



Illustration 4: Central part of a page from the Qu'rān produced by Abdallah Ibn Muhammad al-Hamadani in 1313, National Library, Cairo (M. Lings, *The Quranic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination*, World of Islam Festival Trust, 1976, p. 54).

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Relationships Between Early Modern Christian and Islamicate Societies in Eurasia and North Africa as Reflected in the History of Science and Medicine

Abstract

During the last two decades, it has become fashionable not merely to write about issues concerning the exchange of knowledge between Jesuits and China or the acquisition of goods and knowledge in the Iberian colonial empires, as was previously the case. Historians of science now direct their attention also to other areas of the globe, where such processes took place during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Depending on their specific expertise, they focus on Dutch trade in what is called today Southeast Asia, networks of knowledge in the Mediterranean or in the Transatlantic world or on colonial institutions in the western parts of the Spanish colonial empire. The actors relevant to these broader historical explorations are mostly men from a selected number of states in Christian Europe. The exclusion of most parts of the world, among them many parts of Europe, from these new narratives continues to be their most glaring deficit.¹ In this paper, I will highlight the continued, even if at times submerged, existence of Eurocentric views and attitudes as expressed in some highly appreciated publications of the last twenty years.

Keywords

Eurocentrism, methodologies, knowledge cultures, Asia, North Africa, history of science, Pietro della Valle, Garcia da Orta.

¹ S. J. Harris, «Networks of Travel, Correspondence, and Exchange,» in L. Daston, K. Park (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Science*, Volume 3, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 341–362; H. J. Cook, «Medicine,» in *ibid.*: 408–434, in particular pp. 416–423; K. A. Vogel, «European Expansion and Self-Definition,» in *ibid.*: 818–839.

1 Introduction

Since more than half a century, historians of science studying the intellectual histories of non-Western societies and cultures struggle to undo the damage caused by centuries of Eurocentric depictions of the intellectual histories in those regions of the world. While an impressive progress was achieved in the investigations of these intellectual histories, Eurocentric beliefs and their methodological fundaments have so deeply permeated western academic and public perspectives on Asia and Africa that even after the many controversial debates this unfortunate intellectual heritage continues to inform judgments and demands among historians of science specializing in early modern history across western Europe.

I will demonstrate the stubborn resistance of this overall perspective on the cultural ›Other‹ with examples on two levels. In the following section, I discuss some positions and their shortcomings in the latest companion book on early modern history of science published in 2006 by the Cambridge University Press (Section 2). Although this book is almost ten years old by now, as a handbook and teaching resource it remains a standard work for students and readers from other fields of historical research. Hence, to understand the deep-seated and pervasive traces of Eurocentric perspectives in those contributions that concern cross-cultural encounters and the ways in which they are approached and interpreted is not an exercise of outdated academic scholasticism. Sections 3.1. and 3.2. offer the second level of discussion. There, I present two specific historical examples of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the differences between my views and those of early modern historians in order to highlight the impact of qualifications, historiographical positions and access to non-Western resources on questions, categories and interpretations.

In my final remarks, I will explain my views about the causes of this longevity of Eurocentrism among historians of western sciences, medicine, philosophy and technology specializing on the early modern period, when they write about knowledge cultures in Asia and North Africa or cross-cultural knowledge products (Section 4). I attribute them primarily to the disciplinary fragmentation of European and other western academia and the corresponding educational shortcomings, the continued impact of older intellectual traditions and their ideological underpinnings on current methodologies, and to the

unreflected retrospective application of current values to past cultures and their products.

2 Problems of Approach and Interpretation

The chapters of the *Cambridge Handbook on History of Science* (Volume 3) that touch on mostly Asian societies or cultures are those by Stephen J. Harris, Klaus A. Vogel, William Eamon, and Londa Schiebinger.²

Harris, in his survey on networks of travel, correspondence and exchange, for instance, postulates:

Indeed, it was no accident that the growth of the Republic of Letters and the curiosity cabinets coincided with the expansion of European travel because each fed the other. The curiosity of scholars and the thirst of administrators of overseas enterprises for hard information led to a demand for ›news from the Indies.‹ Colonial bureaucrats, commercial agents and missionaries – themselves often the products of a humanist education – could easily meet the demand in the reports written in the course of their duties (Harris 2006: 351).

Anybody who is familiar with early modern travels in Eurasia and North Africa recognizes immediately how misleading this statement is. The scholarly interests of various members of the Republic of Letters in Amsterdam, Leiden, Tübingen, Paris, Carpentras, London, Rome, Venice or Naples, to name only a few cities where men lived who either traveled to far away countries or wrote letters to others who went or lived there, covered much more than the Indies or ›hard information.‹ It is not even clear what Harris means when he calls the information collected by different groups and individuals during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in many different places on earth ›hard.‹ Much of what interested the scholars was not information, but material – coins, manuscripts, inscriptions, animals, plants, paintings, sweets, drugs, spices, cloth and other things. Information was only a small part of the diversifying exchanges between scholars, merchants, princes, missionaries, ambassadors, converts, prisoners of war and fugitives. This is in particular the case for the regions mostly ignored by historians of science of the early modern period – North

² For Harris and Vogel, see footnote 1; W. Eamon, ›Market, Piazzas, and Villages,‹ in *ibid.*: 206–223; L. Schiebinger, ›Women of Natural Knowledge,‹ in *ibid.*: 192–205.

Africa, southern Europe and West Asia. Colonial bureaucrats, commercial agents and missionaries were rarely capable of meeting the demand for information, and it was certainly not easy for them to provide such information. Very few of them knew more than a smattering of one of the various local languages – whether Arabic, Turkish, Persian, Amazigh, Gujarati, Telugu, Malayālam, Bengali or Dakhnī, to limit myself only to examples from North Africa, West Asia, and South Asia. All of them needed social, cultural, scholarly, and practical help from local people of different social status and education. But none of their informants, teachers, superiors, healers, or slaves appears in Harris' survey paper, not even as a category.

Equally problematic is Vogel's chapter on *European Expansion and Self-Definition*. For him, Europeans are only Spaniards, Portuguese, French, English, Dutch, Italians, and Germans, in short those people and regions that every author of *The Cambridge History of Science* considers as »the Europeans« (Vogel 2006: 818–821, 827, 829 et al). They are defined by their participation in overseas travels and the fact »that even the early stages of European overseas explorations – between 1492 and 1526 – were characterized by spontaneous curiosity, practical observation, and learned reflection« (*ibid.*: 819). The colonized people or the empires these travelers visited and settled in are simply called »natives.« Their elites were offered European knowledge as »an opportunity for integration and (to a certain extent) for development, which they could not refuse« (*ibid.*: 820). Vogel is clearly mistaken when he writes: »Since antiquity, Europeans had maintained a relatively stable relationship with the wider world. Contacts were mostly indirect, and longer engagements, such as that of Marco Polo at the court of the Mongolian leader Kublai Khan in the second half of the thirteenth century, were few and far between« (*ibid.*: 821). As Phillips Jr. (2007: 93), for instance, observed »medieval people traveled far more frequently than we think, especially after the eleventh century.«³ But the problem with Vogel's quote is not limited to this contrast in perception with regard to traveling in and beyond medieval Europe. At its center is the reduction of Europe and Europeans to some small part in the Catholic world. Muslims, Jews,

³ W. D. Phillips Jr., »Individual and Community among the Medieval Travelers to Asia,« in C. H. Parker, J. H. Bentley, *Between the Middle Ages and Modernity: Individual and Community in the Early Modern World*, Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007, pp. 93–107.

Christians of the non-Catholic churches in eastern Europe, or the various nomadic groups in Europe are simply not included in this picture of Europe. There can be no doubt that this reduction is conceptual and thus ideologically grounded. It is one of the silent components of our ways to think about ourselves in the past and today. Arguments like those by Janet Abu Lughod (1989) made more than two decades ago according to which a different world system extended through Eurasia until about 1350 undeniably have not reached the historians of the early modern period (yet?).⁴ But the methodological problems of this approach to a global history of science in the early modern period are not limited to the constrained perspective of what Europe was and meant then. A further version of this *pars pro toto* vision of the past is the identification of some Jesuit missionaries with all of them and of the Jesuits with the missionaries of all the other orders. Vogel's generalization of a short passage by the Jesuit Francis Xavier (1505–1552) concerning the alleged lack of knowledge about nature and the heavens among the Japanese reflects this treatment of the actors and their sources:

Thus instruction in European natural knowledge was not simply a strategic tool employed by the European missionaries to win attention. It was self-evident to these missionaries that natural knowledge and theology were interconnected: the deficits of East Asian natural science not only pointed to a weakness in their religious beliefs but also provided a point of entry to prove the superiority of Christian doctrine (*ibid.*: 829).

To me, Vogel's generalization contradicts letters and reports from Jesuits as well as other missionary orders about the purposes of their teaching activities in India, Iran, the Ottoman Empire, and the Caucasus Mountains. These sources show that many missionaries and their superiors often did not care much or at all for teaching about nature or the heavens. Those who did care to some degree did so due to personal initiative and chance or for luring children, adolescents, and princes away from their beliefs and faith communities. Missionaries could suffer punishment for too much curiosity and study of the stars or other subjects. The differences between the activities and evaluations sent from East Asia to Rome and those from India or the Middle East have so far not received the attention due to them.

