

# COLLOQUIES

ON THE

## SIMPLES & DRUGS OF INDIA

BY

GARCIA DA ORTA

NEW EDITION (LISBON, 1895) EDITED AND ANNOTATED  
BY THE CONDE DE FICALHO

TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND INDEX

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## TWENTY-FIRST COLLOQUY

### IVORY AND THE ELEPHANT

*It is a colloquy which does not refer to medicine, but to pass the time.*

RUANO



AS the bones of elephants are used in medicine it will be well if we discuss them and the elephant.

ORTA

Much has been written about the elephant; still there is a great deal to say, and something to wonder at, so that one ought not to want material for conversation on the subject. Beginning with the ivory, I must tell you that no elephant bone is ever used in medicine or in industry, only the teeth. Do not be deceived by those who write of *espodio*, saying that it is the burnt bones of the elephant, before you have made certain that it is not so, if God grants the time for this and for other things. I note this because, as regards the elephants which die here, the people make no use of the bones, but take the flesh to eat, and the teeth for objects of art.

RUANO

Do some have horns?

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### ORTA

No, for what we see is all from the teeth and pieces of them, and each elephant has not more than two tusks. The nails are not made use of, although Paulo Egineto says that they are. The elephant wants only the power of speech, to be a rational animal. More than that, in Cochin there is an instrument with which it says two words.<sup>1</sup> When the elephant had to eat, its master (called NAIRE in Malabar, and in the Deccan PILUANE) said that he had not a good caldron to boil the rice, and that the elephant should take the caldron to the *almoxarife*,<sup>2</sup> and that he would order it to be mended. So the elephant came with the caldron on his trunk, and the *almoxarife* told the NAIRE to take it to the caldron-maker, who would mend the bottom only, where it was damaged. The elephant took it to the house, but in cooking the rice, the water leaked out because the bottom was not properly soldered. Then the *Naire* gave it to the elephant, and the elephant took it back to the caldron-maker, who took it and mended it. But the workman left it worse than it was before, giving it a few blows with a hammer. Then the elephant took it to the sea, and put it in the water, looking whether water came out of the bottom. And as he saw that it did, he took it back to the caldron-maker, making many trumpeting at the door, by way of remonstrance. Then the caldron-maker mended it and soldered it well. The elephant returned to the sea to try it, and found it to be all right. Then he took it to the house, and made it ready to cook with. No man could show more sense. This happened as I say, and to-day there are witnesses who saw it, and many others who have heard it at first hand.

<sup>1</sup> The words were probably rice and betel. For Damian de Goes related that when Diogo Reveira was at the city of Bijayanagar he saw an elephant writing with the end of its trunk. He afterwards asked it what it would eat, and it replied in a clear voice, "Rice and betel."

<sup>2</sup> In Portugal the office of the *almoxarife* was to collect the royal dues. From المشرز eminent, honoured.



## IVORY

### RUANO

What is the word for an elephant in Arabic and in India ?

### ORTA

In Arabic it is called **FIL** and the tusk **CENALFIL**. In Guzerat and the Deccan **ATI**, in Malabar **ANI**, and in Canarese **AÇETE**. In the language of the Kafirs of Ethiopia **YTEMBO**. No one calls it **BARO**, as Simão Genoes says, for he tells stories with many lies. The Indians do not use it in any form for medicine, only the Turkish and Arabian physicians, who cure by following Avicenna.

### RUANO

In this country they use, for the fine arts, a quantity of ivory which comes from Sofala, and they tell me that it also goes direct to Portugal as merchandize ordered by the King.

### ORTA

You must know that from Ethiopia, that is from Sofala and Melinde, there comes to India every year 6000 quintals besides what goes to Portugal, which is very little in comparison. Besides this there are elephants in Malabar, but few and not tamed. In Ceylon there are many and very well trained, indeed the most valued of any in India. They are in great numbers in Orissa in Bengala and Patani, in the Deccan, and in the country of Cotamaluquo<sup>1</sup> which borders on Bengala. They also have them in Martaban, Pegu, and Siam, and they say that the King of Siam has a white elephant, and has the honourable title of King of the White Elephant. I know not whether this is true.

