

## “The Wheel of Torments”: mobility and redemption in Portuguese colonial India (sixteenth century)

INES G. ŽUPANOV

Garcia da Orta wrote in his *Colóquios dos Simples e Drogas he Cousas Mediciniais da India* that “the Portuguese who sail through many parts of the world, wherever they go do not look for knowledge but only how to dispose of their merchandise ... They are not curious to know about things that exist in those countries.”<sup>1</sup> In 1563, when the book was printed in Goa, the capital of the Portuguese colonial empire in Asia, trade and profit-making were routinely branded as sinful from the pulpits and as unlawful when taxes and bribes were not paid to the royal officials. A sense of decay, decadence, and loss of spiritual and moral nerve was pervasive in contemporary Portuguese correspondence and in the treatises reflecting on the *Estado da Índia* that stretched along the coasts of the southern seas from Africa to Asia. Fifty years after the successful military conquest of Goa in 1510 and the self-declared possession of the oriental “Indias,” those first two decades

<sup>1</sup> Garcia da Orta, *Colóquios dos Simples e Drogas he Cousas Mediciniais da India* (Goa, 1563), ed. Conde de Ficalho, facsimile of the 1891 edition (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1987), vol. I, p. 151. Hereafter “Orta.” There exists also a facsimile edition of the original edition published in Lisbon by the Academia das Ciências de Lisboa in 1963.

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appeared to the late sixteenth-century Portuguese in India as a “golden” age, *idade dourada*, after which everything went downhill. Though the accumulation and consumption of goods, riches, and capital had created euphoria and fantastic mercantile *élan*, they also provoked anxiety and profound soul searching. Complaints about the economic and moral crisis that started in that period may have been widely exaggerated, but these complaints engendered a new genre of colonial writing and historiography that focused specifically on the *decaência* of the Portuguese empire.<sup>2</sup>

Given that the Portuguese held on to Goa for another four centuries, until 1961, the doomsday scenarios of the colony in the 1560s were obviously premature. Leaving aside the question of whether there actually was a severe social crisis and financial crunch at this particular moment, what is of interest to us is the fact that prominent intellectuals and administrators in late sixteenth-century Goa experienced the world of the Portuguese colonies as trapped in a deranging and painful state of permanent mobility – mobility that would lead to disaster and loss of cultural, political, and religious community, unless some sort of framework or boundary were contrived to legitimize their hastily acquired Asian *dominium*.

<sup>2</sup> See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia: A Political and Economic History* (London and New York: Longman, 1993), pp. 80–106, and “The Trading World of the Western Indian Ocean, 1546–1565: A Political Interpretation,” in *A carreira da Índia e as rotas dos estreitos*, eds. Arturo Teodoro de Matos and Luís Filipe F. R. Thomaz (Angra: O Seminário, 1998), pp. 207–27; Luís Filipe F. R. Thomaz, “A crise de 1565–1575 na história do Estado da Índia,” *Mare Liberum*, 9 (1995).

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Poetic licence, literary genius, and the desire for royal gratification made Luís Vaz de Camões rhapsodize in his epic *Os Lusíadas* about the courageous Lusitanians at the door of Asia.<sup>3</sup> Refashioning a small, unruly band of sailors and soldiers, led by Vasco da Gama, into the valiant successors of the conquering Roman legionnaires, supported in their actions by the Roman gods themselves, Camões consecrated all present and future Portuguese Asian conquests as a “new” *imperium Romanum*. This poetic vision was in fact all-pervasive in sixteenth-century Portugal, and it coexisted with the darker side of Portuguese imperial ambition. A fear of geographical overextension, combined with an inability to consolidate and control “possessions,” presented a permanent source of anxiety. Already in 1540, João de Barros, a grammarian and historian of Portuguese Asia who believed in the spiritual, social, and linguistic future of the empire – he envisaged Indians speaking Portuguese in their temples – was having doubts about “material” survival: “Portuguese arms and memorial stones [*padrões*], planted in Africa and in Asia, and on thousands of islands beyond the three parts of the world, are material and time might spoil them, but it will not spoil the doctrine, customs and language that the Portuguese have left in those parts.”<sup>4</sup>

The fantasy of successful *translatio imperii* that the Portuguese shared in the sixteenth century with the Spanish

<sup>3</sup> Luis Vaz de Camões, *The Lusiads* (London: Penguin, 1987 [1952]).

<sup>4</sup> João de Barros, *Gramática da Língua Portuguesa: Cartinha, Gramática, Diálogo em Louvor da Nossa Linguagem e Diálogo da Viciosa Vergonha*, ed. Maria Leonor Carvalhão Buescu (Lisbon: Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, 1971), p. 405.

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monarchy, with which they had stood “united” from 1580 to 1640, acquired an eschatological streak in the later seventeenth century, due to António Viera’s belief that the re-established Portuguese royal dynasty was predestined to rule the fifth and last earthly empire before the advent of the Judgment Day.<sup>5</sup> As Anthony Pagden has convincingly argued, the European political imagination developed over time an image of the Roman empire as “the object of successive ‘renovations.’”<sup>6</sup> It was precisely moments of crisis that had signalled, invited, and enabled movements of “re-foundation.” Rather than view the middle of the sixteenth century as a period of decline for the Portuguese empire in Asia, Ângela Barreto Xavier has recently argued that the reign of João III (1521–57) was not a fall into the trap of bigotry and the Jesuit Counter-Reformation, but was instead a re-foundation of a state apparatus capable of supporting the burden of the global imperial project.<sup>7</sup> Ecclesiastical hierarchy and religious order were constitutive elements of the construction of the Joanine administrative state. Behind and below this overarching political design, colonial actors such as Garcia da Orta, a doctor, botanist and merchant in precious stones, and Gaspar de Leão Pereira, a theologian and archbishop of Goa,

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Cohen, *The Fire of the Tongues: António Vieira and the Missionary Church in Brazil and Portugal* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Anthony Pagden, *Lords of the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France, c.1500–c.1800* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 27.

<sup>7</sup> Ângela Barreto Xavier, *A Invenção de Goa: Poder Imperial e Conversões Culturais nos Séculos XVI e XVII* (Lisbon: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 2008).

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seized the moment to propose their own respective visions of cultural mobility and political legitimation.

First, they had to identify the immediate source and cause of the corruption. Orta's humanist indignation at the lack of Portuguese interest in the natural sciences, geography, and history was a minor item on the list of complaints levelled against degraded colonial society in India. Louder, stronger, and more ominous voices than Orta's were heard expressing aversion to what was perceived as unprecedented zeal for the acquisition of material riches. The first two archbishops of Goa, Dom Gaspar de Leão Pereira and Dom Jorge Temudo, thundered warnings directed at the lost souls of their contemporaries.<sup>8</sup> They were echoing the charismatic voice of the famous Jesuit Francis Xavier, who a decade or two earlier had repeatedly asked the question, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul."<sup>9</sup>

The heart of the problem for sixteenth-century Portuguese colonial society in Asia was that it was being pulled in contrary directions – it was caught between an expectation of and desire for unlimited movement, and a longing sense, a still famous *saudade*, of belonging and at-homeness. In their two colossal books printed in Goa, Orta's *Colóquios* of 1563 and Dom Gaspar's *Desengano de perdidos* of

<sup>8</sup> José Wicki, "Duas relações ... 1568 e 1569," *Studia*, 8 (1961), pp. 123–221.

<sup>9</sup> In a letter to João III, the king of Portugal in 1548, St. Francis Xavier advised the king to meditate on Matthew 16:26 – "Quid potest homini si universum mundum lucretur animae vero suae detrimentum patiat" – a quarter of an hour every day. José Wicki, "La Sagrada Escritura en las cartas e instrucciones de Francisco Xavier," *Manresa*, vol. 24 (1952), pp. 259–64.

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1573, both men took movement and mobility as their starting point. Their separate tropical paths, however, would lead them to different conclusions. Grounded in his personal experience as a physician, pharmacist, and botanist, Orta found mutability and change to be a permanent feature of the natural world, to which human beings had to adjust, as individuals and through society.<sup>10</sup> In response to the corrupting exterior powers presented by the tropics, this New Christian doctor proposed local drugs, plants, and potions for the purposes of rejuvenation and cure. The reinvigoration and acclimatization of the body were the only means of fighting, if only temporarily, the merciless forces of natural decay.<sup>11</sup>

For Dom Gaspar de Leão Pereira, the transience and frailty of the human condition had nothing to do with nature. It was rather about the sinful soul travelling through terrestrial zones of agony and temptation. The struggle between the soul and the flesh was a universal war with only two possible outcomes: ascent to heavenly Paradise, or descent into the fires of Hell. For Dom Gaspar, no amount of investment in the human body, something advocated by Orta, could restore health to the soul. The worst of all evils to befall the soul, he

<sup>10</sup> Orta celebrated movement in a way that reminds us of Montaigne’s statement that “being consists in movement and action.” Antonio José Maraval, *Culture of the Baroque: Analysis of a Historical Structure*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986 [1975]), p. 175. Hereafter “Maraval.”