⁴ J. L. Abu Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World system A.D. 1250–1350*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Eamon's depiction of foreign knowledge and the construction of its practitioners as exotic aliens at the streets and market places of Venice does not represent a more sophisticated achievement:

The piazzas were also the sites of displays of exotic rarities and demonstrations of nature's wonders. A sixteenth-century *ciarlatano* who called himself ›il Persiano‹ claimed that he possessed ›marvelous occult secrets of nature‹ from Persia, and a Venetian distiller advertised a cabinet of curiosities that included ›ten very stupendous monsters, marvelous to see, among which there are seven newborn animals, six alive and one dead, and three imbalmed female infants‹ (Eamons 2006: 214).

Without any contextualization, it is very difficult to know whether this ›Persiano‹ was a convert, left behind by his compatriots from one of the various merchant groups that traded in Venice during the sixteenth century as Giovanni B. Ramusio (1485–1557), for instance, reported in his collection of travel accounts, or whether he indeed was an impostor who sold his wares as a false persona, a charlatan, as Eamon writes.⁵ In the early sixteenth century, Safavid Iran might have been indeed too far away for being anything else to an Italian city dweller than one of the exotic ›Other.‹ Over the course of the century and even more so in the following one, however, readers, spectators, and courts in Italy, Russia, Spain, England, or the dukedom of Holstein could enjoy embassies sent by the Safavid shahs to negotiate trade and military contracts and several defecting members of these embassies like Faysal Nazari (1560–1604), the later Don Juan of Persia (Safavid embassy to Spain 1599–1602), or Haqq Virdi (Safavid embassy to Holstein, 1636), who remained in Europe, wrote books about the land of their birth and their conversion, or collaborated with German, Dutch, and other scholars.⁶ New maps of the territory ruled by the Safavid dynasty (r. 1501–1722) were compiled in Venice in cooperation between men from different origins and

⁵ E. Brancaforte, S. Brentjes, ›From Rhubarb to Rubies: European Travels to Safavid Iran (1550–1700). The Lands of the Sophi: Iran in Early Modern Maps (1550–1700)‹, *Harvard Library Bulletin*, Vol. 23, Nos. 1–2, 2012, p. 150; G. B. Ramusio, *Navigazione et viaggi, Venice, 1563–1606*, with an Introduction by R. A. Skelton, and an Analysis of the Contents by G. B. Parks, Amsterdam: Theatrvm Orbis Terrarvm Ltd., 1968, Volume 2, fols. 14b, 16a.

⁶ G. Le Strange (ed.), *Don Juan of Persia: A Shi'ah Catholic, 1560–1604*, London: Routledge Curzon, 2005 [1926]; R. Matthee, ›The Imaginary Realm: Europe's Enlightenment Image of Early Modern Iran,‹ *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 30, No. 3, 2010, pp. 449–460, here p. 454.

backgrounds: Giacomo Gastaldi (d. 1567), a self-trained cosmographer from Piedmont; Giovanni B. Ramusio, the secretary of the Venetian government; the translators of the Venetian government like Michele Membré (1505–1595) from Ottoman Cyprus; merchants from Iran; and a very well educated and highly skilled anonymous informant. The final product mixes an equally broad variety of elements: Ptolemaic terminology; names found in letters by Venetian ambassadors to the court of the Aq Koyunlu (r. 1378–1501), a dynasty, which ruled in western Iran before the Safavids; visual representation from portolan charts of the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries; an occasional set of coordinates taken from the Arabic geography of the Ayyubid prince Abū l-Fidā' (1273–1331); and a broad variety of toponyms of Iran, previously unknown to mapmakers and collectors of maps across Christian Europe (Brancaforte, and Brentjes 2012: 135, 148–151).

Michele Membré was the first Venetian ambassador who traveled to Qazvin to greet Tahmasb (r. 1519–1576), the second Safavid shah, to propose a trade agreement, and to cleverly explore his thoughts about the Ottomans and other subject matters.⁷ Further inquisitive envoys followed later. Ambassadors were not the only men from Italy, England, Germany, Spain, France, or Russia who came during the early modern period to Iran. Merchants, scholars, and missionaries stayed often months or even years in the capitals and major provincial towns. The same applies to the Ottoman Empire and different kingdoms in South Asia as well as the Portuguese colony around Goa.

In contrast with earlier centuries, merchants, scholars, and special envoys bought in the Ottoman Empire, Safavid Iran, and Sa'di Morocco (Sa'di dynasty officially ruled from 1554–1659 but was practically defunct by 1631) substantial numbers of Arabic, Persian, Ottoman, Greek, Coptic, Syriac, Hebrew, and Armenian manuscripts on a broad range of topics.⁸ Today, these manuscripts form the core of the major collections in Rome, Leiden, Berlin, Paris, Cambridge, and Oxford. Some of them, like Giovanni Battista Raimondi (ca. 1584–1614), Pietro della Valle (1586–1652), Jacob Golius (1596–1667), John Greaves (1602–1652), Raphael du Mans (1613–1696), Johann Mi-

⁷ A. H. Morton (ed. and transl.), *Michele Membré, Mission to the Lord Sophy of Persia (1539–1542)*, London: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 1993.

⁸ I thank Justin Stearns, Abu Dhabi for this information.

chael Vansleb (1635–1679), or Ange de Saint Joseph (1636–1697) learned Arabic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish, modern Greek, or other languages. They compiled dictionaries and wrote grammars in cooperation with Armenian, Arabic, or Persian Christians or converts and Muslim scholars, book merchants, or scribes in Isfahan, Aleppo, Basra, and Istanbul. They translated texts from the languages they had learned into Latin, Italian, or French, summarized Tycho Brahe's (1546–1601) new model of the universe in Persian for an astrologer from Lar, discussed Copernicus' (1473–1543), Brahe's and Ulugh Beg's (1394–1449) models and works in Arabic or Turkish in Aleppo or Istanbul, printed religious and scientific books in Arabic, Syriac, or Hebrew in Rome and exchanged maps in Istanbul. And they wrote about their travels in a form full of prejudices, seeing their native town/s and culture as the measure of all things. They often integrated knowledge gleaned from ancient Greek and Latin authors or medieval and early modern writers of their own countries. The pictures, which they created in this manner, were colorful, but flawed.

Thus the images of the various Islamicate states in early modern Christian Europe were not only much richer than the mere exotic suggested by Eamon's example. There were many people from different walks of life who had a personal impression of the one or the other due to war, trade, diplomacy, scholarly interests, and manly desires for short-term relationships, whether with slave girls, through marriages for a short time, visits in bordellos, or illicit adventures. A well-balanced history of the early modern sciences will have to include these rich and multifaceted encounters across Eurasia and North Africa.

Schiebinger is one of the few authors in *The Cambridge History of Science* who points in this direction. She admits that »(the) negotiation between European and exotic natural knowledge traditions is a complicated story that remains to be told« (2006: 204). She emphasizes that locals were part of the acquisition of new knowledge and that what she calls »unlettered women« played a role in many instances. Her example is a female slave of Garcia da Orta (d. 1568), whom I will discuss below in section 3.2. But she too places the greater scholarly achievement in the hands of the colonizers. She believes that it was them who systematized and universalized knowledge, which in her view had been (merely) local (*ibid.*).

Things are, however, as always in human relationships and activities, much more complex and complicated. The various kinds of

knowledge that da Orta and other authors from Catholic and later also Protestant countries in Europe sent home or reported about after their return were only rarely truly unsystematic or locally confined. Many of the cultures they encountered, interfered with, or mutilated, had their own systems of knowledge and networks of short- as well as long-distance trade and exchange. A brief look into trade histories of South, East, and Southeast Asia could have taught the authors of the *Cambridge History of Science* that their perspective from the various corners of the »West« was imprecise, insufficient, and self-centered.⁹ For centuries, societies in India practiced a systematized healing culture, which included oral, written, and visualized registers of drugs, therapies, anatomies, or forces.¹⁰ Similar claims can be made about China, Japan, or Korea in East Asia or societies in West Asia and North Africa.¹¹ Writing the history of early modern sciences and medicine in a manner that is fair to the historical actors and their conditions, necessitates abandoning the parochial focus on a few societies in Europe and on their men or women who acted as producers of knowledge, or agents of knowledge transfer and transformation. Such a shift in attitudes presupposes the acquisition of new skills or new relations of cooperation. It is inadequate to analyze da Orta's book, for instance, without knowing some of the languages he refers

⁹ From the vast number of publications on this topic, see for instance: K. N. Chauduri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean. An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985; A. Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988–1993 [2 vol. s.]; G. Wade, »An Early Age of Commerce in Southeast Asia, 900–1300 CE,« *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 2, 2009, pp. 221–265; K. R. Hall, *A History of Early Southeast Asia, Maritime Trade and Societal Development, 100–1500*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2011.

¹⁰ See, for example, J. Filiozat, *The Classical Doctrine of Indian Medicine*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1964; C. Leslie (ed.), *Asian Medical Systems: A Comparative Study*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977; G. J. Meulenbeld, and D. Wujastyk, *Studies on Indian Medical History*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987 [Reprint: 2001]; G. J. Meulenbeld, *A History of Indian Medical Literature*, Groningen, The Netherlands: E. Forsten, 1999–2002 [5 vol.s.].