### RUANO

You have not solved my doubt as to where so much ivory is used up.

<sup>1</sup> Golconda.

## TWENTY-FIRST COLLOQUY

ORTA

Some ivory is used in China, where the demand is increasing. In Ceylon it is used largely for many things and is highly polished, such as boxes, combs, and many other things, also in Pegu. Of the 6000 quintals that come from Sofala, all is used in Cambaia, except the small quantity that goes to China. This is used every year.

RUANO

The supply is such that if you had not stated it I could not have believed it.

ORTA

You must know that the Devil puts a certain superstition in the minds of the wives and daughters of the Banians, being those who live according to the pitagorico custom. It is that, when any relation dies, the women break all the bracelets on their arms, numbering twenty or more, and presently have as many new ones made; and these bracelets are of ivory, except a few of tortoise shell. The Devil has arranged this in order that the ivory which comes annually from Ethiopia may be wasted, and always will be wasted while this superstition lasts. This ivory is valued according to the size of the tusks, for small tusks are worth little, and large ones have a high value, weight for weight. They also make other works of art from the tusks, but in smaller quantity.

RUANO

I am astonished at this superstition. I am told that the tusks of elephants grow again after they have fallen out; because I do not know how there can be so many elephants in the world.

ORTA

You have much reason in that. The elephants are long lived, but none have more than two tusks and do not change

## ELEPHANTS

them; and the females do not have tusks. In Ethiopia the Cafres kill the elephants to eat their flesh raw, and sell the tusks to us. The elephants are caught by traps made with trees and in other ways. It may be presumed that there are more elephants in Ethiopia than cows in Europe.

### RUANO

Of what illnesses do the elephants die, and what use is made of them in these lands?

### ORTA

They are very melancholy and in much fear, more so at night than in the day-time. When they sleep at night they seem to see dreadful things. The cure for this is that their Naires should sleep on them, and always be asking them why they do not sleep. They are subject to fits of fury, when they break their chains and do much harm along the road they pass. The Naires cure this by taking them into the country, calling them many bad names and abusing them for their folly. For other ailments they take medicines peculiar to this land. As for their uses, they work at drawing and moving artillery from one side to another. They serve the kings in their wars; some kings have a thousand elephants, others less, others more. They go to war armed, especially the head and breast. Small bells hang along their sides, and iron points are fixed upon their tusks. Castles are fixed on their backs in which the Naires sit who guide them, and in which are placed battle axes, hooks, and other muniments. I have seen them in battle, and the mischief they did was to throw the enemy into disorder and sometimes to put them to flight. They tell me that they often take to flight themselves, when they do more harm to their own people than to the enemy; but this I have not seen.



## TWENTY-FIRST COLLOQUY

RUANO

Have they any other way of fighting?

ORTA

Yes. They fight each other with their Naires, who teach them and guide them from above. It is a very cruel battle, fencing and wounding each other with their tusks. They fight with great bravery, and they often deliver such tremendous blows, one on the other, on their foreheads that they fall dead on the ground. A Portuguese of credit told me that he saw a very powerful elephant fall dead in an encounter with another. They also fight when inebriated, and have taken men in their trunks and torn them to pieces, which I have seen on several occasions.

RUANO

Pliny says that their blood is useful for several things as well as the liver and scrapings from the ivory.

ORTA

This may well be true, but they are not used.

RUANO

They say that the elephant sleeps with the female elephant, like a man with his wife, different from other quadrupeds.

ORTA

The truth is that their habits are the same as those of other quadrupeds. The only difference is that the male rests on a higher bank and the female on a lower one. I have been told this by Portuguese worthy of credit. I have seen elephants, but I have not seen them with their females; only this is what I have heard.

## ELEPHANTS

### RUANO

Pliny also heard that the souls of elephants drew serpents out of their places.

### ORTA

I cannot say how that may be, for I have neither seen nor heard anything of it.

### RUANO

Pliny also says that the elephant, when he eats poison, seeks for an antidote to cure himself.

### ORTA

I have not seen this and have no knowledge of it, nor have I ever heard of it in Ethiopia where the elephants most abound.