<sup>11</sup> Ines G. Županov, “Drugs, Health, Bodies and Souls in the Tropics: Medical Experiments in Sixteenth-century Portuguese India,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 39, 1 (2002), pp. 1–43. See also Ines G. Županov, *Missionary Tropics: The Catholic Frontier in India (16th–17th Centuries)* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

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insisted, was for it to become carnal. “Sensualists ... do not have soul because they have converted it into flesh.”<sup>12</sup>

It is worth following the movement mapped by these two conflicting and yet, as we will see, in many ways complementary manuals for survival in the Portuguese colonial tropics – not just the geographical tropics but also the tropics of the soul or, as Ronaldo Vainfas put it in the case of Brazil, “the tropics of sin.”<sup>13</sup> Orta’s *Colóquios* and Dom Gaspar’s *Desengano de perdidos* are products of a culture in need of guidance, advice (*aviso*) and counsel (*conselho*).<sup>14</sup> Captains, pilots, and sailors were being invited to write *Roteiros* to facilitate travel to India; spiritual directors were flooding the market with *Guiás* and *Spiritual Exercises*; viceroys and state administrators were writing *Pareceres* (opinions) on how to govern the *Estado da Índia*. Within this plurality of viewpoints and judgments, it was not a question of where one stood, but rather of where one was moving to, or what one aspired to get. The opening of a myriad of capillary tubes and the dramatically enhanced porosity of the communal tissue caused social relations and individual desires to become so densely opaque that reality became almost surreal in its complexity. The problem of knowing how to situate oneself in this labyrinth of possibilities could bring an individual to the point of doubting his own existence. For a Jesuit,

<sup>12</sup> D. Gaspar de Leão [Pereira], *Desengano de Perdidos* (Goa, 1573), ed. Eugenio Asensio, (Coimbra: Por ordem da Universidade, 1958), p. 146. Hereafter “*Desengano*.” In translation, the *Desengano de Perdidos* may be rendered imperfectly as *Disillusioning the Lost*.

<sup>13</sup> Ronaldo Vainfas, *Trópico dos Pecados: Moral, Sexualidade e Inquisição no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> Maraval, pp. 57–78.

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Baltasar de Gracián y Morales, human existence could not itself “exist without a human being who knows.”<sup>15</sup> How one might know that one knows was also in question. As that sage in Bordeaux, Montaigne, bluntly asked: “What if knowledge, trying to arm us with new defences against natural mishaps, has imprinted in our fancy their magnitude and weight, more than her reasons and subtleties to protect us from them?”<sup>16</sup>

At one point or another between 1560, the year that Dom Gaspar arrived in Goa, and 1568, when Orta died, the physician and the archbishop must have met. Since the prelate did not oppose the publication of the *Colóquios* in the press, which was mostly under his wing, we can safely say that he did not find the book offensive, subversive, or contrary to his own very different pedagogical program. What this program was is more than apparent from a book printed in Goa in 1565, *Tratado que fez mestre Hieronimo, medico do papa Benedicto 13 contra os judeus: em que prova o Mesias da ley ser vindo*, prefaced by Dom Gaspar’s *Carta do primeiro Arcebispo de Goa a povo de Isreal, seguidor ainda da ley de Moises, & do talmud, por engano & malicia dos seus Rabis*.<sup>17</sup> According to the

<sup>15</sup> Maraval, p. 61. See also Baltasar de Gracián y Morales, *El Discreto*, in *El Héroe. El Político. El Discreto. Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia*, ed. Arturo del Hoyo (Barcelona: Clásicos Plaza y Janés, 1986), p. 92. *El Discreto* (1645) is a portrayal of the typical courtier.

<sup>16</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), p. 795.

<sup>17</sup> *Tratado que fez mestre Hieronimo, medico do papa Benedicto 13 contra os judeus: em que prova o Mesias da ley ser vindo*, prefaced by Dom Gaspar’s *Carta do primeiro Arcebispo de Goa a povo de Israel, seguidor ainda da ley de Moises, & do talmud, por engano & malicia dos seus Rabis*. Biblioteca Nacional, Lisbon, Reservados, 411.

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archbishop, Judaism was an illness, one that lasted 2,000 years and claimed 2,000 million souls, and had come about because the Jews had originally refused remedy from the hand of the ultimate *médico*, Jesus Christ.

We cannot know just how Orta felt about this “medical” text. As a *cristão novo*, a New Christian, whose family had converted from Judaism around the turn of the century, he must have grasped the menace of the newly established Inquisition, transplanted into Goa in 1560.<sup>18</sup> Significantly, the armada of that year brought to Goa both the archbishop Dom Gaspar as well as the first inquisitor, Aleixo Dias Falcão. That the threat was real was confirmed in 1580, four years after Dom Gaspar’s death, when Orta himself was posthumously tried by the Inquisition and sentenced to be burned at the stake; his bones were dug out, burned and scattered in the Mandovi river. Dom Gaspar’s bones are preserved even today in a tomb near the altar of St. Joseph in Goa Cathedral. In the 1560s, however, the two learned men were still busy pushing for their different programs, both of them sure that they knew how to deal with the fantastically dynamic and disturbingly transitive Portuguese colonial order.

Orta, who placed his confidence in empirical observation, viewed mobility through a horizontal “spyglass.” His gaze was fixed on the here and now, flatly spread across the surface of the phenomenal world. Likened to a garden (*orta*) by Luís Vaz de Camões, an admirer of his who was versed in rhetorical ruses and puns, Orta would not only map, pin

<sup>18</sup> “New Christian” was a term used to designate converts from Judaism.

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down, and describe his objects but also watch them grow, change, and travel from one place to another.<sup>19</sup>

Of concern in this essay is the translation into language of what Orta perceived as the horizontal mobility of plants, drugs, spices, animals, and people in Portuguese colonial India. Our hope and conviction is that we will glimpse social relations and cultural practices through this language. Orta’s ingenious power of display should not blind us to the fact that he is consciously intent on blurring the distinction between reality and representation. To do so persuasively was for him, as we will insist, a matter of life and death.

Matters of life and death were always on Dom Gaspar’s mind, and before his eyes. The archbishop was acutely aware of the material world in movement, which enabled and facilitated phenomenal colonial expansion. Given his roots in the mystical Iberian spirituality of the early sixteenth century, however, his spiritual astrolabe was pointed elsewhere. To his audience in Goa, Dom Gaspar proposed that the eyes be averted from the flesh, and that the eyes of the spirit be opened. Instead of a horizontal mobility of things, he put forward an interior vision, one that would reveal an even richer world, such as the one painted by Hieronymus Bosch, perhaps, in which creatures and things move up and down the ladder of salvation. To drive his message home to stumbling Christian souls, in his *Desengano de perdidos* Dom Gaspar conjured up the *figura* of the mermaid. This monstrous creature, known to classical European literature, whose serpentine form was also sculpted

<sup>19</sup> Orta, vol. I, pp. 7–8.

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on the walls of the “pagan” temples of India, became a heuristic device for acquiring knowledge. In Dom Gaspar’s text, mermaids came to personify the five senses and were, as such, pronounced guilty of misleading spiritually directionless Christians. While it certainly seems that Dom Gaspar specifically chose mermaids to fashion a persuasive allegory of errant human perception, it appears also that he, in turn, was chosen and “possessed” by them. These were a special kind of “local” mermaids and mermen, the *nagini* and *naga*; they had survived a long series of idol-smashing campaigns, and were eventually assigned a particular role in the Christian economy of visibility and subalternity.

If the *figura* of the mermaid enabled the archbishop to deliver his pious homily against sensual knowledge of the world, it may also have opened a passageway to the messages that Indian “alterity” strove to imprint on the body of the tropical *Christianitas*. As they passed through the factory of cultural translation, the mermaids blended with local, autochthonous divine creatures (the *nagini* and the *yakshi*), assimilating strands of imported European imagination and refurbishing their traditional purpose and meaning. The forces behind these fantastic catalysts of cultural migration were, even before the arrival of the Portuguese, associated with gender, fertility, and rootedness in the soil.<sup>20</sup> Unwittingly initiated by Dom Gaspar de Leão Pereira, this assimilation,

<sup>20</sup> Ines G. Županov, “Conversion, Illness and Possession. Catholic Missionary Healing in Early Modern South Asia,” in Ines G. Županov and Caterina Guenzi (eds.), *Divins remèdes: Médecine et religion en Asie du Sud, Purusartha* 27 (Paris, 2008).

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enabling mermaids and *nagini* to become incarnations of each other, was not at all what he had had in mind. In fact, he desired just the opposite.

Both the *Colóquios dos Simples e Drogas he Cousas Mediciniais da India* and the *Desengano de perdidos*, in spite of their celebration of movement and mobility, deal with the acquisition of stability in a rapidly expanding early modern world. They are both rhetorical *tours de force*, spectacularly boastful linguistic constructs that orbit the same burning question of how to shore up imperial Portuguese acquisitions in Asia.

“From long roads, long lies”

The first point of encounter between the physician and the archbishop is the choice of literary genre: a dialogue. At first glance, it does not appear an original choice: this is one of the privileged literary genres of the Renaissance. Manuals for self-fashioning, such as Baldassare Castiglione’s *Il Cortegiano*, and religious works of catechetical nature, often seized upon this older classical form, grafting onto it new and urgent messages and lessons. As a verbal construct, dialogue is inherently peripatetic. It follows the pace of an intellectual promenade, with stopovers, occasional *double entendres*, witticisms, surprises, confessions, and conversions. The first crucial difference between *Desengano de perdidos* and *Colóquios* is the choice of ending. The former offers a customary conclusion with the triumph of revealed knowledge. The second does not really end at all: it stops abruptly, with an additional chapter left behind due to the author’s “forgetfulness.” Orta, who plays the part of himself in the dialogue, apologizes to his

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interlocutor Ruano: “I thought that the lecture on *betre* [betel] was already completed, but, alas, my memory is so weak that you must pardon this instance of forgetfulness, as well as many other that may have occurred.”<sup>21</sup> Oblivion, whether due to old age or to the incapacity to encompass the multitude of things to be uncovered, observed and studied, emerges as the limit of the individual quest for knowledge.

Dom Gaspar, on the other hand, brings his two interlocutors, a Christian/Teacher and a Turk/Disciple, to the gates of Heaven.