¹¹ See, for example, J. Needham and G. D. Lu, *Science and Civilization in China*, Volume 6: *Medicine*, N. Sivin (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000; V. Lo, and C. Cullen, *Medieval Chinese Medicine, The Dunhuang Medical Manuscripts*, London and New York: Routledge, Curzon, 2004; T. J. Hinrichs, and L. L. Barnes, *Chinese Medicine and Healing, An Illustrated History*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 2013.

too or without cooperating with someone who does so.¹² Only then will it be possible to understand what da Orta did before writing his book, what his sources really might have been and which difficulties his crossing of intellectual boundaries might have entailed. The same applies to all those reports about foreign countries, natures, and cultures that the reporters sent to their families, peers, kings, or orders or composed and published with the help of people who never had seen, smelled, heard, or otherwise experienced the foreign matters the travellers talked about.¹³ Only an analysis of the testimonies about how knowledge was acquired abroad from different angles and perspectives, among which the travellers' role is merely one, will uncover the multifaceted processes that intersected in different manners when producing cross-cultural, systematized, and universalized (if at all) knowledge. A similar position, albeit without including explicitly the foreign actors and their knowledge, was already formulated in 2002 by Marc A. Meadow who wrote:

The question of how the Fuggers, or other firms like theirs, contributed to the procurement of exotica for these collections, and the implications thereof, is not a trivial one. The objects collected in *Wunderkammern*, especially the exotica, flooded in from throughout the known world, and even at times from beyond it. In an era before the establishment of disciplines such as zoology or botany, ethnography or anthropology, the stories these objects told derived in no small part from the biographies they acquired moving from hand to hand. Their original contexts, uses, and narratives were filtered through the numerous people involved at each stage of their journey (Meadow 2002: 183).¹⁴

¹² G. da Orta, *Colóquios dos Simples e Drogas da Índia*, facsimile of Conde de Ficalho's edition of 1891, 2 Vols., s.l.: Imprensa nacional, s.d. (English translation: G. da Orta, *Colloquies on the Simples & Drugs of India*, New Edition, Edited and Annotated by the Conde de Ficalho, Translated with an Index by Sir C. Markham, London: Henry Sotheram and Co., 1912 [Lisbon 1895]). Although Markham's English translation of 1912 is often very problematic, I provide a reference to it here and elsewhere for the reader who cannot access the Portuguese text. For the quotes I chose, the differences between Markham's and my understanding of the Portuguese text are comparatively minor and do not concern matters of relevant content.

¹³ One extreme example of this distance between traveler and travel report is A. Thevet's (1516–1590) cosmography, see F. Lestringant, *André Thevet, Cosmographe des derniers Valois*, Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1991.

¹⁴ M. A. Meadow, »Merchants and Marvels. Hans Jacob Fugger and the Origins of the Wunderkammer,« in P. H. Smith, and P. Findlen (eds.), *Merchants & Marvels. Commerce, Science, and Art in Early Modern Europe*, New York: Routledge, 2002, pp. 182–200.

Hence, the new standard survey of the history of the science, medicine, and technology should not only have diversified its perspectives within the disciplinary, professional, institutional, gendered, and performative ranges of knowledge about nature, but also with regard to the cultures, people, and systems of knowledge, which interacted in producing the outcomes and contexts discussed in *The Cambridge History of Science*. This is obviously not the case. Despite all diversification explicated in the volume, the concept of a single, linear history of knowledge toward ›modern science‹ continues more or less silently to orient its authors' perspectives and remains a major gateway for Eurocentric readings of the past. Obviously, many more discussions are needed before the history of science, medicine, and technology becomes truly pluralistic and global and leaves behind its adherence to one specific system and to one set of cultures of knowledge.

3 Two Historical Cases

I will now briefly discuss two specific cases with the aim to highlight some of the complexities that need to be considered when we wish to move towards a pluralistic and more open-minded historiography. The first case concerns the manner in which Pietro della Valle (1586–1652), a Roman nobleman, wove knowledge from different cultures together with the explicitly formulated goal of securing enduring fame. But the texts he produced did not fit together as an expertly woven carpet. Rather, they remained a patchwork characterized by losses, rejections, and incompatibilities. The second case discusses the above mentioned Garcia da Orta, a physician of multiple ›national‹ and religious backgrounds, which endangered the lives of his relatives and the peace of his corpse. His university education and his talents opened up ways to high-ranking patrons of knowledge and customers of his medical skills. These social networks allowed him to move to a far away corner of the Portuguese Empire, where he could escape the clutches of the Inquisition as long as he lived. Family members in Portugal and friends in Goa, however, were not so fortunate. They were burned for their complicated background in Sephardic Jewry and enforced ›New Christianity,‹ which they shared with da Orta. This background was deeply aspersed and despised of by many a man in the highest control body of the Church of Rome in Portugal

and Spain. Like the Roman patrician, this physician created a complicated and complex web of knowledge from different cultures, through which he evaluated authorities, skills, and products. Both men are appreciated today in a similarly reductionist manner, one in the history of early modern medicine and pharmacology, the other in Safavid Studies. Neither of the two, however, has ever attracted enough respect to secure them a fair and comprehensive analysis of their words, stories, texts, emotions, and relations with other people. In this they are not alone. Many people, even those who left behind traces, have been written out of the history of science, medicine, and technology, partly like da Orta or fully like della Valle.

3.1 *Pietro della Valle*

Pietro della Valle is one of the most famous travellers through the Ottoman and Safavid Empires of the early seventeenth century. Those who wished to travel later through these lands, like Jean de Thévenot (1633–1667), Ambrosio Bembo (1652–1705), or Angelo Legrenzi (1643–1708), often admired and relied upon his large and lengthy volumes which supposedly described his experiences and encounters while traveling through deserts and mountain ranges, visiting cities and villages, falling in love, or following the Safavid shah to a military campaign.¹⁵ His fame reached far beyond the seventeenth century. In his *East-West Diwan*, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe praised him for his precise observations and entertaining narrative. Today, della Valle is seen by historically-interested Iranians as one of the most reliable narrators of early-seventeenth-century Safavid Iran, whose texts did not just make the traveler famous. His letters bring, as they believe, fame and reputation for their country even today. Historians of Safavid Iran and early modern Italy consider della Valle as one of the most reliable reporters about Iran, who looked at the people he met with sympathy and attention. His work is highly appreciated by them. In the respective entry for the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, John Gurney wrote, for instance, that della Valle was »one

¹⁵ See, for instance, E. Sabadini, »Safavid Persia Through Italian Eyes: From Reign of Freedom to Land of Oppression,« in A. M. Ansari, *Perceptions of Iran: History, Myth, and Nationalism from Medieval Persia to the Islamic Republic* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2014, pp. 163–182), p. 169.

of the most remarkable travelers of the Renaissance, whose *Viaggi* is the best contemporary account of the lands between Istanbul and Goa in the early 17th century (n. p.).«¹⁶

But things are much more complex than this simplified summary of della Valle's literary impact on the perceptions of Iran, its people, and culture suggests. A recent book on the narratives created about Iran, its identity, and value tries to tackle these complexities. Elisa Sabadini, one of its contributors, argues that the early modern perceptions of Safavid Iran in Europe changed from one of a land of freedom to being one of a land of oppression. In her article she argues that early modern Italian visitors of Iran created a positive myth of the country, which appeared in two different discursive forms. One of these discourses stressed, she believes, the marvelous character of this piece of earth. The other one takes a more realistic tone and identifies land, people, and culture in thoroughly positive terms: »a high degree of civilization, a kind attitude towards Christians, security and justice also assured to the foreigners, and richness and power of the highest degree« (Sabadini 2014: 167). Sabadini characterizes della Valle's portrayal of the land, its inhabitants, and elites as »the apex of the creation process of the myth. With this work, a precise image of Persia is definitely shaped and fixed, reaching its more complex formulation« (*ibid.*). She believes that della Valle's letters, once published, had an immediate success, which »assured a wide and rapid spread of this image, at least among Italian readers« (*ibid.*). She overlooks, however, that the letters were only published almost thirty years after della Valle's home coming. She does not ask why that was the case, what happened to the letters in the meantime, and what induced della Valle to present in the published form the image he did. She mistakes sales numbers for acceptance without tracing the Italian readership of the letters and its perception of the image della Valle presented in them. Moreover, she focuses her view of della Valle's messages on the four points she considers as the fundamental elements of the myth, without analyzing the complete set of letters for their judgments about foreign cultures and their members. Sabadini apparently neither read other material that della Valle had produced during his travels such as his diary, letters to his family and friends except Mario Schipano, or the thick volumes containing excerpts which della Valle wrote be-

¹⁶ J. Gurney, Pietro della Valle (<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/della-valle>; last accessed on 27 July 2015).

tween 1626 and 1652 in Rome. These volumes reflect his painstaking effort to modify his letters so that the Inquisition would grant him the permission to publish them. In short, she did not realize that della Valle's published letters were not simply descriptions of his travel experiences abroad, but a mirror of his difficult publication experiences as well as other serious problems at home.

