more appropriate language of the medico-botanical books in the early modern period that became fatal to Orta’s memory and authorship. It was not until the Portuguese national science required an early precursor of a heroic (colonial) scientist that his reputation had to be restored and reconstructed.

\(^{65}\) Dom Gaspar’s dialogue was not Ciceronian, but Lucian variety in which all Orta wanted to do with his dialogue had to be undone. D. Gaspar de Leão [Pereira], *Desenganos de Perdidos* (Goa, 1573), ed. Eugenio Asensio (Coimbra, 1958), p. 146. ‘Sensualists ... do not have soul because they have converted it into flesh’.

\(^{66}\) On the various editions of the *Aromatum et simplicium* and, in particular, the illustrations presented in them, see Florike Egmond’s contribution to this volume in Chapter 9.

\(^{67}\) Cristóvão da Costa or Christoval Acosta, *Tractado delas drogas, y medicinas de las Indias Orientales, con sus plantas debuxadas al bivo por Christoval Acosta medico y cirujano que las vio ocularmente* (Burgos, 1578), preface ‘Al lector’.