We will reach this stage, & all [things] from this place [earth] have to remain, & only love can accompany us, & we'll acquire reason, & understand ourselves armed with divine love, & we will begin to be like those we want to find at the moment of the dreadful and horrendous Death: Horrendous I say to the Mundane for whom all the good ends with its [death's] arrival, & but not to Christians, if they spent their life in patience, & and in desire of Death, then it [death] is a Door through which they enter to enjoy God the supreme good, praised forever and glorified. Amen.<sup>22</sup>

The use of the future tense in this passage is an established strategy for inducing certainty and rendering as complete

<sup>21</sup> I translate *prática do betre* as “lecture on betel” in order to render the translation smooth. That he calls his explanation *prática* rather than lecture comes from the fact that he clearly distances himself from the academic, that is non-empirical, type of lecture still in vogue at this point in Europe. Orta, vol. II, p. 389.

<sup>22</sup> *Desengano*, p. 353.

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events that may never occur. It also triggers an act of volition: what I will do is what I want to do. Throughout its text, the *Desengano de perdidos* exemplifies numerous acts of will that play a part in the Christian theatre of hope. The dismissal of illusions and of the spiritual errors that cause the loss of the soul requires a teacher or director, in both the theatrical and the pedagogical sense, who is capable of guiding the volition along the path of perfection. Dom Gaspar sets up his didactic theatre as a journey to the heart of Islam, and then out of it into the gates of Heaven. The only two interlocutors, a Christian and a Turk, meet on the road between Suez and Cairo and converse all the way to Constantinople.<sup>23</sup> As they travel through the countryside, which is under the control of the Ottoman empire, the Christian wears local “Muslim” dress, so as not to betray his origin and religion. When Dom Gaspar wrote his text, this kind of strategic disguise was being introduced in India as a particular, official Jesuit method of conversion called *accommodatio*.<sup>24</sup> The technique came into being after the arrival of Alessandro Valignano in 1575, and it was applied mostly in the territories outside and away from the Goan capital.

The archbishop never completely trusted his Jesuit subordinates in Goa. Profoundly touched by Franciscan spirituality, he was suspicious of both *accommodatio* as well as the Jesuit concept of contemplation in action. Between *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*, his choice was easy and

<sup>23</sup> *Desengano*, p. 55.

<sup>24</sup> There was nothing exceptional about adopting local dress code when engaged in travel, commerce and intelligence work. What the Jesuits did, is turning the practice of disguise and passing for a “native” into cultural theory.

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unequivocal. He went even further and renounced his office between 1567 and 1574, and established a convent of Madre de Deos for the Franciscan Friar Minors in Daugim, east of the Goan capital. It is during this time of retreat and spiritual leisure that he completed most of his literary works. After the death of Dom Jorge Temudo, the archbishop he had appointed in his place, and an order from Lisbon, Dom Gaspar reluctantly resumed his ecclesiastical duty for just short two years before he died in 1576.

The opening conversation of the *Desengano de perdidos* is posted with (deceptive) signs of equality between the two pilgrims. The Christian has a crippled hand and the Turk a limping leg. Both acquired their infirmities while fighting in wars; both have renounced military life. When they meet, one is on his way from India to the Holy Land, the other to his native town, Constantinople. During the first leg of the journey, it is the Turk who knows the way, and he prods the Christian to increase his pace. Soon, however, the Turk begins to lag behind, not, according to the Christian, because of his crippled leg, but “because you are more lame inside than outside.”<sup>25</sup> Little by little, through question and answer, the Turk becomes more and more “persuaded” and thus dependent on the guidance of the Christian, and an initially horizontal relationship turns into a vertical, hierarchical bond.

The erosion of the Turk’s confidence is not solely the work of a single Christian. It is also the work of the Catholic League, Dom Gaspar insists, which defeated the Turkish armada at Lepanto (1573). In Constantinople, when the

<sup>25</sup> *Desengano*, p. 44.

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conversation reaches its apogee (and the book its midpoint), the Turk is converted.<sup>26</sup> From then on, the roles of the two protagonists slightly change, at least in name. The Christian instantly decides that “it does not conform to reason, when there is such a big change to allow to remain the infamous name of Turk; and I’ll call you a Disciple, & you call me a Teacher, so that we are all disciples of the Lord Jesus”<sup>27</sup>. At the moment of conversion, the Disciple loses all vestiges of the autonomy and ethnicity he possessed as an “infidel.”

Orta and his invented character Ruano converse on an equal footing as two expert physicians. The difference between them, one which Orta periodically underscores, is their nationality. The Spanish Ruano often refers to “your Portuguese,” and Orta likewise affirms with “our Portuguese.” Orta moreover expresses the common Portuguese rancour directed at imperial Spanish pretensions concerning the Molucca islands.<sup>28</sup> This open and frequent expression of Portuguese national pride possibly presents a way for Orta to soften and obscure his New Christian and Spanish origins.<sup>29</sup> There are, however, real

<sup>26</sup> *Desengano*, p. 173.   <sup>27</sup> *Desengano*, p. 179.   <sup>28</sup> Orta, vol. I, pp. 361–2.

<sup>29</sup> His father, Fernão da Orta, was a Spanish Jew from Valencia de Alcántara, who had emigrated to Castelo de vide in Portugal in 1492. He belonged to the group of Jews who were baptized after Dom Manuel’s decree in 1497. The descendants of those converted Jews were called *marranos* (pigs) or *crístãos novos* (New Christians). Garcia da Orta was born in 1501 or 1502. I. S. Révah, *La Famille de Garcia de Orta* (Coimbra: Universitas conimbricensis, 1960), pp. 1–17. See also Charles R. Boxer, “Two Pioneers of Tropical Medicine: Garcia d’Orta and Nicolás Monardes,” *Diamante*, 14 (London, 1964), pp. 6–11, and Augusto da Silva Carvalho, *Garcia D’Orta* (Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidad, 1934), pp. 10–23. Hereafter “Carvalho.”

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achievements for which he cannot but praise Portuguese valor. “The roundness of the earth has never been known as it is today, especially by the Portuguese.”<sup>30</sup> The reduction of the time taken by travel and the possibility of circumnavigating the earth are connected directly to the acquisition of knowledge. “I say that we know more in one day through the Portuguese than we knew through the Romans in hundred years.”<sup>31</sup> The fruit of this knowledge is what Orta wishes to discuss; the character of Ruano serves to ask the right questions and so perform the role of Orta’s alter ego. In a ventriloquistic fashion, he articulates Orta’s desires:

I have a great desire to know about the medicinal drugs (such as are called the drugs of pharmacy in Portugal), and these other remedies and simples which there are here, as well as all the fruits and pepper [spices]. I would like to learn their names in all the different languages, as also the countries where they grow, and the trees or plants which bear them, and likewise how the Indian physicians use them. Furthermore, I would like to know about some of the other plants and fruits of this land, even if they are not medicinal, and also some of the customs of this country and the things that happen therein.<sup>32</sup>

In a word, Ruano’s function is to solicit answers to the questions to which Orta wishes to respond. Ruano is as knowledgeable – about classical Greco-Roman and Arab medicine, and botany, within the Renaissance framework and disciplinary limits – as Orta. He lacks knowledge only of

<sup>30</sup> Orta, vol. I, p. 203.    <sup>31</sup> Orta, vol. I, p. 210.    <sup>32</sup> Orta, vol. I, p. 19.

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“India,” a geographical term that denotes, in Portuguese documents of the period, the entire Asian empire, Africa included.

In the manner of a Devil’s Advocate, Ruano challenges some of Orta’s claims and demands additional explanations. At times, when he feels that Orta exaggerates or omits the whole truth, he even teases him. “You are not just a philosopher as you want to appear, you also want pearls and [precious] stones, just like everybody else.”<sup>33</sup> To this friendly provocation, Orta responds briefly, “Yes, I know.” His ostentatious transparency in word and deed is in fact a double trick. His scientific motto, “truth is painted naked,” is a complex construct of hidden and disclosed facts.<sup>34</sup> In his own “naked” book, he manages to conceal much of himself, his family, his relationships and his religion. Except for a servant woman, Antónia, no one from his fictive or real household, his wife or two daughters, for example, enters the scene. There is no sign of his sisters and relatives, who had had brushes with the Inquisition in Lisbon. Only a few months after Orta’s death, Leonel Peres (or Gonçalves), husband of Catarina da Orta, the author’s sister, admitted to the inquisitor Aleixo Dias Falcão in Goa that the dead physician had believed that “the Law of Moses was the true Law ... that the prophecies were not yet fulfilled. That Christ was not the son of God; that the Jews had not killed him, but he had died of old age, and he was the son of Miriam and Joseph.”<sup>35</sup> We know from the Inquisition

<sup>33</sup> Orta, vol. II, p. 123.

<sup>34</sup> Orta, vol. I, p. 79. “Porque a verdade se pinta nua.”

<sup>35</sup> Carvalho, p. 73. *Reportorio geral de tres mil oitocentos processos, que sam todos os despachados neste Sancto Officio de Goa, e mais partes da India do anno de Mil e quinhentos e secenta e hum, que começou o dito*

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records that his marital life was not a happy one and that his wife, Brianda de Solis, refused to pay for a new cloth to cover her husband's corpse.