Della Valle's published letters are as much a panorama of Roman social relationships, scholarly expectations, religious dictates, and cultural norms as they are a depiction of the Ottoman Empire, the Safavid Empire, Portuguese Goa, and other parts of western India. Although della Valle remained the only speaking person, many people contributed to his texts directly or indirectly. Della Valle, of course, saw the cities and landscapes through which he traveled as an eye-witness. But he was guided by books he carried with him while traveling, the erroneous content of which increasingly annoyed him. Nevertheless, della Valle returned to them and others from antiquity, the Middle Ages, and early modern western Europe after he had come back to Rome. Their perspectives were complemented by the views of Persian historians, whose works della Valle had bought during his voyage. As important as these accounts by male authors were for the final form of della Valle's letters, his Assyrian wife Sitti Ma'ani (d. 1622), whom he had married in Baghdad, was responsible for essential parts of them. Her access to the female areas of private houses in Iran greatly enriched her husband's experience, in particular of Safavid noble society and of the court's noble Georgian hostages. Furthermore, della Valle profited from local people he and Sitti Ma'ani talked to, dined with, or were intimately linked with. His second wife Tinatin de Ziba from Georgia, whom Sitti Ma'ani had adopted as a child and who was a very active member of della Valle's household in Rome, left behind a rich array of documents which need to be analyzed for her contributions to della Valle's printed oeuvre. Finally, there were his sons with Tinatin, who edited his two volumes on Iran and India, but who never had seen either of the two regions nor their mother's home-land, the Caucasus Mountains. These diverse participants in and contributors to della Valle's book endow his texts with a similarly complex intellectual biography as Meadow claimed for the exotica that the Fuggers traded and that their customers displayed in the cabinets of curiosity. Even if we consider della Valle's own textual practices alone, isolated from his various social and intellectual contexts and the people who populated them, it is not difficult to discover

their manifold layers of sources, goals, and narrative styles as I have shown in an earlier paper.¹⁷

Della Valle wrote his original letters with the explicit goal to acquire eternal fame, but not to present a description of his adventures. Adventures are actually relatively rare in the many pages he wrote while travelling. He compiled a diary as a preparation for his later letters. But it did not consist of simple notes he made during a reception, a visit or after a conversation. He often drafted long parts of the letter he would write the next day or some time later. In this diary, he summarized rumors or more specific information about the court of Shah 'Abbas I (r. 1586–1629), about the Shah's Georgian hostages or about ambassadors from courts in Europe. After he had left Iran, he added here and there thoughts or information about activities as if these were items he had remembered while in the country. In all likelihood, the diary not only served him as a space for sorting his thoughts, collecting data, and drafting a story while traveling. He also used it at home when undertaking the much longer journey through ancient books (mostly in Latin translation), Persian and Arabic manuscripts and early modern travel accounts, geographies, histories, as well as other topics in Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and French. One result of this journey was the transformation of his letters in three principal formats. He removed the visualization of his efforts to learn local languages and to inquire in them about the toponymy and history of the places he traveled through. His journey through books in Rome thus countermanded his learning new knowledge while traveling through far away countries. Della Valle obviously felt he had to discard some of this new knowledge in order to reach his personal goal – publishing a text that would preserve his name and fame for later generations.

The second format he changed in the process of altering his letters for print was the addition of books that had played no role in his letter-writing while he traveled. It is not always easy to determine whether his occasional complaints about his lack of access to printed books in Isfahan, for instance, was more than one of the numerous rhetorical strategies that the Roman patrician employed to establish

¹⁷ S. Brentjes, »The Presence of Ancient Secular and Religious Texts in the Unpublished and Printed Writings of Pietro della Valle (1586–1652),« in S. Brentjes, *Travelers from Europe in the Ottoman and Safavid Empires. Seeking, Transforming, Discarding Knowledge*, Variorum CS961, Farnham, Burlington: Ashgate, 2010; III.

his own reputation and authority. It might well be that the Carmelites and Capuchins who had opened their convents in the Safavid capital before he arrived there in late 1617 or early 1618 had not brought a substantial library with them. But the various convents at Goa certainly possessed sufficiently well endowed libraries for their teaching as well as private collections of books, parts of which are still present today at Goa State Central Library. Nonetheless, neither della Valle's letters nor his diary contain any references to his reading activities while in town.

The addition of quotes from books and references to manuscript texts increased the academic status of della Valle's published letters. But they also altered the narrative about the three regions through which he had traveled and where he had lived. Della Valle had already noted his displeasure with certain cultural and political features in Safavid Iran. The image he drew of Iran in his diary and the original letters was not exclusively positive. He did not like Persian poetry, thought that the shah and his courtiers spoke in a less refined manner than Italian fish wives and thought of himself as the better human being because of his adherence to the only ›true‹ faith. Della Valle's letters do not portray him as someone eager to become intimately familiar with local knowledge forms, their themes and questions as well as their discourses. His later Persian text, written to an astrologer from Lar, confirms this impression. It shows unmistakably that his knowledge of scientific Persian was very meager.¹⁸ His familiarity with the local scholars' knowledge of mathematics and astronomy corresponds with his own self-representation as a person little interested in getting to know better the court's astrologers, despite the fact that he and his household lived for some time in the house of the court's main astrologer due to the shah's command. The addition of quotes from, and references to ancient works furthered another negative effect in della Valle's portrayal of Iran. Della Valle used them in a manner that he could often draw the conclusion that nothing had changed in the country from antiquity to his own days.

The third change, which he introduced as a result of his exploration of books mainly from his own culture, consists in the devaluation of his former acceptance of the kind of knowledge pursued and appreciated in Safavid Iran. This recontextualization of Iranian learning through ancient texts is one of the many forms in which authors from

¹⁸ MS Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica, Pers. 10.

Catholic and Protestant countries in Europe constructed a narrative over the centuries, which continues – even if in a fragmentary form – its hold till today. According to this narrative, scholars in Islamicate societies had translated ancient Greek texts for no other purpose than their preservation for those who were truly interested in their knowledge, namely ›Us.‹ Islamicate scholars only translated the sciences, which served their practical needs in medicine and astrology or helped them debate the various religious communities in those regions. Although the academic stories told about these processes today are more complex and fit the historical processes better than older stories, they still possess some of the flaws created by the early modern textual practices. These practices combined ancient and medieval narratives about ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, or ancient Iran as well as Islamicate lands centuries after these narratives were formulated with prejudices and reports about filtered experiences of the traveler's own times and making. Using ancient authors as a yardstick prevented a rapprochement to an understanding of the foreign society's internal values and modes of operation. Certainly, della Valle was curious and liked Iran better than the Ottoman Empire in terms of strategy and politics. He was also willing to learn and change his views and values. But he was not a twenty first-century anthropologist.

Thus, changing the original formats of his letters was not a violation of the rights of his hosts to a fair and just description of their ways of life. It was a necessity for cementing the reputation he had already acquired at home while being away and which was increased in lectures, ceremonies, brawls, correspondences, scholarly texts and conflicts with the Pope and the Propaganda Fide. Creating knowledge in the early modern period incorporated all these elements of the personal, the communal, and long-distance travel. It embodied desires, losses, pains, and activities of pride. Without his marriage to Sitti Ma'ani, della Valle would have been unable to access information about the Georgian queen and Safavid hostage Ketevan. Without his wife's death and his own life-threatening disease, he would not have learned anything about the persecuted community of *nuqtavis* in Lar, people who apparently believed in letter magic (a specific form of natural philosophy), and the endowment of planets with souls. He would not have met Mulla Zayn al-Din (early seventeenth century), his brothers and friends, all highly educated men in southern Iran, who first nursed him back to health and then included him in their community, talking openly and freely about many scholarly and

other themes. It was this kind of heightened personal experience that induced della Valle in Goa to write a Persian summary of beliefs about the universe held by an Italian Jesuit who was on his way back from Siam to Italy. He may or may not have sent this text to Zayn al-Din in Lar, which is the first Persian description of Tycho Brahe's mixed model of the heavens. It reports briefly about scientific and religious debates among scholars and clerics of the early seventeenth century in Italy and elsewhere in Europe. Although this text has by now found its way into several academic articles, it has not arrived yet in the narrative of the early modern history of science, medicine and technology. The same is true for della Valle and his other texts about Safavid geography, Turkish grammar or Shah 'Abbas I, his collection of Oriental manuscripts or his role in the emerging Coptic and Samaritan studies in the Republic of Letters. None of these things are unknown to the academic world studying early modern Europe. But the historians of early modern science, medicine, and technology tend to pay no attention to them as *The Cambridge History of Science* demonstrates. Pietro della Valle, like many of his contemporaries who traveled to or lived in North Africa and West Asia, have no place in their stories. Neither do the Carmelites, Capuchins, or Augustinians who operated west of China. The Jesuits and their study by modern historians of science, medicine, and long-distance networks of knowledge have obliterated all those other actors and their contributions to early modern knowledge across the globe.

3.2 *Garcia da Orta's Coloquios dos simples, e drogas he cousas mediçinais da Índia, Goa, 1563*

In this sub-section, I will reflect on the connection between da Orta's life and his only printed book, the colloquies on simple remedies drugs and medical things of India. I decided to focus on three texts, which evaluate this book, because they had, and have, a broad impact within history of science. I exclude many of the recent articles written primarily in Spain, Portugal and France, because they do not alter the basic diagnosis I present here and because I discuss them in another paper on issues of methodology.¹⁹ My intention here is to highlight

¹⁹ S. Brentjes, »Issues of Best Historiographical Practice: Garcia da Orta's *Colóquios dos simples e drogas e cousas medicinais da Índia* (Goa, 1563) and Their Conflicting

some of the fundamental tensions that permeate the three texts and which are not overcome in the more recent literature.

Garcia da Orta was born at the beginning of the sixteenth century in the little Portuguese town Castelo de Vide. His father and mother had fled Spain some years earlier as a result of the persecution of Muslims and Jews by Spain's rulers Isabella (r. 1474–1504) and Ferdinand (1475–1516) after 1492. Both parents had been forced to convert to Catholicism after the Portuguese King Manuel (r. 1495–1521) proclaimed on 5 December 1496 the general expulsion of all Jews from the country, a decree that was changed in 1497 into a general conversion order (Saraiva 2001: 1).²⁰ Da Orta studied natural philosophy and medicine at the universities of Salamanca and Alcalá de Henares. After two years of possibly pharmaceutical practice in his hometown, he moved to Lisbon, where in 1525 and 1526 he received two certificates that allowed him to ride a mule, which was sign of his social standing, and to practise as a physician. In 1527, he applied repeatedly for a professorship at the University of Lisbon, which he finally received in 1530. He taught natural philosophy, logic and other fields of knowledge until 1534. In 1532, he became a member of the university council and engaged actively in the institutional affairs. Da Orta also established strong relationships with members of the Portuguese court. When the pressure of the Portuguese royal family against the so-called »New Christians« increased under King João III (r. 1521–1557), da Orta left Portugal for Goa in 1534, sailing with Martim Afonso de Souza (d. 1571), captain-major of the Indian Ocean in 1534–1538 and governor-general of the Portuguese territories in India from 1542 to 1545. This protection may have helped da Orta and later also his mother, sisters and brothers-in-law to leave Portugal's threats to their well-being, since on 14 June 1532 the Crown had stipulated that no »New Christian« could leave the country. According to Saraiva this draconic law, however, did not bring the wished results, but rather induced more middle-class people to flee the country (*ibid.*: 35).