### RUANO

Pliny also writes that the best elephants and the most warlike are in Taprobana, not in India.

### ORTA

If by Taprobana Ceylon is to be understood, as some maintain, the elephants there are the best and the best trained. If by Taprobana Sumatra is intended, elephants are there but not so good as those of Ceylon. Very often men think that a thing comes from one land, when it comes from another more distant. For instance many believe that the best *lacre* comes from Sumatra, and hence the name *locsumatri*, but the best *lacre* does not come from there, but from Pegu; and so it may be with the elephants of Sumatra.

### RUANO

Are they capable of understanding the language of their country, as Pliny relates?



## TWENTY-FIRST COLLOQUY

### ORTA

Not only of their own country, but they can also be taught that of another land. The elephants brought from Ceylon to Guzerat and the Deccan can easily be made to understand their masters, and some that are taken to Portugal soon learn Portuguese. I will show you some in India that understand. They are so covetous of glory that if one is told that he is the king of Portugal he is much pleased. They are ashamed of anything wrong that they do. They are grateful for kindness shown to them. They are vindictive if injuries are done to them. I remember what happened at Cochin. An elephant threw some cocoanuts to a man, and the man broke them on the elephant's head. The good elephant kept the rind of the cocoanut in his mouth, holding it in one cheek. Seeing the man who had done him the injury, he drew out the cocoanut husk with his trunk, and afterwards he carried the cocoanut husk in his cheek, as much as to say, I remember the injury you did to me. By this you can see that the elephants have memories.

### RUANO

Pliny says many other things about them, for instance that they make war with the rhinoceros over their pastures.

### ORTA

These rhinoceroses are in Cambaia where it borders on Bengala and Patani, and they are called GANDA. They are not so good or so gentle as the elephants, and for this reason they are not so well known, for it stands to reason that animals so large and fierce should not be liked. When I write of the *licies* I will revert again to this animal and relate all I know. Pliny also says that a headache is cured by putting a poultice of barley on it. But there is no barley in Ethiopia, whence the greatest numbers come. Of the other places there are

## ELEPHANTS

some from Bengal, and a small quantity from Cambaia. So that I do not know how he can have tried it, although I know that the tame ones might make use of it.

RUANO

How are the elephants tamed and taught ?

ORTA

The newly caught are tamed with whips, and with shameful words, and with hunger ; then with good treatment as reward for good behaviour. They tell me that to tame the large ones in Pegu, they put them into large houses with many small doors, and prod them through the doors with swords and spears. Then they go in to them when they are tired, wounded, and starving, and when the elephants, badly wounded, lie down on the ground, they make friends and become masters. They wash the wounds and dress them with oil, and give them food. First with wounds and starvation, then with kindness, they succeed in taming them. I wish to tell you these things about the elephants because they are the most certain. Pliny relates many more.

SERVANT GIRL

Please, sir, Micer André Milanes, the lapidary, has called.

ORTA

Ask him to come in.

*Enter* ANDRÉ MILANES

I kiss the hands of your worship.

ORTA

And we kiss yours.

## TWENTY-FIRST COLLOQUY

ANDRÉ

Do you wish to sell your great emerald or the smaller one ? for I am ready to buy both. The small one is the finest.

ORTA

I will sell all, and I will show you both if you will tell me who is the buyer. This I will confide to your faith, that you will only show them to the buyer or to his agent, and that you will return them to me at once if he does not buy. Now tell me, did you see elephants caught and tamed when you were in Pegu ?

ANDRÉ

Twice. The first time when the King and all the kingdom hunted, upwards of 200,000 people. They formed a circle, making it smaller and smaller, catching a great number of deer, pigs, and tigers, many alive, and others wounded or dead.

ORTA

I have seen Nizamoxa hunt in the same way, and take a great number.