Long lies were coming from afar. Both Orta and Dom Gaspar use this common proverb in their respective texts, each with a different interpretative twist.<sup>36</sup> Orta uses it to dismiss wrong information about camphor, whereas the archbishop employs it to display the Turk's insulting attitude towards the Christians and the Portuguese. The Turk draws on the proverb to express his doubt and to ridicule the Christian's rendering of the Portuguese victory in Chaul, a small town in the so-called *Províncias do Norte*. In response to a touching account of the heroism shown by a small Portuguese force in the face of a huge army of the Idalcão (the sultan of Bijapur), an account woven through with miracle and divine protection, we are presented with an ironic and violent reaction on the part of the Turk. He not only disbelieves the story, holding it as "a lie coming from afar," he also readies himself to attack the Christian and avenge the event: "Do you want me to take revenge of your blasphemies with this stick?" The archbishop effectively reverses the meaning of the proverb, showing that the proselytising of Christianity does not abide by the proverbial law. Christianity remains pure and unchanged, whether it comes from afar or

*Sancto Officio até o anno Mil e seis centos e vinte e tres, cõ a lista dos Inquisidores que tem sido nelle, e dos autos publicos da Fee, que se tem celebrado na dita CIDADE de GOA. FEITO PELLO LICENCIADO JOÃO Delgado Figueyra do Desembargo de sua Magestade, Promotor & Deputado do dito Sancto Officio. Sendo os Inquisidores os senhores Francisco Borges de Souza & João Fernades de Almeida, ANNO do M. DC.XXIII, Biblioteca Nacional, Lisbon, Reservados, cod. 203.*

<sup>36</sup> "De longas vias, longas mentiras," *Desengano*, p. 41; *Orta*, vol. I, p. 154.

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not. Unlike camphor, which is liable to arrive in foul or counterfeit form from distant places, Christianity remains incorruptible in transit. According to the archbishop, the healing touch of salvation travels towards the East, whereas lies – adulterated spices and drugs, corrupted words, nefarious sins and lewd religion – waft towards the West.

After the Council of Trent, polemical Christian literature used irony and role reversal as its stock in trade. The Jesuit students of the Collegio Romano were trained in disputations in which they had to serve as the Devil’s advocate. The Turk in the *Desengano de perdidos* plays just such a role before his conversion into Disciple. Whenever unable to follow the explanations of his Christian interlocutor, or else unhappy with them, he hurls insults. “You are a wolf, & dressed in sheep’s skin [and you] want to double-cross me.”<sup>37</sup> Dom Gaspar de Leão Pereira plots the relationship of his characters in agonistic terms. The Turk is treated all through the first half of the book as a disorderly child on whom the Christian inflicts verbal punches and slaps. One such assault is to install in the Turk’s infidel soul a feeling of *temor servil*, the servile fear that arises when the eyes of the soul are directed towards the punishment of Hell. “This fear causes pain & sadness (*tristeza*) in the soul, & and the desire to leave the sins, & improve one’s life.”<sup>38</sup> Fear is in many ways a major import of Christianity, brought from afar to the local Asian converts. In exchange for spices, the Portuguese brought, as their own form of merchandise, the fear of Hell and sin.

<sup>37</sup> *Desengano*, p. 27.    <sup>38</sup> *Desengano*, p. 104.

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The teaching of Christian fear was the first and crucial step towards building a colonial Christian community. It was, at least in the beginning, the only cohering principle for the otherwise plural and multicultural society brought about by Portuguese colonial rule. “The first movement of conversion of these people will be fear of torments,” the archbishop maintained, since “fear is the origin of wisdom.”<sup>39</sup> In the *Desengano de perdidos* the process of ingraining fear into non-Christians is clearly thematized under separate subchapters and shot through with exemplary anecdotes. As central as it was to spiritual conversion and – to use Dom Gaspar’s word – healing, fear and its derivatives had also to pass through the body. It is on the matter of the body and the body politic that Orta and the archbishop meet again and, predictably, pull in different directions.

**“The taste of flesh”; between corruption  
and resurrection**

Liçenciado Dimas Bosquet, a prominent physician in Portuguese India around the middle of the sixteenth century, commends Garcia da Orta in the opening pages of the *Colóquios* for his long experience in India and knowledge of the remedies and simples that exist “in this country.” What Orta endeavoured to do during his thirty years in India was to serve his country (*patria*) and friends, and to search for truth and perfect knowledge. At the same time, Bosquet added that he “cured many different people, not only those who

<sup>39</sup> *Desengano*, p. 100.

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accompany viceroys and governors of this oriental India, but also at some courts of the Muslim kings and gentiles, and he communicated with physicians and curious people.”<sup>40</sup> In order for everybody to profit from his experience, insisted Bosquet, Orta wrote in Portuguese and in the form of a dialogue, “and this is why he sometimes moves away from medicinal topics and relates some things of this country which are worth knowing.”<sup>41</sup>

Wherever Orta’s ethnographical digression takes us, we return in the end to the body. It is a body in movement, and the movements of the body that nourish his narrative magnetize all external things, drawing them into its orbit. The classical Galenic-Hippocratic idea of the body as constituted by four humors corresponding to the four elements of the physical world is the basic principle of the sixteenth-century medical profession. Orta belongs to this tradition. Yet, when he needs to show his academic medical learning, he places it in Ruano’s lines and repartee. As Orta’s *doppelgänger*, Ruano usually defends or starts with conventional, immobile wisdom or understanding. He also has a penchant for adding short scientific glosses of approval to Orta’s experiential demonstrations. “On all the points you have referred to, you have thoroughly satisfied me and much more concerning the first qualities, which are warmth, cold, humidity, dryness.”<sup>42</sup>

In contrast to the mechanical and textual framework within which an ordinary European doctor might work out his diagnoses and remedies, Orta presents his own experience, which explodes venerable authorities of all colors and

<sup>40</sup> Orta, vol. I, pp. 10–11.    <sup>41</sup> Orta, vol. I, p. 11.    <sup>42</sup> Orta, vol. I, p. 34.

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denominations. One reason for this is that the body in Europe and the body in the tropics are not the same. There is nothing revolutionary in Orta's view that different climactic zones endow bodies with different humoral constitutions. What does strike us as exceptional, though, is Orta's unabashedly materialist approach to the body, his refusal to pay lip service to Christian tenets.

By the 1560s, it was common knowledge that there was something "rotten" in the climate of Goa. The male Portuguese body suffered from certain pathologies which were constant menaces to survival. Concupiscence and excessive sexual desire were denounced by the official religious community as a permanent threat to the body and to society. That being said, there was a general obsession with masculine potency, a matter that was viewed as a health concern and was a frequent source of complaints. Orta's treatment of this hot topic never exits the realm of matter-of-fact observation, diagnosis, and remedy. Thus, he might note that the Chinese hold amber to be good for "conversation with women," or that asafoetida is good "for lifting the member."<sup>43</sup> One searches in vain for passages like these in the early nineteenth-century British translation of the *Colóquios*: Sir Clements Markham, the prudish translator, chose either to deliberately misinterpret certain Portuguese phrases or to simply cut out the indecent passages.<sup>44</sup> Orta's straightforward verbal sensualism

<sup>43</sup> Orta, vol. I, pp. 52 and 76.

<sup>44</sup> Garcia da Orta, *Colloquies on the Simples & Drugs of India*, new edition (Lisbon, 1895) ed. and annotated by the Conde de Ficalho, trans. with an Introduction and Index by Sir Clements Markham, K.C.B, F.R.S. (London: Henry Sotheran and Co., 1913).

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was ironed out because it showed neither lapidary ceremoniousness nor “scientific rigor,” two supreme virtues upon which the British based their self-perception of their role in the Indian colony.

What Orta proposes to describe through his panoply of simple and composite remedies are methods to stimulate the body such that it functions well. Each natural substance is considered in terms of its origin, qualities or virtues, the history of its use, as well as the various opinions of the classical and Arab physicians. “To answer your last question, I say, that I don’t know of any Greek who wrote about *benjuy*. Of the Arabs, Averoes called it *belenizan* or *bolizan* or *petrozan*. It is warm and dry in the second degree. It aromatizes and calms down a humid and weak stomach. It makes a good smell in the mouth, fortifies members and enhances coitus.”<sup>45</sup> Good digestion and good sex are of equal importance to a good physician-pharmacist experimenting with lesser-known drugs and remedies. Anything that works for the improvement of health is good, according to Orta, such as the oil massages used by Ayurvedic practitioners in Malabar (Kerala), bloodletting, expurgating, sweating, and dieting. The human body in the tropics is profiled in the *Colóquios* as a porous and open entity susceptible to humoral changes from without. Heat and humidity in particular accelerate the growth of all natural things: a sweet-smelling flower turns quickly into a rotten, foetid, reeking fruit. The people are subject to the same regime of accelerated decay, in addition to being vulnerable to the “new illnesses,” as yet unknown in Europe.

<sup>45</sup> Orta, vol. I, p. 104.

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Just as individuals were prone to catching diseases transmitted through contact between humans, the world at large was at risk from contagion. One such illness, contracted in “very close contact,” was syphilis. The theory in vogue, which Orta holds as credible, is that syphilis came from the Spanish Indies, or, as he tells Ruano, “from your Indies.”

Every day there are new illnesses like *morbo napolitano* [Neapolitan disease] (which we call *sarna de Castella* [Castilian scabies]) and God was so merciful that he gave to every country remedies to cure them. Because the one who gives illness, gives remedies for it ... and since we don't know all the remedies for all the illnesses, we bring *ruibarbo* from China, from where we bring *pão* [wood] or *raizes* [roots] to cure Castilian scabies, and *cana fistola* we bring from India, and *manná* from Persia and *guaiacam* from the Western Indies.<sup>46</sup>

This is one of the rare instances in which Orta chooses to invoke divine intervention, which here appears to legitimate and support discovery, travel, and the circulation of goods in various parts of the world. His medical optimism about syphilis may have been enhanced by the fact that the disease seemed curable in its initial stage. The pustules (*buboes*) were not considered ill famed by the “natives of the country,” claimed Orta; they called them *fringui*, a name used also to designate Christians and the Portuguese.<sup>47</sup> Writing in the first decade of the seventeenth century, a French visitor to Goa,

<sup>46</sup> Orta, vol. I, p. 179. <sup>47</sup> Orta, vol. II, p. 107.