Saraiva's thesis, supported and modified by subsequent studies,

Interpretations,« in H. Wendt (ed.), *Globalization of Knowledge in the Iberian Colonial World*, Berlin, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science: Edition Open Access, forthcoming.

²⁰ A. J. Saraiva, *The Marrano Factory: The Portuguese Inquisition and Its New Christians 1536–1765*, Leiden: Brill, 2001.

about the Portuguese Inquisition and its persecution of the so-called ›New Christians‹ is as important for analyzing da Orta's life and work, as are the activities of the Inquisition. None of the historians of science, medicine and technology in Europe and North America, whose texts I had access to, – neither those on whom I focus in this paper nor those of the more recent articles – considered either of the two aspects when explaining their particular readings of da Orta's book and practices.²¹ The widespread understanding of the Portuguese Inquisition outside the small circle of experts consists in the acceptance of the inquisitorial self-legitimizing rhetoric. According to this self-representation, the Inquisition's purpose was to weed out those who allegedly continued to practice elements of the allegedly Jewish faith of their parents or grandparents. They were tortured, their property was confiscated, they had to do penance or were burned, if they survived their interrogations. Saraiva contests this description of the events. In his reading of the written, tabular, or visual sources the purpose of the Inquisition as the representative of the top echelon of Portugal's landed aristocracy was to destroy the growing Portuguese mercantile middle class by inventing the category of the ›crypto-Jew,‹ of Christians who secretly practised Judaism (*ibid.*: IX).

Hence, da Orta's case, as a transmitter of knowledge across cultures and people, needs to be approached from many more angles than the purely scientific or the cross-cultural. We need to inquire what it meant to him to flee like his parents the land of his birth and to see family members and friends, both in Portugal and in Goa, fall victim to the Inquisition and its auto-da-fés. We also need to ask what da Orta's affiliation to his patron, the nobleman and governor of Goa Martim Afonso de Souza, and his participation in de Souza's various punitive campaigns against Muslim rulers in western India meant. We have to question da Orta's ascent to one of the richest merchants of Portuguese Goa, his landownership in Mumbai and his possession of numerous female and male slaves from among the local population. Only when all these aspects of da Orta's life style and activities

²¹ None of these authors discuss Saraiva's thesis. Several refer to the role of the Inquisition in da Orta's life and those of his relatives, but do so in a non-analytical fashion. Moreover, all those I have read use the language of the Inquisition without any reflection. Some even use it as the basis for constructing their peculiar interpretations. For a more detailed discussion of these features see my paper wholly dedicated to the issue of best historiographical practice mentioned in footnote 19.

are included, might we discover the meaning that his book on drugs had for him.

These investigations do not explain, however, the success of the Latin reformulation of da Orta's work by Carolus Clusius (1526–1609) in the Netherlands and other European countries. Hence, da Orta's ascent to an expert of Indian medical and culinary botany, whose knowledge served as a point of reference for three centuries, is not merely the outcome of his book printed in 1563 in Goa and transported to Portugal where Clusius allegedly happened to stumble over it in some small bookshop. The book's fate was, like Meadow's *exotica*, shaped by more than one trajectory, more than one life, more than one biography. Two of these biographies are connected with Cristóbal Acosta (d. 1594) and Tomé Pires (d. around 1540?), like da Orta authors of books on Indian drugs. Tomé Pires was an apothecary of Afonso (d. 1491), son of King João II. He arrived in India in 1511 in order to trade in drugs for the Portuguese Crown. According to Cortesão, who collected all snippets available on Pires' life, the royal factor lived for two and a half year at Malacca where he wrote most of the first Portuguese account of Asian plant drugs, the *Suma Oriental*. He finished the book in India, before he was sent, in 1516, as the first Portuguese envoy to China, where he seems to have died some twenty years later.²² Pires, and not some higher ranking Portuguese noble, was sent to China, because he »had been apothecary to the Prince Dom Afonso, and was discreet and eager to learn, and because he would know better than anyone else the drugs that were in China.«²³ Pires' text came as a manuscript to Portugal and from there to England and France. But it was never printed and thus was lost in the sediments of human memory until the 1930s, when Cortesão discovered a modified version of it in Paris and published it in 1944. The question that needs to be addressed in a future study is whether da

²² A. Cortesão (ed. and transl.), *Suma Oriental of Tome Pires. An Account of the East, from the Red Sea to China. Written in Malacca and India 1512–1515. And the Book of Francisco Rodriguez, Pilot-Major of the Armada that Discovered Banda and the Moluccas*, London: Hakluyt Society, 1944, pp. xvi, xviii–lxx [Reprint: *An Account of the East, from the Red Sea to Japan, written in Malacca and India in 1512–1515, and The Book of Francisco Rodrigues, Rutter of a Voyage in the Red Sea, Nautical Rules, Almanack and Maps, Written and Drawn in the East before 1515*; Volumes I–II, Farnham, Burlington: Ashgate, 2010].

²³ Quote from Fernão Lopes de Castanheda's (d. 1559) *História do descobrimento e conquista da Índia pelos portugueses* by Cortesão, *Suma Oriental of Tome Pires*, p. xxvii; my translation.

Orta indeed had access to either the manuscript or parts of it in a written form or via oral transmission.

Cristóbal Acosta is said to have been a so-called ›New Christian‹ like da Orta, whose student he possibly was for a short time at Goa. But it is not clear from where he hailed. He might have been born in one of the Portuguese colonies in Africa – Tangier, Ceuta, Cap Verdes or elsewhere, because he called himself Africano. In contrast to Pires and da Orta, Acosta arrived in 1550 in India as a soldier. He fought in several military campaigns of the Portuguese and is said to have been captured in Bengal. After being released, he returned to Portugal where he joined the entourage of his former captain Luís de Ataíde (1517–1580), who had been named viceroy of India in 1568. Arriving in this year in Goa as the personal physician of the new governor, Acosta was appointed a year later to the Royal Hospital of Cochin at the Malabar coast (Kochi in Kerala). During this time, he collected plant specimens about which he published a book in Burgos in 1578. The title of this book refers explicitly to da Orta and his work. In January 1572, he returned to Portugal, but moved on to Spain where he became a physician in 1576 and surgeon in Burgos. Acosta's *Tratado de las drogas, y medicinas de las Indias orientales* has been called a plagiarised version of da Orta's book or defended as an extension and enrichment of the same. Thus, like Clusius' Latin revision of da Orta's book it belongs intellectually and materially to the latter's biographies, while Pires' writings may be linked to it exclusively due to their material setting in Portuguese and Asia drug and plant trade networks. Hence, da Orta's book and its relevance to the early modern history of medicine and botany need to be viewed as a point of intersection in a complex network of conflict and cooperation between people and communities, emotions and desires, languages and plants, trade and war, literary appropriation, adaptation and piracy, political, religious and economic institutions and memberships in interpersonal systems of protection and support.

Very few historians of science, medicine and technology of the early modern period in Europe, North Africa or India take more than one of these elements into account when discussing and often glorifying da Orta's work. None of those whose articles or books I checked ever defined his or her project in this comprehensive and complex manner. Most writers about da Orta do not reflect on his life as the context of his book. Clearly, I do not claim that nobody studied da Orta's biography. But I like to draw the attention to how interpreta-

tions of the book tend to integrate this biography, if at all, rather superficially. Even those who focus solely on the book, consider only singular aspects. Works on the subject have been published after 2005 by Teresa Nobre de Carvalho, Isabel Soler, Juan Pimentel, Timothy Walker, Ines Županov, Palmira Fontes da Costa, and others.²⁴

For this paper, I chose two of the more elaborate discussions of da Orta's book, because they highlight a broad range of methodological problems. The first one is Richard Grove's highly appreciated *Green Imperialism* (1995).²⁵ Harold J. Cook's book *Matters of Exchange* (2007) has won a similar high acclaim as Grove's work on knowledge exchange in Asia.²⁶ Both scholars include in their discussions of da Orta's book to some degree the physician's background and parts of his life in India. They fail to raise, however, the important question as to whether the manner in which da Orta set up his narrative, included certain, but not other details of his life into it, and how he formulated some of his claims are intimately linked to these circumstances. Both recognize that his origin in a forcibly converted Sephardic family may have had an impact on what he discussed and how he wrote. Grove concedes this point more clearly than Cook. But his formulation of the cause of this possible relationship is so contorted that it remains unclear whether he realized what he wrote:

In general the text is remarkably subversive and even hostile of European and Arabic knowledge, regarding it as superfluous in the face of the wealth of accurate local knowledge. The reader becomes aware of a dialogue developing at several levels, some more hidden than others, in which Orta allows his own position to remain publicly indeterminate. We may be allowed, I think, to make a connection between the subversive element of the text and the personal problematic and ambivalence in Orta's status as a hidden Jew, a

²⁴ However, it can be said that as a matter of methodology those that I read continue to suffer under most of the historiographical shortcomings discussed here. The two cases (della Valle, da Orta) chosen for my methodological intervention do not aspire to be read as a review essay of the entire literature ever published about della Valle or da Orta. Moreover, I analyze the more recent writings on da Orta in my more extended article ›Issues of Best Historiographical Practice,‹ which is exclusively dedicated to that author. See footnote 19.