ANDRÉ

Then 4000 elephants were surrounded—females, males and young. They were all let go, except 200, so as not to denude the forests of them. I saw this, and the 200 were tamed by encircling them with beams, and making the circle smaller and smaller, and the barrier stronger, until the space was only large enough for the elephants to stand in. Then cords were passed between the beams, and round the legs and tusks, so that they could not move. Then two cords were passed round each, and they were wounded until they wept tears, which I saw. On each elephant his master then mounted, taking



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the ropes from its feet. If they gave trouble they were wounded and starved. When they submitted their wounds were dressed and they were given food. Taking them out, each one was placed between two tame elephants to give it counsel, and in this way all were tamed.

### ORTA

I had heard of this way of taming, but I did not know that there were so many to hunt in Pegu and Ceylon; and I have heard that there is another way of hunting. Do you know it?

### ANDRÍ

The King received news of a very great elephant that ranged the woods, and he sent to it some of his elephants which were very tame and domesticated. He told their masters that he did not want them to go with the elephants, but that they were to keep near. The elephants came on, the females in front, and the wild one followed, feeding as it went, until it came into Pegu, which is a great city, and there it was enticed to a place where it was enclosed and the females left it; and it was tamed in the way which I have already described.

### RUANO

This is very well, but Pliny says that when they meet pigs in the forest the elephants turn back and are frightened.

### ORTA

I already know the contrary; for in the close places of elephants there are pigs and the elephants take no notice of them. In the woods of Malabar there are many pigs, where there are few elephants, and it is not said that they have any fear. It is true to my knowledge, what Pliny says, that they detest rats, and when there are rats where the elephants sleep,

## TWENTY-FIRST COLLOQUY

they sleep with their trunks coiled up, that the rats may not bite them. For the same reason they dislike ants. I request that you will see to the sale of my emeralds, and now let us go to dinner. Do not think I am frivolous in talking so much on this subject, for Mateolo Sinense, a learned man, talked much of elephants, and not with so many truths as I have related.

## THIRTY-FIRST COLLOQUY

CATE<sup>1</sup>

RUANO



COMPLAINING of relaxation and softening of the gums, your cook told me that I should eat (chew?) BETRE, ARECA, and CATE well mixed together; she added that CATE was the best of all. She provided it, and I found it to be styptic and rather bitter. She also said that she knew very well that drinking water should be taken after it. This she brought,

and I know not anything as good as that, but with a bitter taste. Then she told me that, with a mixture of BETRE and ARECA, she knew it would be very good. Certainly it seemed to me to be a very good medicine to dry and open. We know where it is, what it is called, and how it works. But I want to be informed respecting the appearance of the tree, for what the medicines are used in this land, and some of the writers who refer to it.

ORTA

This plant is most abundant in the territories of Baçaim, Manora, and Damam, cities of our King. It is also in the

<sup>1</sup> *Areca Catechu.*



## CATE

mainland of Goa and in many other parts, but not in such quantity as in the places I mentioned first, whence it is taken to Malacca and China in large quantities, as well as to Arabia, Persia and Khorasan. As a medicine the demand is not large, but a great quantity is used in China and Malacca to chew with betel. They all call it CATE, in Malacca CATO with some variations. The Arabs, Persians, and all the people of India call it CATE. In its own proper country they call it UPLOT, also PUCHO, owing to the great trade in it to Malacca, where it is so called. The tree which yields this CATE is the size of an ash tree, and the leaves are small like those of the gorse (or *jounas*, as they call it in Portugal). We may also compare it to the tamarisk, for it has many spines and leaves all the year round, and the branches are very strong and heavy. It never decays, according to the natives, neither from the sun nor from damp, and among themselves they call it "the plant that is always living." It endures blows, and for this and because of its weight, they make certain sticks of it, with which they beat the husks from the rice. They call them *piloes*. They tread it into a very large stick made like a pestel, and this stick, which they put inside to stamp, is made like the handle of a pestel, and 6 *palmos* in size. They call this tree in its native habitat HACCHIC. As I do not know the language of this country so well as I know Portuguese, I do not know the reason that they call it CATE. Well, this is enough on the subject.

## RUANO

All you have said explains things very well, but I want to know about the flower and fruit.

## ORTA

It has flowers, but they tell me there is no fruit.

## THIRTY-FIRST COLLOQUY

I RUANO

Tell me how these lozenges are manufactured and the shape they are given.