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Pyrard de Laval, gave a more detailed picture. “Concerning syphilis [*vérole*], it is in no way infamous and it was not shameful to have contracted it a few times. They even make a virtue out of it. They cure it without sweating with the *bois de Chine* [China wood]. This illness exists only among Christians and they prefer it to fever or to dysentery.”<sup>48</sup>

For Portuguese men, Laval suggested, the contraction of a sexually transmitted disease was a sign of sexual prowess. In the *Colóquios* Orta is especially concerned with the virility of the Portuguese men, and accordingly prescribes a variety of drugs ranging from asafoetida, amber, and benzoin, to opium, *bhang* (hashish), and many others. He also identifies drugs that calm sexual appetite, such as *raíz angélica* (angelic root) or *raíz do Espírito Santo* (root of the Holy Spirit).<sup>49</sup> As bodily virility was closely correlated with mercantile virility, Orta strongly advised those who had plans to engage in speculative imports and exports between Europe and India not to invest in the trading of anti-aphrodisiacs.

For both Orta and Dom Gaspar Leão de Pereira, the new global order, in which people and things circulated and encountered each other in various situations and locations, was fraught with danger. In Orta’s opinion, it was the body that had to be fortified and protected, through diet and hygiene and even physical pleasure. The *Colóquios* celebrate tasty fruits like mangoes and durians, and even provide culinary tips.

<sup>48</sup> Pyrard de Laval, *Voyage de Pyrard de Laval aux Indes orientales (1601–1611)* (Paris: Chandeigne, 1998), vol. II, p. 536.

<sup>49</sup> Orta, vol. I, pp. 205, 267.

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The richness of the tastes and smells that fascinate Orta and provided pleasure to the Portuguese is precisely what made the archbishop shudder with disgust and anger. The ideal body, as envisaged by Dom Gaspar, is a body closed to exterior experiences and sensations. "From flesh, can one desire anything but delight, what can come out of foolish sensuality but vices, ruled by five boys who are five exterior senses? ... The eyes do not want ugly things that frighten them: the ears do not want but gentle and happy voices, & not the thunders that break them; the nose does not want effrontery of stench; the taste [desires] good flavour; the touch [desires all to be] smoothness."<sup>50</sup> The chief culprits of the disorders of flesh, as they were experienced in the tropics (and elsewhere), were the senses, which capture external stimuli. Just like Orta, Dom Gaspar is aware of the fast-changing, hazardous, dense, and odorous texture of Portuguese colonial life. The confusion and overabundance of perfumes, precious unguents, and mixtures of herbs and water all disorient the senses. Such substances were, moreover, in great demand, and were procured not only from India, "but from the whole universe."<sup>51</sup> The real origin of these olfactory disorders was clearly the East. "These kinds of delights and pleasures, used to be found in the past only among the Orientals, & and now this plague runs throughout the world."<sup>52</sup> The globalization of pleasure, inducted by products discovered outside Europe and then pushed onto the international market by the Portuguese and Spanish monarchies, had changed ancient customs, tastes, and morality. It had also perverted economic and mercantile laws, which ceased to function

<sup>50</sup> *Desengano*, p. 158.    <sup>51</sup> *Desengano*, p. 148.    <sup>52</sup> *Desengano*, p. 148.

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properly. The Turk remarks in astonishment, for example, that increases in the production of sugar have not made the commodity any less expensive. The Christian responds by saying that when he was a child in Spain an *arroba* of sugar coming from Madeira island fetched 500 *reis*, whereas “now when so much comes from India, & from Brazil loaded on ships, it is valued up to two thousand *reis* per *arroba*.”<sup>53</sup>

The skyrocketing price of sugar was due to an increase in demand. According to Dom Gaspar, the cause of this increase is demonic. Because the *Desengano de perdidos* is primarily concerned with psychomachia – the internal battle between vice and virtue, true religion and false religion, as incarnated within the text in the two protagonists, Christian and Turk – the demonic is located in volition. “Since the sin is founded in will, without whose agreement there can be no fault, & no force can move it, the Devil uses skills and manners to bring it down with tricks if he cannot do with force.”<sup>54</sup> Thus, the will must continually defend against two enemies – the Devil and “his wife, the flesh.”<sup>55</sup>

The best, almost cinematic scenes in which the author depicts the triangulation between the will, the Devil and the flesh are found in the second part of the work, in the wonderfully sensuous allegory of the encounter between Ulysses and the mermaids. It is not by accident that Dom Gaspar chose this classical story for his allegorical psychomachia. The maritime theater in which Ulysses, representing the will, and the mermaids, being “the progeny of the Devil and the flesh,” fight out their battle, is the perfect setting for a sixteenth-century Portuguese colonial drama of sin and redemption.

<sup>53</sup> *Desengano*, p. 150.   <sup>54</sup> *Desengano*, p. 157.   <sup>55</sup> *Desengano*, p. 158.

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All the topoi of medieval and early modern Christian misogyny are enacted at one point or another. *Serena* in ancient Greek means “attraction and provocation”: mermaids are incarnations of the sins of the flesh. To go back to the question of sugar, what seemed to have impressed Dom Gaspar in his childhood is that “in the houses of the devotees of the mermaids, you will find barrels of sugar” and that “the chief confectioner who envelops the evil of the vices with the sugar coating” is the Devil himself.<sup>56</sup> This product of demonic alchemy is mixed with other oriental spices such as musk, amber, and numerous other foods to the point of saturation. The descriptive overflow conveys the disorientation that the soul must feel when faced with too many choice ingredients. The highest moment of the rhetoric arrives, as usual, with a series of tautologies. The mermaids “add taste to taste, food to food, sweetness to sweetness.”<sup>57</sup> The result, in Dom Gaspar’s sensualist denial, is the vertiginous fusion of all carnal appetites and their effects. The mermaids “add all the instruments to play music to taste.”<sup>58</sup> The continuous processing of the information entering the sensory channels creates an effect of synesthesia, which ends up terrorizing both the body and the language. Thus, overexcited men “tremble of cold in the middle of spring” and “turn around on the wheel (*roda viva*) of torments, so many and so contrary that it seems that the furies of Hell persecute them.”<sup>59</sup>

The vicious circle of sin and desire is closely related to the availability of goods (*fazenda*). Those who have less, the

<sup>56</sup> *Desengano*, pp. 150, 157.   <sup>57</sup> *Desengano*, p. 149.   <sup>58</sup> *Desengano*, p. 149.

<sup>59</sup> *Desengano*, pp. 146, 162. See also p. 171.

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argument goes, desire more, and those who are forbidden to consume certain products consume them abundantly. The example with which Dom Gaspar demonstrates this point brings us to the central aim of the book: It is a refutation or, rather, a vilification of Islam. The case in point involves wine. “Mafamede took away the wine of the word,” tutors the Christian in his usual combination of metaphorical and abusive expressions, “so that deceived with this enticement you fall into brutish life.”<sup>60</sup> According to Dom Gaspar, contraband wine from Spain was much coveted by the Muslim army of Bijapur, the same army that had besieged Goa not long before the Christian embarked on his journey to the Holy Land. The army had not, however, succeeded in destroying the capital of Portuguese India – perhaps, it is implied, because the Muslim soldiers drank too much!

Dom Gaspar’s narrative is constructed in view of two different audiences. He addresses and admonishes directly the Turk and the Muslims, but he lectures the Portuguese Christians at the same time. His statement that “inside of us there is a stable for the beasts, which are beastly appetites” applies universally to all people. The bestiality of the human interior is contrasted with the “movement” of natural reason, which the archbishop tries to create within the soul of the Turk. Right in the middle of the book, he succeeds. The moment at which the Turk’s conscience turns and he converts comes at the highpoint of the attack on the mermaids. After the Turk steps over the threshold and becomes a disciple, in fact, the mermaids disappear altogether. This authorial move corresponds to the

<sup>60</sup> *Desengano*, p. 155.

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story it depicts. “The poets say finally that the mermaids died of passion, because they were unable to drown Ulysses.”<sup>61</sup>

Conversion is death, a certain kind of death. Mermaids die, a Turk dies; the bodily orifices close, and the inward space receives grace. In the archbishop’s words, “you feel clarity.”<sup>62</sup> At this particular instant in the text, a mask is dropped: it is suddenly revealed that the Turk was born to a Christian father, and sent to work as a boy for a Muslim who converted him to Islam.<sup>63</sup> As for the mermaids, the reader had been advised from the beginning to invest in them merely a poetic interest, the author being sure that “they do not exist in the world.”<sup>64</sup> They were conjured up, it seems, for the sole purpose of alerting the Turk to the nefarious workings of his own five senses. As the enemies within, they bewitch the soul, causing it to move against “natural reason”; when they do not succeed, what ensues is painful self-knowledge. “Ay, ay, ay ... I am lost, & lost more than anybody,” cries the Turk at the moment of his conversion.<sup>65</sup>

### Serpents, nuns and soldiers

The importance of confronting one’s own five senses, personified as mermaids, in order to know and to control them, seems to have been taken literally in Goa. Creatures resembling mermaids in their astoundingly strange beauty can be seen even today in many Goan churches. One of the oldest, São Pedro, constructed in the early 1540s in the western suburb of the Old Goa, on the bank of the Mandovi river, provides refuge to five breathtaking mermaids.