²⁵ R. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

²⁶ H. J. Cook, *Matters of Exchange. Commerce, Medicine, and Science in the Dutch Golden Age*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007.

status he retained only with difficulty and which his family failed to retain (Grove 1996: 81).

There is no indication in the text that da Orta considered himself a »hidden Jew.« On the contrary, he presents himself as a good Catholic who was part of a thick network of missionaries and colonial administrators. It is in particular the emphasis on his good relationships with Martim Afonso de Souza as well as Miguel Vaz Coutinho (d. 1547), the Vicar General of India and one of the co-founders of the Society of Jesus in Goa, almost two decades after de Sousa had left Indian soil and Vaz Coutinho had died, which suggests that da Orta's book should be read as much more than a purely scientific work.²⁷ The complete absence of his mother and sisters, who had fled the Inquisition at home, hoping to be protected at Goa by their wealthy and well-connected brother, and the lack of any reference or even only an allusion to the burning of two of his Portuguese friends and physicians by the Goan Inquisition confirms that the *Colóquios* were intended to achieve more than merely providing a testimony to local botanical vocabularies, and healing practices.

When we take Saraiva's analysis of the Inquisition's policy against the people disparagingly called »Judaizers« seriously, then da Orta really had no reason to »retain the status of a hidden Jew« as Grove claims. Nor did his family have such a reason. The »crypto-Jew« and similar such terms were simply not their categories. But even when we dismiss Saraiva's insistence on the socio-economic nature of the persecution of 40.000 Portuguese Christians by the Inquisition between 1536 and 1821, da Orta would have had no reason to maintain a status as someone whom the Inquisition wished to kill. His goal would have been, as many of the documents of this dark period show, to present himself as a good Catholic with strong social connections within Portugal, Portuguese Goa and beyond its borders. This is exactly what the narrator named »Orta« in the *Colóquios* does.²⁸

²⁷ da Orta (s.d. Vol. 1: 4, 6, 32, 97, 205), (s.d. Vol. 2: 16, 120, 140, 260, 329, 339); Cook (2007: 97).

²⁸ The continued usage of the terminology of the Inquisition by all modern writers about da Orta, including the current ones mentioned previously, shows that there was, and is, little effort to understand da Orta's categories and his complex and complicated narration of his life in India on his own terms. This lack of effort is also indicated by the absence of an edition of those parts of the material on da Orta and his family

Although Cook does not explicitly discuss possible connections between da Orta's biography and his book, he mentions more biographical details than Grove and thus considers them in all likelihood relevant for his later comments on the text itself. He speaks, for instance, about the persecution of da Orta's family in Goa after his death, emphasizes da Orta's dedication of his book to his long-term Portuguese patron Martim Afonso de Souza and points to the poem of the famous Portuguese poet Luis de Camões (d. 1580), who in 1553 was sent to Goa as a punishment. He stayed there for a short time, before being sent to Macao. Cook sees, unfortunately, no reason to ask why da Orta dedicated his book in 1563 to a man who had left Goa in 1545 or why he printed it in a small print shop of the Jesuits at Goa, whose German and Portuguese owners apparently lacked the philological competence to assure a correct setting of the Portuguese text (Cook 2007: 96–98). Da Orta disposed of sufficient financial and social means to arrange for having his book printed in Portugal, should he have wished so. These features of present as well as absent people and their decisions speak strongly for the thesis that da Orta's book addressed first and foremost the upper echelon of the Portuguese society of Goa. While this idea was already suggested by Županov²⁹, she did not ask what da Orta wished to achieve with such an approach (Županov 2002: 2–5), given that numerous historical and political details, often well known to his contemporaries in Goa, are incomplete or simply false. Similarly, the botanical and medical details are often presented in such a fashion that no reader could have made use of the plants or drugs for healing purposes. These two issues are not the only, but two central features of da Orta's book that oblige us to ask what his purpose in writing the book may have been instead of reading it either in the tradition of a positivist Eurocentric history of scientific progress or in the verbose postmodernist, but often superficial narrative of bodies, sex, and cross-cultural discovery of Asian nature.

Grove and Cook deviate substantially from each other in their answers to a part of these questions, namely the evaluation of da

created by the Inquisition in Lisbon as well as Goa that are available today in Portugal's National Archive.

²⁹ I. G. Županov, »Drugs, Health, Bodies and Souls in the Tropics; Medical Experiments in Sixteenth-Century Portuguese India,« *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 39, No. 1, 2002, pp. 1–36.

Orta's book as a scholarly text about remedies and foodstuff. Cook offers an interesting direct evaluation of the text, recognizing da Orta's ingenious interlinking of his learning about simples and drugs in India with his studies at Salamanca and Alcalá de Henares. He identifies the fictitious character Dr. Ruano in da Orta's dialogues as mirroring Jean Ruel or de la Ruelle (1474–1537), the humanist editor of Dioscurides' *Materia medica*. Da Orta had studied with Elio Antonio de Nebrija or Lebrija (1441–1522), the Spanish commentator of this new edition (Cook 2007: 97). Thus, da Orta's repeated, explicit rejection of ancient Greek and Latin authorities is more than merely an expression of his own, better knowledge. It is, as he says clearly into Ruano's face, a rejection of the humanist project: »You seem very much attached to these modern authors who, in order to praise the Greeks, speak badly of Arabs and of some Moors born in Spain, and others of Persia, calling them Maumetist barbarians (which they hold to be the worst epithet there is in the world), especially the Italians [...]« (da Orta s.d. Vol. 1: 33).³⁰ In a similar manner he chastizes his esteemed teacher Nebrija for carelessness in his use of Greek sources: »Ruano: Did Antonio de Lebrixa, in the Dictionary, say *anacardus*, a herb often approached by Galen? Orta: It is true that Lebrixa has said this, and that he was very learned and curious, but he erred in the Greek name. Without paying more attention he said that Galen had said it. He was careless, and you need not be surprised at this, for the good Homer sleeps sometimes« (*ibid.*: 65–66).³¹

Cook reads da Orta's dialogues, however, primarily as speaking for »the knowledge of things« than the knowing of texts, although he admits that the Portuguese author also relied on numerous texts:

Orta's character plays the part of the new natural historian: he gives answers based on knowledge of the things themselves. [...] Although the element of this discussion that is most apparent is Orta's use of his own and contemporaries' experiences with things themselves, it is also clear that he drew heavily on texts as well, especially ones about the drugs and plants of South Asia (Cook 2007: 97–98).

³⁰ da Orta (s.d. Vol. 1: 31). According to the Portuguese editor, the complete sentence is incorrect and unclear. Since the last part seems to be of no direct relevance to the issue formulated in the first part, I omitted it instead of trying to force a meaningful translation. da Orta (1912: 13).

³¹ See also (da Orta 1912: 33).

Cook justifies the latter judgment by the botanical vocabulary of da Orta's book. He believes that »his transcriptions of many words show his contact with native speakers,« a statement he uses to argue for da Orta's acquisition of some Arabic at Goa (*ibid.*: 98). This claim highlights one of the problems that historians of early modern science, medicine, and technology face when working on texts composed in other countries than those in western Europe. Da Orta's transliterated Arabic words mostly come from Latin translations and indicate, if anything at all, da Orta's lack of understanding of Arabic orthography, pronunciation, and elementary grammar. His transliterations of words from Indian languages oscillate between good and hopelessly corrupt, if not outright false. Sometimes he also attributes words to a language, which does not use it.

Some of these problems that outline da Orta's limited access to the locally spoken, but also to the major written languages can already be recognized early on. In the second session, da Orta answers Ruano's demand for naming the first drug in various languages: »[...] and I say that *aloes* or *aloe* is Latin and Greek. The Arabs call it *cebar*, and the Guzeratis and Deccanis *areá*; the Canarese (who are the inhabitants of this sea-coast) call it *catecomer*, the Castilians *acibar*, and the Portuguese *azevre*« (da Orta s.d. Vol. 1: 25).³² This first example in the *Colóquios* indicates that da Orta did not know Arabic, Gujarati or Dakhni well, although he explicitly claimed to have read Ibn Sīnā's medical oeuvre, *al-Qānūn fi l-tibb*, in Arabic and compared it with Andrea Alpago's (d. 1521) translation. (*ibid.*: 36)³³ There are several Arabic words for aloe. One of them is *šibr*. A similar reservation applies to da Orta's knowledge of Gujarati and Dakhni. The word offered by da Orta is misspelled. The word he probably meant is *alwah* or *alia*. The first of the two is used in Arabic, Persian, Panjabi, Urdu, and related languages and dialects in India. Gujaratis, however, call the plant *kunvāra*, in all likelihood derived from a Sanskrit ancestor. The nineteenth-century Portuguese editor of the *Colóquios* already pointed out the fact that da Orta had only a modest grasp of the various Indian botanical names. He identified, for instance, da Orta's Canarese *catecomer* as a corruption of the Sanskrit *ghrita kumārī* (*ibid.*: 37).

A fair analysis of da Orta's text and its various layers and func-

³² See also (*ibid.*: 6).

