

"Collaborative research on the meteorological and botanical history of the Indian Ocean  
1600-1900 "  
- Goals and perspectives

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In my presentation I will synthesize the main types of Portuguese sources that help the “research on the meteorological and botanical history of the Indian Ocean 1600-1900”; I will mention the sources available to us; and I will point out my main research areas that may somehow concur to our research project.

In Portugal one may find several sources ranging from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> that allow us to analyze “the meteorological and botanical history of the Indian Ocean, 1600-1900”. The building of a Portuguese maritime empire that emerged in these spaces in the early fifteen hundreds and that remained there until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, offered several and diversified sources that allow an investigation in this theme. Since the early reports of Portuguese presence in Indian space that we find data about meteorological and climatic situations in the different spaces that the Portuguese got in touch with, from Mozambican shores to the Hindustani ones. These reports allow us to have a rigorous insight about the meteorological and climatic situations that they met then.

The letters sent to Portugal by the king's officials where their travel reports, described the monsoon system, namely the opposite winds, and the way these conditions often precluded navigation and the spices' transport. They also described the cargos, the spaces they came from, and the local customs. Among these reports we must detach Duarte Barbosa's book, Tomé Pires' *Suma Oriental*, and the expansion Chronicles.

In the General Histories on the Portuguese Eastern Empire, like Fernão Lopes de Castanheda's, João de Barros', João Baptista Lavanha's or Diogo do Couto's, we often find exhaustive descriptions of local flora's and fauna's. Yet so far these data have not been explored and confronted with the informations that have been compiled in those texts that since 1563 dealt with Natural History. One must remind among these Garcia da Orta's *Cóloquio dos Simples e das Drogas Mediciniais da Índia...* (“colloquies on the simples and drugs of India”). This work was known all over Europe from its early days both through travel compilations like Gian Battista Ramusio's *Navigazioni et Viaggi...* or Fracanzano da Montalboddo's *Paesi...*, and translations in Latin and Italian (16<sup>th</sup> century), French (17<sup>th</sup> century) and English (19<sup>th</sup> century).

Natural History kept on being written in Portugal with a special focus in Asian spaces. Among these works stands out Manuel Godinho de Erédia's *Suma de árvores e Plantas da Índia Intra Ganges [Report of Trees and Plants from India Intra Ganges]*(1612) that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century kept on being studied, namely due to economic reasons. The teaching of Natural History increased in Portuguese Universities, and a cabinet in this field was

created at Coimbra University, the oldest Portuguese University. In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century another relevant institution was created, The Royal Botanic Garden, close to Palácio da Ajuda, which was at the time the king's residence. This Botanic Garden still exists today as part of Lisbon Technical University. One of the main documental resource for those who want to work on the meteorological and botanical history of the Indian Ocean 1600-1900 is however the Instituto de Investigação Científica e Tropical [Tropical Scientific Research Institute].

This Institute develops historical and socio-anthropological research on national histories in a global perspective. It also encloses the Ultramarine Historical Archive, where one may find both visual and written documents about the contacts between Portuguese and other peoples between the 17<sup>th</sup> century and 1974-1975. The documents concerning the Indian space are also kept there. This Institute manages the Tropical Botanical Garden (founded at early 20<sup>th</sup> century).

The main bibliographic resources on this topic are monographic studies and may be found at the above mentioned Ultramarine Archive, National Archive, Portuguese National Library, and Coimbra General Library. With this reality in mind it would be relevant to know if the topics involving fauna and flora that emerge in the texts about the Portuguese presence in the East, have been influenced by other researches made in European countries with imperial domains, and to unveil the way the knowledge about local fauna and flora emerged in Europe. Although this may be a long term project, it still may be possible define different stages, with realistic goals that have in mind the interdisciplinary nature of this research.

I have been working for many years on the Portuguese texts that deal with our presence in extra-European spaces since the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The sources concerning the Indian space go back latter, to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. At this stage I am involved in two research projects: the critical edition of the four volumes of Castanheda's *História do Descobrimento e Conquista da Índia pelos Portugueses* [*History of the Discovery and Conquest of India by the Portuguese*]. This voluminous work was written in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and is composed of ten volumes, of which only eight and an parts of the 9<sup>th</sup> are known. My critical edition will have a long preliminary study about the author and his time, of his cultural and historical sources, and of the whole original editing process. I am also working in another project with two other colleagues of the above mentioned Tropical and Scientific Research Institute, on a critical edition of Duarte Barbosa's Book. Although this was one of the most important sources for those who wanted to get acquainted with the new lands that were visited by Portuguese travelers, this book was not printed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Duarte Barbosa describes the fauna and the flora of those spaces he visited in the East, as well as their inhabitants and their customs. This kind of work requires an interdisciplinary questioning of the sources, since to reveal the text, the author and his time compels us to have in mind that: “... interdisciplinarity interlocks with the concerns of epistemology –the study of knowledge –and tends to be centered around problems and issues that cannot be adressed or solved within the existing disciplines...”( Joe Moran, *Interdisciplinarity*, London-NewYork, Routledge, 2002: 14)