<sup>61</sup> *Desengano*, p. 160.    <sup>62</sup> *Desengano*, p. 173.    <sup>63</sup> *Desengano*, p. 173.

<sup>64</sup> *Desengano*, p. 139.    <sup>65</sup> *Desengano*, pp. 161, 173.

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1 São Pedro, Church in Ribandar (Goa). Pulpit decorated with the wooden statues of *nages* or *naginis* or *nagayakshis* (seventeenth century). These local spirits are traditionally associated with the underworld, with trees and with water. They are worshiped by the Hindus for their power over fertility. These wooden statues can be also interpreted as representing mermaids.

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They are made of painted wood, and positioned so as to be holding up the beams of the pulpit box. Dark blue-green scales cover their fish tails, which seem to curve under the weight of the edifice. The upper parts of their identical bodies are skin-colored, with slightly protruding bellies and bulging breasts. The lush, surreal foliage that covers the lower part of the pulpit grows partly out of their arms. A bunch of grapes hangs, like a third breast, from their mouths, the only other “ornament” on the bodies besides their necklaces. Were these wonderful sculptures used to remind the faithful of the transience (albeit a beautiful one) of worldly sensual pleasures? These pulpit cariathides that literally support the place from which the Word was spoken are doubly coded as both accomplices of and distractions from the divine. Although the pulpit in question, like most of the pulpits in Goa, must have been carved in the seventeenth century, it seems to illustrate Dom Gaspar’s point. A Christian soul needs to see and know his senses, and, at the same time, reject them under the weight of the divine word.

Attached to these Goan pulpits, such sculpted figures are more than just the European mermaids of Greek mythology. The local wood carvers who produced these creatures smuggled in the forms and images of powerful local divine and demonic agents, the *naga*. The *naga* and *nagini* are male and female divine cobra/serpent kings and queens. Hindu mythology associates them with water and with fertility. They can also inhabit trees and be confounded with tree spirits called *yaksha* and *yakshi*. Most of the cariathides on the Goan pulpits represent a mixture of these elements. They are always located on the base of the pulpit: as a rule, the upper box had

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mostly a hexagonal plan, unlike rectangular Portuguese models, and often contained sculptures of saints as decorations. When there is a canopy that rises above, it is usually executed in an equally ornamented style, with the Dove of the Holy Spirit hanging from the lotus-shaped rosette in the middle of the round lid.<sup>66</sup>

The church of the Santa Monica monastery in Goa has another pulpit showing full-breasted nymphs. They are wrapped in leaves from the waist down, except for the extreme ends of their tails, which curve up like snakes; more leaves wrap around their necks.

Carved in wood and painted in gold, as were most of the pulpits, altars, and retables that constituted Portuguese colonial splendour, these four intensely feminine *nagini* were seen by generations of nuns. Between 1610 and 1750, some 400 resided in the monastery; the pulpit can be roughly dated to the second part of the seventeenth century. What is striking about these sculpted *nagini* are their faces. With a sober, nun-like expression, they look down in barely perceptible pain onto the church audience. The implicit pain owes to the fact that their hands are upraised in order to support the pulpit box suspended on the southern wall of the church. Above their heads, their hair grows into a lotus flower supporting a (fake) transversal beam of the pulpit. A lotus growing from the inside of the head has special meaning in the Indian *siddha* medical school, which considers it the seventh and last energetic knot (*muticcu*) on the vertebra. We can only speculate as

<sup>66</sup> José Pereira, *Baroque Goa: The Architecture of Portuguese India* (New Delhi: Books & Books, 1995), p. 91.

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2 Santa Monica, the church of the first monastery for women in Asia, Old Goa. A detail of the decorated pulpit of the church. A female *nagayakshi* (seventeenth century).

to the extent to which the creator of the wooden *nagini* was aware of this fine point in *siddha* medical theory.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Brigitte Sébastia, *Les Rondes de saint Antoine: Culte, affliction et possession en Inde du Sud* (Paris: Au lieu d'être éditions, 2007). The nuns, Monicas, were renowned for their syrups and medicinal preparations on the basis of spices they grew in their interior garden. The most beautiful frescoes in their former refectory contain paintings of numerous medicinal plants.

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The haunting question that comes to mind when looking at these creatures is how those nuns “read” these bare breasts, placid eyes, and serpentine bodies. Since the pulpit in the church of Santa Monica resides in its “public” part, and the cloistered nuns heard the mass from behind a gilded door, the naked *nagini* were the only female figures associated with the monastery that the lay audience was allowed to see. Like earth spirits, the “Monicas” fought hard to preserve their location and their institution, established in 1610 by Dom Frey Aleixo de Meneses, the archbishop of Goa, in spite of very powerful opponents.<sup>68</sup> Even the king of Portugal was initially opposed to the opening of female convents in India, one reason being that this would do away with both hefty dowries and “white” aristocratic Portuguese women, rare and valuable on the local marriage market. Women from Portugal, some of them endowed by the king, the so-called *órfãs del-Rey*, the King’s orphans, were the most coveted. The fear that many such rich marriageable women, young widows in particular, would decide against marriage and use their dowries to enter the monastery infuriated local authorities and exacerbated prevailing misogyny.

Sending *órfãs del-Rey* to Goa was seen as a way of further Portugalizing a society that had grown out of intermarriage between Portuguese men and Asian women.<sup>69</sup> Since the time that Afonso de Albuquerque wrestled this prized

<sup>68</sup> José Nicolau da Fonseca, *An Historical and Archaeological Sketch of the City of Goa* (New Delhi, Madras: Asian Educational Services, 1994 [1879]), pp. 304–11.

<sup>69</sup> Timothy J. Coates, *Degredados e Órfãs: colonização dirigida pela coroa no império português. 1550–1755* (Lisbon: CNCDP, 1998).

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string of islands from the sultan of Bijapur in 1510, intermarriage with local women had been encouraged, especially so with “white” Muslim women, as well as other Asian women from the extended Portuguese maritime empire. Just as, for better or worse, the movements of merchants and army ships loaded with spices and other goods connected distant cultural orbits and constellations in Asia and Africa, blood and genes were circulating and intermingling with unprecedented speed.

Staunch opponents of female monasteries in Asia offered yet another, ecological argument. According to them, all women in Asia were under threat of falling into the sin of concupiscence, even if they were white and born in Portugal. The monastic life “was not suitable for the women in India, owing to their great weakness, the great luxury and delights of the land, the intemperance of the climate, and the licentious upbringing of the girls” who grew up in slave households.<sup>70</sup> This argument hints obviously that the monastery would be unable to contain the female sexual energy endemic in the tropics.

Like the immobilized wooden representations of the mermaids/*nagini* of the pulpits, women were either to remain at home, to be locked up and guarded or else to be removed to public institutions. In order to more easily protect women from men and from themselves, Dom Frey Aleixo de Meneses laid the foundations for two other institutions for women, in addition to the Real Convento de Santa Monica: the Recolhimento da Nossa Senhora da Serra and the Recholhimento de Santa Maria

<sup>70</sup> Charles R. Boxer, *Mary and Misogyny* (London, Gerald Duckworth and Company, 1975), p. 102. Germano da Silva Correia, *História da Colonização Portuguesa na Índia* (Lisbon, 1960), vol. II, p. 204.

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Madalena. The first admitted respectable widows or abandoned wives and their children. Women whose husbands were away on account of business were allowed to stay here temporarily as paying lodgers. The other *recolhimento* was a shelter for former prostitutes, victims of rape, or those abandoned by their lovers. Such women were called converts, *convertidas*, or repentants, *arrepentidas*. Although, in principle, only white women and those not of New Christian origin were eligible to join these institutions, the vast majority of the women and “orphaned” children were classifiable as Euroasians.<sup>71</sup>

Marriageable or married Christian women were seen as best remaining in their “immobile” and “invisible” state, hidden behind doors and veils, circulating as little as possible. Slave girls and non-Christian servants were in a different category, and exposed to proverbial cruelty from men as well as their secluded “respectable” mistresses. Rich prostitutes and unmarried women, the so-called *solteiras* or single women, were also at risk of being immobilized by the colonial administration: they were confined to particular quarters on the outskirts of the city. For Garcia da Orta, any ailing woman, *solteira* or not, had to be succored immediately. Thus, he brings Ruano to a house of a rich *mestiça* and *solteira*, Paula de Andrade, who has been poisoned by her black servant with *datura*, a plant that must have both terrified and titillated Goan men. Stories were told about the workings of this hallucinogenic, stories in which adulterous women fed the drug to

<sup>71</sup> Euroasian in this context means a person of mixed heritages, partly Portuguese and partly Indian, Black African, Chinese, or of any other Asian ethnicity.

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their husbands in order to humiliate or kill them. Goan women were generally reputed for their passionate nature, which tended to make them despise all interdictions standing in the way of pleasure and lovemaking. "I confess," says the Christian in the *Desengano de perdidos*, "that today with good reasons we should change the gender, & from Mermaids, *Serenas*, we should make Mermen, *Sereno*: because women have reached such an unfortunate state that they steal from their husbands, sons, & as much as they can, in order to give to their lovers, even when they are black, *cafres*."<sup>72</sup>

Passion for sin and passion for saintliness were closely interwoven in Portuguese colonial society; each was overlaid by the other. Ironically, or perhaps purposely, the Convent of Santa Monica was erected in the part of the town called Ilha do Fogo, the island of fire, notorious for the "lost" (or fallen) women, *mulheres perdidas*, who resided there. The hillock was immediately renamed as Monte de Santa Monica, eventually becoming Monte Santo or Monte Sião (Sion).<sup>73</sup> In a comparable way, the *nagini* mermaids appeared in the Goan pulpits

<sup>72</sup> The Arabs employed the word *kafir* to designate "an infidel, and unbeliever in Islam." The Portuguese took it in this sense to designate non-Christian people of color. Henry Yule and Arthur Coke Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive* (London: John Murray, 1903; New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1979), pp. 140–2. See also Monsenhor Sebastião Rodolfo Dalgado, *Glossário Luso-Asiático* (Coimbra: Empresa da Universidade, 1919), p. 170.