³³ See also (*ibid.*: 18).

tions in the physician's life presupposes a careful study of the multi-lingual vocabulary, the histories of the eight languages da Orta most often refers to (Arabic, Persian, Gujarati, Bangla [Bengali], Dakhni, Malayālam, Malay, and »the language spoken at Goa«). Da Orta calls the language of Goa Canarese. Its speakers he identifies as »the inhabitants of this coast« (*ibid.*: 25). This identification indicates some of the problems that da Orta faced. Canarese is usually identified with the Dravida language Kannaḍa. Kannaḍa is today the official language of the state of Karnataka, which surrounds the state of Goa in the East and the South. Today's official language of Goa is Kōṅkaṇī. Kōṅkaṇī is a language, which has as its basis an Indo-European substrate related to Sanskrit, but was influenced by elements from many other languages and dialects, among them the Dravidian Kannaḍa. Today's state language of Mahārāshṭra, where da Orta owned land and a house in the region of Mumbai is Marāṭhī, another Indo-European derivative from Sanskrit. This language is not named in da Orta's book, although he mentioned once the name Mombaim [Mumbai] and referred more often to his house and garden (*ibid.*: 326). The example of *catecomer* as a Canarese word, presented above, increases the confusion, since it is not a Dravida word and thus could belong to Kannaḍa only as an Indo-European element. I was not able, however, to find proof that it indeed had been part of that Dravida language in the first half of the sixteenth century. Thus, until a systematic study of the various so-called Canarese words presented by da Orta has been undertaken, it needs to remain an open question as to which spoken language da Orta's Canarese refers to. A further complication of the linguistic mixture presented by da Orta results from the observation by Mitchell that the separation and identification of various languages as a measure of ethnicity was only introduced by the British Raj in the nineteenth century.³⁴ Moreover, today's division of major parts of the Indian Subcontinent according to majority languages was introduced even later, namely during the twentieth century.³⁵ This reveals that it is very difficult to identify with reliability what Canarese may have meant to people in Goa in 1563 and which lan-

³⁴ L. Mitchell, »Parallel Languages, Parallel Cultures: Language as a New Foundation for the Reorganisation of Knowledge and Practice in Southern India,« *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 42, No. 4, 2005, pp. 445–467.

³⁵ P. A. Mishra, *Divided Loyalties: Citizenship, Regional Identity and Nationalism in Eastern India (1866–1931)*, Ph D Thesis, University of Minnesota, 2008, pp. 4–5.

guage/s they named by this label. Even the explanation by the early modern Portuguese author João do Barros (1496–1570) that »(t)he narrow strip of land that runs from the sea to the Ghats is called Concan and its inhabitants Conquenijes even though our people call them Canarijs« does not clarify with certainty whether da Orta had learned the corrupted word from an inhabitant of that strip who only spoke Kōṅkaṇī (which is highly unlikely) or both languages or from some other person or even from a book.³⁶

These and other features of da Orta's text contradict Grove's and Cook's interpretations of the author's knowledge and goals as reliable local knowledge, experimentalist and as aiming to know things, even when both historians emphasize different features of the book. In particular, Grove subscribes on the one hand to strong epistemological claims, when discussing the *Colóquios*, while acknowledging on the other that da Orta had not really penetrated local knowledge beyond the mere surface. Grove's desire to recognize da Orta's book as the first European text on South Asian ethnobotany anchored in a local »system of cognition« that rejected not merely ancient Greek and Latin, but equally Arabic and Brahmin medical systems, seduced him to merge the dominant glance at da Orta's text through the lense of Clusius' Latin reformulation with an erasure of the differences between da Orta's work and Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein's (1639–1691) *Hortus indicus malabaricus*. This latter book was written more than a century after the *Colóquios* in Cochin, more than 770 kms south of Goa, by a Dutch nobleman, soldier, and colonial administrator. Grove states:

[In] these texts, contemporary Hippocratic emphases on accuracy and efficacy tended to strongly privilege Ayurvedic and local Malayali medical and botanical (and zoological) knowledge and to lead to effective discrimination against older Arabic, Brahminical and European texts and systems of cognition in natural history. Inspection of the mode of construction of the *Coloquios* and, even more, of the *Hortus malabaricus* reveals that they are profoundly indigenous texts. Far from being inherently European works, they are actually compilations of Middle Eastern and South Asian ethnobotany, organised on essentially non-European precepts. The existence of European printing, botanical gardens, global networks of information and transfer of materia medica, together with the increasing professionalisation of natural history, seem actually to have facilitated the diffusion and dominance of a

³⁶ Quoted after M. Rai, S. Dessa, *A History of Konkani Literature* (Pune: Sahitya Akademi, 2000), p. 2.

local epistemological hegemony alongside the erosion of older European and Arabic systems (Grove 1996: 78).

In my view, such an identification of the two texts as fundamentally in agreement in form, content, context, and purpose is misleading. It seems to have been born from Grove's desire to argue for »(the) dominance of low-caste epistemologies and affinities in the diffusion of Asian botanical knowledge after 1534« (*ibid.*: 80). Furthermore, Grove's evaluation is marred by elementary mistakes of separating and opposing medical and botanical knowledge forms, which interpenetrated in their historical trajectories. The system he calls »European« depended heavily on texts and methods of classification and healing that were written in Arabic and practiced in the Middle East as well as South Asia. Arabic medical and botanical writings and goods were, of course, at home in the Middle East, but also in South Asia, central Asia and North Africa. Da Orta's book does not at all privilege Ayurvedic and local knowledge along the Malabar Coast. If da Orta privileges anything in his book, it is his own knowledge. The second rank, moreover, is given to medical and pharmaceutical texts written by authors from Islamic societies and translated into Latin as well as orally distributed knowledge of merchants and physicians. In the second session, for instance, da Orta lists some of his informants – a Parsi (Zoroastrian) merchant, Muslim physicians of Burhan Nizam Shah (r. 1508 or 1510–1553), ruler of Ahmadnagar in the Deccan, Hindu physicians of Bahadur Shah (r. 1526–1535, 1536–1537), ruler of Gujarat, Jewish merchants from Jerusalem who were sons of physicians and druggists (da Orta s.d. Vol. 1: 26, 28–29, 34, 36 et al.).³⁷ Other merchants are mentioned in other parts of the *Colóquios*, sometimes even with names, while physicians remain almost completely name- and faceless.

The different treatment of informants suggests considering da Orta's book as comprising different layers of intentions and messages the author wished to submit to his readers. This different treatment reflects on the one hand different personal experiences of da Orta in different parts of India. On the other hand, it signals that da Orta inscribed his text with more than one message that he wished his readers to recognize. One of the functions of the physicians is to serve as a tool for da Orta vouching for his expertise in West Indian, Arabic

and Persian materia medica. A second function is to tell tintillating stories about the dangers India offered. He makes it very clear that the local doctors considered him a threat. He reports that they countermanded his medical advice to the Muslim ruler more than once (*ibid.*: 204–206 and Vol. 2: 123).³⁸ Thus naming them would have given them too much visibility and honor.

The names that he presents when talking of Persian or Hindu doctors are those of their Muslim royal patrons. On a first glance, this repeated reference to the two Muslim rulers of Ahmadnagar and Gujarat mirrors his continued emphasis on his excellent relationships with Portuguese noblemen and high-ranking clerics. Da Orta posits himself as an esteemed and protected client of all major power players in Goa and her neighbours. At a second glance, the situation is less transparent. Bahadur Shah, for instance, was a rather unwilling ally of the Portuguese, forced into their embrace by the Mughal attack at Gujarat in 1535. He died in 1537 while visiting one of the Portuguese ships that anchored at the coast of Gujarat to attack Diu. Both sides accused the other for the sultan's death. Moreover, Bahadur Shah had resisted Portuguese conquest of his land time and again and had asked the Ottoman Empire for naval support. The Ottomans sent a fleet twice to cooperate with him or his successor against the Portuguese. The first time, in 1531, the Ottoman-Gujarati alliance succeeded in holding off the Portuguese, while in 1538 it suffered a resounding defeat. Thus presenting in 1563 Bahadur Shah time and again to the Portuguese readers of Goa will not have endeared da Orta to them. At the very least, Bahadur Shah's presence in the *Colóquios* would not have contributed to sending a message to the Goan Inquisition, which motivated its members not to persecute da Orta and his family. The death of Burhan Nizam Shah in 1553 also would not have contributed to portraying da Orta as well protected by Muslim forces. Hence, we should, perhaps, read the presence of these two potentates in the *Colóquios* as a confirmation of da Orta's loyalty to the Portuguese Crown and Goa. This assurance is explicitly made in the book, when da Orta reports, for instance, about Burhan Nizam Shah's lucrative offer to visit him every year for a few months (*ibid.* Vol. 1: 119).³⁹ A further way to understand da Orta's decision to talk about them repeatedly is his explicit claim that he knew better than they and their

³⁷ See also (*ibid.*: 8–17 and elsewhere).

³⁸ (*ibid.*: 121–124, 300).

³⁹ (*ibid.*: 68).

physicians how to cure local diseases, even in severe cases (*ibid.* Vol. 2: 139–143).⁴⁰ The stories that da Orta tells in these instances pit local against Portuguese medical expertise. The rulers, or their physicians, are certain that they know how to treat local diseases and disqualify the practices of Portuguese doctors in general. Da Orta describes himself as a socially skilled person who would not contradict a prince or fight the local physicians, but who knew nonetheless that the claim was false and that his ›western‹ medical training would prevail. His stories thus provide him the opportunity to tell his Portuguese readers of the superiority of his and through him their culture of knowing and doing things related to disease and health (*ibid.*: 140).⁴¹ This is certainly a message that will have pleased his Portuguese audience in 1563.