ORTA

They cut very small twigs from the tree, boil them and pound them into shapes like lozenges or wafers, or like the flour of NACHANI,<sup>1</sup> which is a small black seed with which they make bread like rye. With that flour and the ashes of a black stick found in that land, or without them, they make slices and dry them in the shade, that the sun may not draw out their virtue. These people all use it, and also the Chinese, being so discreet and well informed, affirm that it is a very good medicine. I have tried it for dysentery and for pain in the eyes and found it very good. As to what is known of mention made of some writers, I will tell you a thing which I believe to be perfectly true, if you will give me leave.

RUANO

I shall be much obliged to you.

ORTA

I say that CATE<sup>2</sup> is what Galen and Pliny and Dioscorides, Avicenna and Rasis call LICIUM, because it was first found in Lycia, a province of Turkey, or because the best kind was found there in former days. The Arabians, Avicenna and Serapiam called it HACDADH.

RUANO

How is it that you say it is the LICIUM? Is it not called

<sup>1</sup> *Eleusine Coracana*, Gært., a dark-coloured millet, the *korakan* of Ceylon, the *ragi* and *nachni* of the Bombay Presidency; these names being corruptions respectively of the Sanskrit *rajika*, and *natchini*.

<sup>2</sup> *Berberis Lycium*, Boyle, and other species of *Berberis*, the *λύκιον Ἰνδικόν* of the Greeks; the watery extract from the wood of which is famous all over India under the name of *rusut*. The Hindustani name of the wood of these trees is *chitra*, the Sanskrit *daruharidra*, i.e. "wood turmeric," the Persian *pilzahra*, the Arabic *ambarbaris*, and the Chinese *kauki*.



## CATE

CATE by the Arabian writers, and this being so why do you call CATE the LICIUM?

## ORTA

I call it so because all the modern and ancient writers, Greeks and Latins and Arabs and Indians, all prefer the LICIUM of India to all others; still more because it is this with which is taught all that here is known; still more because all the things for which LICIUM served are used in this country for CATE; still more because it has the conditions for making good LICIUM. It serves for weakness of the eyes, strengthens the gums and teeth, kills parasitical creatures, and is good for the throat, for rheumatism and for dysentery. You ask why the Arabs do not call it CATE. To this I reply that many things lose their correct names when transferred to an alien language. Now it may be that, in speaking with Arabian physicians, they will give me another name that is used in their language. You say that all speak of this simple. Well, Galen says that it is a thorny tree and that the best comes from India; also that there is plenty in Lycia and Cappadocia, and that their virtue is astringent and dry. Others contradict this. Pliny gives the advantage to India and says that it comes in leathern bottles of rhinoceros and camel hide, and tells how they are made, to which all agree. Why, then, do you ask how it is made? I will not talk of this any more.

## RUANO

So as not to hinder so good a discourse I will not ask about the leathern bottles, but will remember what you have said.

## ORTA

I will answer everything. I say that Dioscorides praised the Indian kind most, and described the tree, which did not differ from the CATE, at least only a little, for he says it is a small tree when it is a large one. He says it is like box and



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that most of it grows in Lycia and Cappadocia, and when he speaks of its uses he says the same as the others—that it has the virtue of opening and soothing. Referring to the chapter in Dioscorides, it will be seen that the Indians use it in the manner that he describes. Avicenna calls it **HACDADH**. He says that the kind from India is stronger and better than that which comes from Mecca, but I believe that the kind from Mecca is the same that comes from India. He adds that when it cannot be had, they put in its place **ARECA** and **SANDAL**.

### RUANO

As to this your cook says one better, that she puts in **BETELE** and **ARECA** and the same **CATE**.

### ORTA

These they had for use from the beginning of the peopling of this land. Rasis says that it is made of the juice of *berberis* made very thick for boiling, and Serapiam says the same, calling it **HACDADH**.

### RUANO

Do the modern writers agree with this ?