<sup>73</sup> Padre M. J. Gabriel de Saldanha, *História de Goa (Política e Arqueológica)* (Nova Goa: Livraria Coelho, 1926; New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1990), p. 127.

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precisely at the time when, with the majority of “natives” converted and displaying signs of true piousness, Catholicism seemed to have triumphed. Affixed to these pulpits, these creatures could be contemplated in all their silently immobile subalternity.

The mermaids were not the only unruly agents of mundane debauchery upon which Dom Gaspar was making war. Soldado Madrepór is another. We do not have to look far to find the archbishop’s literary inspiration for this character. The Braggart Soldier or *miles gloriosus* was a stock character from classical and Renaissance theatre. As comic type, the Soldado Madrepór accepts the blame for all that went awry in the Estado da Índia. He is, in fact, a product of the very economy of the fateful surplus of pleasure and material goods that rendered mermaids the pestiferous companions of the Portuguese Asian empire. The braggard Soldado Madrepór is a “fearful, cowardly, weaking, stupid, vicious, greedy, boastful glutton.”<sup>74</sup> It is he who, according to a famous Dutch traveller Jan Huyghen van Linschoten, is found in furtive amorous encounters with “luxurious and unchaste” *mestiças* who poison their husbands with *datura*.<sup>75</sup> “He smells of dishonest women,” is Dom Gaspar’s opinion.<sup>76</sup> Loitering in and around the capital during the monsoon season (April to September) when the fleet was grounded in Goa, low-class soldiers, joined with some humbler varieties of young *fidalgo*, were targets of

<sup>74</sup> *Desengano*, p. 194.

<sup>75</sup> John Huyghen Linschoten, *The Voyage of John Huyghen Linschoten to the East Indies, from the old English Translation of 1598* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1988), vol. I, p. 209.

<sup>76</sup> *Desengano*, p. 198.

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social disapproval as well as charity. Often hungry and homeless, they begged, borrowed or stole to get food. The Santa Casa da Misericórdia and various other confraternities worked daily and hard to nourish, dress, nurse, and bury the most unfortunate of these men, who would die miserably in Goa rather than gloriously on the battlefield.

Unlike the married *mestiças* and mermaids, captured and locked behind doors if not affixed to pulpits, these soldiers were always in motion, moving from patron to patron, from place to place, from the notorious houses of the local *bailaderas* or dancing girls in Cambarjua, on the border with the Goan non-Christian hinterland, to the Muslim courts, where they sold their services for money. The followers of this last course of action were called *renegades*: they sometimes paid their way back to Goa; other times they remained where they were and converted to Islam. Their biographies were rarely written because they undermined the official male Portuguese virtues of military prowess, heroism, and Christian faith. The imperatives of empire- and nation-building had destroyed their careers.<sup>77</sup> Dom Gaspar wrote his text precisely at the moment that national aspirations and heroic zeal were at their highest, before Alcácer Quibir (Al Kasr al Kebir) and the death of Dom Sebastião.

Luís Vaz de Camões, a poor, underemployed and underpaid soldier in India, and a friend of Garcia da Orta, praised the valor, courage, boldness, and providential grace of the discoverers under the command of Vasco da Gama.<sup>78</sup> Da

<sup>77</sup> DeJaneira Couto, "Quelques observations sur les renégats portugais en Asie au XVIe siècle," *Mare Liberum*, 16 (1998), pp. 57–86.

<sup>78</sup> Camões, *The Lusiads*.

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Gama’s triumphant but weary soldiers met their own nymphs on the island of love; they were also called mermaids or *Sirenas* (X, 45) and were sent by the pagan gods as reward for the “discovery” of the passage to India. These creatures, ordered by Gods to “fall in love” with da Gama’s soldiers, serve also as soothsayers, announcing future Portuguese deeds in Asia. Each one of the “discoverers” had, moreover, to “catch” his nymph. There is a sense of extreme mobility and vigor attached to this small but feisty group of Portuguese men, a sense that seems to defy all odds, natural and supernatural.

The movements of “discovery” and “conquest” were, in the Portuguese case, exclusively maritime ventures. Throughout its course, the whole of the Portuguese Asian empire had been bound and limited to coastal areas. No wonder, then, that the literature of the period is saturated with water, with seas and oceans. No wonder that mermaids, galleys, fleets, and soldiers inhabit the margins of these texts as metaphors, personifications, metonymies, and synecdoche of all the successes and failures of the national enterprise.

### The ship of redemption

Surrounded by the sea on one side and by immense continents on the other, the Portuguese Asian empire was not much more than a network of merchant settlements interconnected by Indiamen sailing along what later became known as *carreiras*, or the Crown trade routes.<sup>79</sup> Goa was the biggest territory under Portuguese rule and the closest to a fully

<sup>79</sup> Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire in Asia 1500–1700*, p. 70.

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fledged colonial microstate. This precarious geopolitical situation, which worsened in the course of time, transpires both in the *Colóquios* and the *Desengano de perdidos* in the form of a particular sense of insecurity, defiance and pride. In spite of their different and even opposing concerns, the two texts serve as manuals for survival in Asia. The problem that they both tackle is how one is to adjust to, rationalize, understand, interpret, and triumph over the unstable pulse of expatriate life in the tropics. In their own ways, a New Christian physician and an archbishop waged war on colonial and tropical pathologies. “The principal diligence of the wise men to cure infirmities of the soul, and to disillusion the lost [*desenganar os perdidos*],” predicated Dom Gaspar, “is the same as that of the physicians [in curing] the body, and of the judges [in curing] the disorders of the treasury.”<sup>80</sup> It is redemption that they each seek for their charges, yet they disagree as to what represent the causes, the prophylaxis and the cure.

Orta’s text is the last bulwark and defense of tropical Portuguese society in India as it had evolved during the first half of the century. If the mobility of things, plants, people, and ideas spawned new illnesses, they also pointed towards new remedies. There is a natural equilibrium that remains in spite of movement and the constant reshuffling of elements. For this sedentary doctor, the movement of things is ultimately a matter of language. Under the many layers of names attributed to both real and imaginary objects that the author conjures up in rapid scattered shots throughout the

<sup>80</sup> *Desengano*, p. 164.

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text, sensuality, the passions, and fantasy alternately surface and sink in the narrative. Orta plays hide and seek with his audience. He trumpets his opinions forcefully, especially when they are safely unexceptional, run-of-the-mill confirmations of political or cultural stereotypes. The deafening noise of the text masks an unexpected critical stance, a vertiginous abyss of things left unsaid, to be read between the lines.

The reader may suspect that the *Colóquios* enclose some hidden Kabbalistic material, especially when Orta quotes transliterated foreign words. “It is called *perla* in Castillian, it is *perola* in Portuguese, and in Latin *unio*; that is for large pearl (*aljofar grande*), because a small one is called *margarita*; in Arab it is *lulu*, so it is in Persian, in other parts of India, *moti*; and in Malabar *mutu*; and in Portuguese and Castillian pearl (*aljofar*).”<sup>81</sup> The tightly packed names in the paragraph, rather than provoking a yearning for the *via mystica*, seem to be contaminated with the thing itself, and the desire to acquire it. As if responding to the demand created through his own verbal magic, Orta dedicates a lengthy passage to providing precise information about where and how to procure the pearl, about the variety of sizes, and differences in price. These were helpful tips to merchants desirous of gaining profit. Yet, just as he seems to decisively succeed in stirring the commercial appetite, Orta will puncture the text with a distancing remark: one of his favorites is the sententious “it is better to be philosopher than merchant.”<sup>82</sup> He can distance himself even further with a statement like “it is better to study

<sup>81</sup> Orta, vol. II, p. 119.    <sup>82</sup> Orta, vol. II, p. 123.

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philosophy than to get rich, but for the one who is needy it is better to get rich.”<sup>83</sup> Not at all, says Dom Gaspar.<sup>84</sup>

Material riches are the nerves of the republic, yet they engender the greed that renders the whole world a wheel of torments.<sup>85</sup> The laws of the world, *leys da terra*, “lead the sinners to disturbances and restlessness: just as the Ocean, it cannot stay without storms, the heart of the evil cannot remain still, all life is a torment, & and as soon as one [life] ends, another takes place: because one abyss brings with it another.”<sup>86</sup> Leading a nomadic existence in quest of material goods is a new form of idolatry. “Prostrated before the Pagoda of the riches,” sinners turn their souls into flesh.<sup>87</sup> This early critique of emerging capitalism is embedded in a Christian version of the theory of limited goods. Unlike immeasurable and everlasting celestial goods, terrestrial goods are limited, and are necessarily wasted when superfluous. Gaspar advocates simply that the investment be made in that which is of “better value,” in a source of treasure that is inexhaustible. To carry out this ultimate commercial deal, one needs a galley.

The galley, on which Ulysses executed the stratagem by which he tricked the mermaids, was the only vessel that could sail the ocean of torments and safely reach the harbor of blessedness, *porto de bemaventurança*.<sup>88</sup> It is on this “spiritual galley” that Dom Gaspar urges his audience to embark. No compass is needed, for the galley is “encased in firmness and

<sup>83</sup> Orta, vol. I, p. 24.    <sup>84</sup> *Desengano*, pp. 115–19.