While the Muslim and Hindu physicians obviously are of inferior relevance in da Orta's narration, the merchants clearly mattered more. One of the main explicit orientations of da Orta's book is the trade of drugs and remedies. This narrative choice reflects his own status as a successful and wealthy merchant of such goods, which, while true, appears to have been a defensive strategy of da Orta against the Inquisition. He portrayed himself not merely as sheltered by strong social networks of patronage, as loyal to the Crown and as more knowledgeable than the local doctors. He also showed himself as an expert in the most important economic activity that the Portuguese Crown pursued in Asia – the trade with drugs, spices, and gemstones. None of these specific elements of da Orta's book was, however, of any relevance to van Reede or Clusius. Thus, approaching da Orta's *Colóquios* through the lenses of these two Dutchmen of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as Grove does, or through Clusius' lens as Cook does in a weak form, divests the book of its proper layers of narration and its author of his goals, hopes, and efforts. It leads both historians, moreover, to different, but questionable determinations of the role of da Orta's book in the transfer of knowledge between South and West Asia and Catholic and Protestant Europe. The biography of the *Colóquios* needs to be told first and foremost for Goa about Goa and Portugal. It is certainly possible that other readers will interpret the various stories, claims, and clues in the *Colóquios* differently than I suggest here. But such differences do

⁴⁰ (*ibid.*: 309–312).

⁴¹ (*ibid.*: 309).

not diminish our obligation to address the explicit statements formulated by da Orta as made in Goa and ask for their meanings there and not far away in Catholic, let alone Protestant, Europe. The book's biographies in those European countries as a monument of early modern medicine, pharmacology, botany and botanical gardens, however, need to be studied there. It seems plausible to assume with Cook, Groves, and many other historians that Dutch physicians, in particular Clusius, were major actors in this respect. But Acosta, the African soldier turned physician, should not be ignored.

4 Final Remarks

The goal of my paper was to argue that even after decades of critique of all kinds of Eurocentric interpretations of the histories of knowledge in different cultures and despite all the new approaches and turns developed in the humanities since the last third of the twentieth century, historians of science, medicine, and technology specializing in the early modern period are still deeply anchored in Eurocentric views, modes of speaking, and interpretive practices. While there are of course visible differences between modernist and postmodernist styles of seeing and writing, in this fundamental regard the differences tend to be negligible. I see several reasons for this deplorable situation.

The first consists in the kind of education we acquire. It is much less complex than the knowledge needed to competently analyze cross-cultural products of any period, including the early modern one discussed here. The knowledge and skills acquired in academic education are either focused in terms of disciplines, regions, cultures, and periods and hence philological and other technical skills or the education tries to be cross-disciplinary, long-term or even global. The latter lacks, however, too often the necessary breadth and depth of the corresponding philological and technical skills. Hence, the only way to study cross-cultural products adequately is cooperation between scholars of those fields that intersect in the early modern products. In the case of Pietro della Valle such a cross-disciplinary cooperation needs to include experts of social, cultural, economic, intellectual, military, ecclesiastic, and diplomatic history of Rome, Naples, Istanbul, Cairo, the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire, Isfahan, Tabriz, Lar, Shiraz, as well as the Persian Gulf of the Safavid

Empire, Hormuz and Goa for the Portuguese colonial empire in Asia and western India. With regard to issues pertaining to the technicalities of the history of science, medicine, and technology, this means that approximately ten languages need to be mastered. In addition, methods and topics of astronomy, astrology, natural philosophy, geometry, geography, medicine, history writing, numismatics, and related disciplines must be assessed for ancient, medieval, and early modern times in Europe and western as well as southern Asia. Similarly broad are the demands for an adequate study of da Orta's book on drugs and plants, his life in Portugal and Goa and the kingdoms he visited in western India. Most of the historians of science, medicine, and technology who write on da Orta know neither any of the Asian languages nor the histories of societies in South Asia and the Middle East. South Asianists, on the other hand, seldom know Semitic languages, Latin, or history of medicine, botany, and natural philosophy in western Europe and the Middle East. No methodology can compensate for such limitations. Only cooperative teamwork can overcome them.

The second reason is closely connected with these limitations in our education. There can be no doubt that history of science, medicine and technology continues to be dominated by research questions and methods developed in, and for, western societies. This dominance carries a bag of prejudices in its structures that devalue in a variety of forms knowledge cultures in other regions of the globe. The greatest stumbling block for a more balanced approach to the diverse cultures is the deeply ingrained belief that theoretical achievements and innovations supercede any other kind of knowledge practice like teaching, instrument making or craftsmanship in metallurgy, ceramics, color production and the like, despite the fact that the latter forms have become important research areas for early modern societies in western Europe and East Asia. Claims that da Orta's book is the first European book ever about Asian plants and drugs can only be repeated time and again because their writers do not consider Islamicate societies in Europe as European societies. The reduction of Europe to Catholic and Protestant societies in western and central Europe is the ideological background of such claims. History of science, medicine, and technology in other regions is often thought of outside of history as reflected by descriptors such as history of science, medicine and technology in Islam, India, or China. The historical trajectories of such identifiers differ. The one point, which unifies them, however,

is their ahistorical character. This allows writers about da Orta, for instance, to formulate such meaningless claims as da Orta rejected or devalued Arabic medicine. When da Orta commented on Christian, Jewish, and Muslim medical writers and their works, he only spoke about their Latin translations as he had studied them in Spain, or the early modern re-translation in Italy in the case of Ibn Sīnā. Although he knew that these authors had originally written their works in Arabic, he learned their knowledge in Latin and as part of a Spanish educational program. These works had become part of da Orta's own medical culture. The works used in western India differed, however, quite substantially in authorship, time and region of composition and language from those he knew, with one major exception – the medical opus magnum of Ibn Sīnā. Da Orta, however, speaks of none of those other works. Hence, his critical as well as appreciative comments on Latin translations of Arabic medical texts need to be studied not within different historical phases of writing about medicine in Islamicate societies, but with regard to a limited body of texts as part of Latin medical education in Catholic western Europe.

Similar problems consist with regard to the study of Pietro della Valle's travel account and his other written products such as his letters to other people than Mario Schipano, the recipient of the letters that constitute the travel account, della Valle's diary, his Persian and Turkish manuscripts and letters, or his published and unpublished scholarly works. Many researchers use only the printed versions of the letters to Schipano and completely ignore the differences between them and the handwritten originals, including the editorial changes introduced into them by della Valle after his return to Rome. The material he brought back from the Ottoman and Safavid Empires is usually only studied by experts of those Islamicate societies. Historians of early modern Italy do not include them in their work. Thus, an important part of della Valle's engagement with the cultures and societies he lived in for almost a decade are not considered by early modernists, which cannot but distort the latter's perspectives and results. Consequently, the impact of della Valle's assumptions about what his envisaged readership would be willing and able to cherish and what the Roman Imprimatur would confirm for publication on the final version of his travel account is neither analyzed nor understood. This has serious consequences for the interpretation of his portrayal of the Ottoman and Safavid societies and their religious, cultural and political features. The wealth and diversity of della Valle's

archival heritage allows, however, to investigate much more profoundly the layers of perception and description that he chose when writing about foreign lands than that of other travelers from Europe. A comprehensive study of all of della Valle's papers has the potential to substantially alter our understanding of the processes that shaped the cultural misrepresentation of western and southern Asian cultures and societies in the early modern period.

The third reason for the continuity of Eurocentric perspectives in current academic works about early modern cross-cultural knowledge products is the continuation of those older layers of perception of the ›Other‹ in current views of ›Us‹ and the ›Other.‹ Almost all researchers working on da Orta continue to speak about him and his work in the language of the Inquisition and do not reflect upon what this language signifies and what it does to their interpretation of da Orta's life and book. This applies to any kind of interpretive stance, i. e. I do not see a significant difference of this impact in the case of a modernist or any kind of postmodernist approach to da Orta. The alternative language used mostly by researchers working on the victims of the Inquisition and/or the Jewish diaspora is that of victimhood. It too accepts the basic pretensions of the Inquisition. Other appearances of this continued presence of early modern (and sometimes also medieval) perspectives on neighbours within Europe or people in Asia and Africa concerns the depiction of other religious groups and other forms of political organization, knowledge, or modes of living. Early modern writers are interpreted as early ethnographers, when writing about such other communities, while they constructed, like della Valle, their reports not on the basis of careful observations of and learning about such other groups of humans, but on a good number of ancient, medieval, and early modern books, their own assumptions and values about ›good and evil‹ and a limited number of interrogations with the help of translators, who, for many people thus portrayed, knew their languages and customs only in a very rudimentary manner.

The fourth reason is the retrospective application of values and perspectives of our own times on texts and people of the past. Methodologically, there is no difference between declaring da Orta, for instance, a pioneer of modern epidemiology or a broker between East and West, because he was neither the one nor the other, except in our own minds. Political correctness does not guarantee a more reliable interpretation of a historical source. Only competence, sound

analysis, and the work with sources from the various knowledge cultures addressed directly or symbolically in da Orta's book, i. e. a synchronic multiperspectivism, can improve our interpretive skills and reduce our dependence on ideologically grounded prejudices.

Finally, the last major reason for the unsatisfactory evaluation of early modern cross-cultural knowledge products in many current historical studies is the fragmentation and decontextualization of these sources and their histories. One example I described above is the selective inclusion of the material produced and acquired by Pietro della Valle. Disciplinary boundaries are one important cause for this fragmentation. Further causes are traditions of historical and other narratives that lived from separating and opposing cultures in and outside Europe and which continue to be followed by the one-sided organization of the academic systems in Europe. A greater attention to our own intellectual ›entanglements‹ in Eurocentric beliefs and the parallel investigation of cross-cultural products from different cultural perspectives are urgently needed, if we wish to overcome this silent prison of assumptions and customs that direct our research practices.

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