Assembling the Tropics

From popular fiction to modern biomedicine, the tropics are defined by two essential features: prodigious nature and debilitating illness. That was not always so. In this engaging and imaginative study, Hugh Cagle shows how such a vision was created. Along the way, he challenges conventional accounts of the Scientific Revolution. The history of “the tropics” is the story of science in Europe’s first global empire. Beginning in the late fifteenth century, Portugal established colonies from sub-Saharan Africa to Southeast Asia and South America, enabling the earliest comparisons of nature and disease across the intertropical world. Assembling the Tropics shows how the proliferation of colonial approaches to medicine and natural history led to the assemblage of the tropics as a single, coherent, and internally consistent global region. This is a story about how places acquire medical meaning, about how nature and disease become objects of scientific inquiry, and about what is at stake when that happens.

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Assembling the Tropics

Science and Medicine in Portugal’s Empire,

1450–1700

HUGH CAGLE

University of Utah
For Leslie.

Anumang bagay ay maisasakatuparan niya.
The double, the shadow, the negative image of the great adventure of the New World.

Caetano Veloso, *Verdade tropical*
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This book has taken a long time to write. It began at Rutgers in 2008 as an entirely different project. In the intervening years, I have carried it with me – writing and then revising it – virtually everywhere I’ve been. I remember where fragments of chapters finally came together. On a plane to Goa. On another to Barcelona. A bus in Lima. Trains between New York and New Brunswick, London, and Cambridge, and Lisbon, Guimarães, and Porto. There were late nights at coffee shops scattered across Manhattan, long days at another in Sunnyside (Queens), and early mornings at several others in Rio and Salt Lake. I imagine the book still bears the traces of its disjointed authorship. But I really have no idea. It has been with me for too long, and I am now much too close to it, to know for sure. For its errors and failings, I alone am responsible. But much that is good about it has come from the wisdom, kindness, and generosity of very many people.

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A Note on Spelling and Translation

Portuguese orthography is notoriously irregular. In the pages that follow – and with occasional exceptions – I have changed the spelling and accentuation of various Portuguese words to correspond to the guidelines set forth in the orthographic accord of 1990. For personal names, I have generally followed the spelling currently used to catalog materials at the Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal in Lisbon. Where Spanish is concerned, I have – again, with some exceptions – followed the Diccionario Real de la Lengua Española. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. Where the Spanish Hapsburgs are mentioned, I have followed convention and used the Anglicized version of their names, with roman numerals indicating their succession in the Portuguese line (so I use “Philip I” not “Filipe I” or “Philip II of Spain”).
Abbreviations

MRP  Andrade and Duarte, ed., *Morão, Rosa e Pimenta*.
SVB  França and Siqueira, eds., *Segunda visitação do Santo Ofício às partes do Brasil*.

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