<sup>85</sup> The author repeats this image of the wheel of torment over and over. *Desengano*, p. 120.

<sup>86</sup> *Desengano*, p. 110.    <sup>87</sup> *Desengano*, pp. 89, 145.    <sup>88</sup> *Desengano*, p. 177.

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certainty”; the only guide it follows is “a navigational map which is the evangelical law, *ley Evangelica*.”<sup>89</sup> The banner of the galley, too, is “fixed, and planted into a huge metal ring.”<sup>90</sup> This obsessive fixity, immobility, and stillness continues to be metaphorically subverted by diabolical movement. Human will and conscience, subjected to sense perception, are endlessly under the attack of the deadly trinity of flesh, world and devil, *carne, mundo, diabo*.<sup>91</sup> In a parallel fashion, however, conversion, which leads to redemption, is the interior motion of the will that rejects diabolical suggestion and malicious human persuasion.<sup>92</sup> In the end, it is a psychological void that is sought after. “Peace and stillness of the heart are the biggest riches of the world.”<sup>93</sup>

At the center of the archbishop’s project lies the salvation of the self – the male, Portuguese, Christian self – from the whirlpool of the endlessly moving empirical world. With a reductive rigor, his text peels away a bewildering network of relations that burden the self and threaten its internal coherence. Salvation and redemption, the ultimate diaphanous texture of the soul, are disconnected from nature, temporality, and human sensual experience, “because no merchandise of this world passes into another world ... [because] the goods of this life are so false, and corruptible that they do not reach the other [world], but they spoil every rotting body that remains after burial.”<sup>94</sup>

<sup>89</sup> *Desengano*, p. 187.

<sup>90</sup> *Desengano*, p. 188. The banner is a metaphor for patience.

<sup>91</sup> *Desengano*, p. 83.   <sup>92</sup> *Desengano*, p. 83.

<sup>93</sup> *Desengano*, p. 127.   <sup>94</sup> *Desengano*, p. 353.

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For Dom Gaspar, deterritorialized subjectivity, the nomadic and fragmentary morality of the Portuguese colonial actors, needs to be rooted. Since terrestrial geography provides no stable ground, he offers a map of the otherworldly, holy continent. In its light, the vicissitudes of life become irrelevant in view of the larger picture. War, flesh and the devil can with their torments “soak only the clothes” of the virtuous man.<sup>95</sup> The remedy against the effects of exterior mobility – and here is another point on which Dom Gaspar and Garcia da Orta furtively agree – is primarily linguistic. It is a “force of true words” that the teacher tries to instill into the disciple. This force draws the soul away from the exterior world into the inward space, in which movement and mobility follow different laws. In the third part of the *Desengano de perdidos* especially, the way of perfection and the way of mystical theology and “unitive love” is contrived and formulated as a grammar having parts to be learned by heart, complete with paradigms, parables, comparisons, exempla, and interpretations. Linguistic acts are the points of intersection between the description of the empirical and visible and the naming of hidden, spiritual essentials.<sup>96</sup> This rambling mystical treatise is, after all, articulated as a “scientific language” presupposing unchangeable laws and relations. By following closely the instructions given herein, anybody can reach the goal of redemption in immobility.

Garcia da Orta’s health manual has, in spite of surface differences, exactly the same structure. It imposes the same

<sup>95</sup> *Desengano*, p. 111.

<sup>96</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 96.

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scientific rigor on its material. It unveils the secrets of nature and of language that enclose meanings and thus control their circulation. However, for the physician who dreamed of traveling and seeing the world, movement turns out to be everything. The more a thing or concept moves, the more it reveals what is hidden within itself. There is nothing spiritual or mystical about these objects, nothing that cannot be reached and experienced by the senses. *Colóquios* is a text without end or conclusion – at the last moment, Orta decided to add a chapter on betel and “some other things,” including Persian roses. In the original edition, this chapter appears right after the table of contents. Since nature keeps revealing new remedies, Orta refuses to conclude his treatise. It is precisely here, in the unfinished, in the boundless possibility of *addendum*, that those “heathens” who were willing to follow Orta could glimpse, at least for a moment, their redemption.

### Destiny of books and authors

Leaving his book unfinished may have been the strategic ruse of an old, tired physician. He may have worked on or even announced a newer, bigger, improved edition, with even more remedies for the weary and weak bodies of Portuguese men. The reputation of his healing skills and his knowledge of pharmacy may have protected him from that threat for which he had no prophylaxis, namely, the Inquisition. At the *auto-da-fé* in 1580, it was his bones and his book that were declared sick and surgically removed, burned and scattered. Mutilated, translated, and plagiarized, the content of his text nonetheless spilled out into others. Charles de l’Ecluse (Clusius), a Belgian botanist, found the

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book in Lisbon, translated it into Latin and published it in Antwerp in 1567.<sup>97</sup> After four successive editions, Clusius finally incorporated it into his own botanical compendia.<sup>98</sup> In the meantime, Italian, Spanish, and French translations were printed in Europe. In the year of Orta's death, Cristóvão da Costa, another New Christian physician, came to India and upon returning to Spain published his *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*.<sup>99</sup> Orta's text was the starting point for this remarkable work on Asian drugs and spices.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Garcia ab Horto, *Aromatum et simplicium aliquot medicamentorum apud Indos nascentium historia* (Antwerp: Officina Plantiniana, 1567), *Aromatum, et simplicium aliquot medicamentorum apud Indos nascentium historia: primum quidem Lusitanica lingua per dialogos conscripta* (Antwerp: Officina Plantiniana, 1574), *Aromatum et simplicium aliquot medicamentorum apud Indos nascentium historia* (Antwerp: Officina Plantiniana, 1579); Carolus Clusius, *Aliquot notae in Garciae Aromatum historiam* (Antwerp: Officina Plantiniana, 1582); Carolus Clusius et al., *Aromatum, et simplicium aliquot medicamentorum apud Indos nascentium historia* (Antwerp: Officina Plantiniana, 1593).

<sup>98</sup> Carolus Clusius, *Rariorum plantarum historia. Quae accesserint, proxima pagina docebit* (Antwerp: Officina Plantiniana, 1601). On Clusius see Florike Egmond, Paul Hoftijzer, and Robert Visser, *Carolus Clusius: Towards a Cultural History of a Renaissance Naturalist* (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, 2007).

<sup>99</sup> Christoval Acosta (Cristóbal or in Portuguese Cristóvão da Costa), *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* (Brugos, 1578).

<sup>100</sup> Just like Clusius, Acosta discarded the dialogue form of his predecessor and added glosses on the page margins in order to facilitate the reading of the text. There is no more pretension that anything is debated

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Ironically, *Colóquios* was so successful and well known that it would become dispersed and absorbed into other botanical works, whose authors barely mention Orta’s name.

The easy migration of words and meanings from Orta’s text into a European spider-web of linguistic fragments was facilitated by the fact that these words were accompanied by the empirical objects themselves, though the objects followed a different rhythm of movement. In contrast, Dom Gaspar’s text had itself migrated from European mystical and Christian polemical traditions. Among those identified as providing the basis for his verbal operations are Henrikus Herp (Herphius or Harphius), Alonso de Madrigal el Tostado, and Bernado Perez de Chinchón.<sup>101</sup> Through a twist of fate, the *Desengano de perdidos* was lost for a few centuries; when it was recovered, it became an object of scholarly interest rather than the victim of imitators and literary thieves. The problem lay in the fact that, in his enthusiasm following the battle of Lepanto, Dom Gaspar advanced a series of prophetic passages in his work; he predicted the collapse of Islam and the Ottoman empire, the marriage of Dom Sebastian to a French princess, and so on. By 1581, with Portugal in the hands of the Spanish monarch, all of these prophecies were proved wrong, or “long lies, *longas mentiras*.” As a result, the Inquisition condemned the work and added it to the *Indice Espurgatório*.

between two fictional or real protagonists. Facts are facts, and when there is a doubt, Acosta clearly spells it out.

<sup>101</sup> See the preface by Eugenio Asensio, “Dom Gaspar de Leão e su ‘Desengano de Perdidos,’” in *Desengano*, pp. III–CIX. Bernado Perez de Chinchón, *Confutación del Alcorán y secta mahometana* (Granada, 1555).

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Thus, both books reached a dead end, at one point or another – as did their authors. Coming from afar, like nightmares or dreams, these tropical books continue to move us because of their combative attitude, their will to persuade, intimidate, heal, and redeem. As documents of exile and utopia, they reveal as much as they conceal about the powerful drama of mobility that elated and tormented sixteenth-century Portuguese colonial society and culture in India. More than anything, these texts provide a poetic space in which their authors and readers revisited a site of a deep loss produced by the experience and the “discovery” of mobility as constitutive of expatriate life. Both Orta and Dom Gaspar, each in his way, conjured up patterns of gestures, condensed images, and myths from the past in order to revive the feelings of coherence and unity that seemed to be waning. Spices, mermaids, galleys – are these what Aby Warburg called *Pathos-formel* or “the forms or formulas of emotional style” that are inscribed into works of art? Just how do the snake-like nymphs, the *nagini* carved on the pulpits of Goan churches, correspond to the serpents of the Hopi Indians, or to pagan antiquity? Writers of books, charmers of snakes; each perform the same ritual act of transforming a nomadic, violent, conquering people, a moving people, into sons of the soil, into natives of places rooted in subterranean elements. It is an enterprise doomed to fail, and so it has to be repeated.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>102</sup> Aby Warburg, *Images from the Region of the Pueblo Indians of North America* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995). My thanks to Stephen Greenblatt, Pál Nyíri and Ângela Barreto Xavier for suggestions for improving this essay.