### ORTA

Sepulveda says that they make it of the juice of honeysuckle and Valerio Probo says the same. Laguna says that we have not got the true **LICIUM**. Antonio Musa also says we have not got it, but, from the indications of Dioscorides, it seems to be the box tree. The Friars desired much to find the true **LICIUM**, for **FELUZALANGE**, which, by the advice of Avicenna, may be put in its place and is the tree of **LICIUM** according to the translation of Belunense, is also wanting. To put in its place the **FΛUFEL**, which is *areca* and *sandal*, according to Avicenna, is more difficult, for Avicenna says it is not well known what it is.

## CATE

### RUANO

There is much red *sandal* in Portugal, and cannot they bring plenty of *areca*?

### ORTA

Yes. But the Portuguese druggists show little diligence in obtaining medicines and much in making money. If they would apply to the India House they would get it in abundance.

### RUANO

So that if we cannot find our LICIUM we must profit by the other Indian one, and be careful to call it LICIUM, since the best is in Lycia and Cappadocia, which ought, it would seem, to be preferred to all others.

### ORTA

I do not say that Indian LICIUM should take the place of Lycian LICIUM, but I maintain that when the Indian kind fails, that of Lycia should be given, for this is the view of all the writers. When that fails the medicine made of the juice of berberis or honeysuckle may be used, or of styptic wild plums. As to what you say that the kind of Lycia should *par excellence* be called LICIUM, this is not so, if you will pardon me for contradicting you. The use of this medicine was first adopted in this country and was the Indian kind, and for want or defect of that of India it had to be rejected; and this is the truth and the other view is not; for in no other region is the CATE so much used as in India.

### RUANO

I will take it from this country and will use it, for it has the effects which you describe. It will be well that you should tell me if there are not many leathern bottles of camel and rhinoceros hide in this land, as Pliny says that they carry it, that we may see the quantity of it by this leather.



## THIRTY-FIRST COLLOQUY

### ORTA

I have not seen leathern bottles of camel skin in this country. There are some camels in the Deccan and Guzerat which take the kings and captains to war, but not so many camels die as horses, and of skins of the latter leather bottles are made. As for rhinoceroses, which the Indians call GANDAS, they are not domesticated in our land. It may be that there are wild ones in Bengal or in Patane, and in the lands of the Patane some are made tame. I have never seen a rhinoceros, but I know that in Bengal they use the horn against poison, taking care that it is the unicorn. But it has not got one, according to the testimony of those who well know. For the Nizamoxa would weigh two hundred times of gold against a little proved unicorn, and much more for a rhinoceros.<sup>1</sup> I know that in 1512 one was presented by the King of Cambay to the King Dom Manoel, now in glory, who sent it to the Pope. This animal is mentioned by Pliny (lib. 8, cap. 20), and by Strabo.

### RUANO

From what you say it seems to me that there is no unicorn in India, for you do not speak of any, and the King, your friend, has not got one, a reason for thinking there are none here, and we do not know where this animal lives.

### ORTA

There are so many uncertain things said about this animal, from its not being well known, that it is not worth while to recount them, for the persons who relate them are not eye-witnesses. But I will tell you what I heard from a person of authority. He told me that between the Cape of Good Hope and Cape Corrientes he saw some animals which, though they were disporting themselves near the sea, were terrestrial. The

<sup>1</sup> This is not clear. Count Ficalho thinks the meaning may be that he would buy the horn of a rhinoceros if he judged it to be a unicorn.



## CATE

shape of the head was like that of a horse, yet it was not a sea-horse. It had a horn which it used, raising and lowering, and turning to right and left, in a way that made it like a finger, and this animal fought bravely like an elephant, but with its horn, which measures 2 *palmas*, and it is said to be an antidote against poison, this being the common fame.

## RUANO

They say that these animals do not want to drink if they can put their horn into the water.

## ORTA

Not only do they say that it is a good drink against poison, according to general belief, but persons worthy of credit say that arsenic was given to two dogs, one receiving a double dose. To the one with the double dose, the scraping of the horn was given him to drink. This one lived; the other that had taken the smaller dose of arsenic died. I know nothing more of this animal, but I saw some of its horns, and how they are fastened to the forehead. I pray to God that we may come to know more, and that what we discover may be for His service; and that what I write may be short rather than long, for I would only record what would be most useful.