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I

The fame of Francisco Sanches (1551–1623), the Portuguese philosopher and doctor who held chairs in philosophy and in medicine at the University of Toulouse, rests mainly on the success of one book, the *Quod nihil scitur*, published in Lyons in 1581. His contemporaries considered him to be a great sceptic and he was known widely as “Sanchez le sceptique”. In the seventeenth century his advocacy of an extreme form of scepticism prompted a Dutch opponent of Descartes, the Utrecht theologian and philosopher Martin Schoock, and the German theologian Gabriel Wedderkopff, to place Sanches on a long list of the most dangerous enemies of the Christian religion, among whom were included the illustrious Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa and Agrippa von Nettesheim.¹ Wedderkopff went so far as to call Sanches the “most ruinous of the Sceptics”. Another German theologian, Daniel Hartnack, thought

¹ Martin Schoock (Schoockius), in his *De scepticismo pars prior, sive libri quatuor* (Groningae: ex officina Henrici Lussindi, 1652), examines the history of scepticism as part of his continuing campaign to discredit Descartes. In his review of modern sceptics he writes: “Ulterius ex recentioribus progressus est Cardinalis Crescentius in libro *de docta ignorantia*: ac prae aliis Franciscus Sanchez in opusculo, quod inscripsit *de multum nobili et prima universali scientia, quod nihil scitur*” (p. 69). Sanches is mentioned frequently in the work, as are Agrippa and Gassendi. The Frankfurt 1618 edition of the *Quod nihil scitur* first brought Sanches to the attention of Schoock and Voetius, who had already attacked Descartes in their *Admiranda methodus novae philosophiae Renati Des Cartes* (Ultraiechti: ex officina J. Van Waesbergae, 1643). Gabriel Wedderkopff refers to Schoock’s work in his *Dissertationes duae quarum prior de Scepticismo profano et sacro praecipue remonstrantium, posterior de Atheismo praeprius Socinianorum* (Argentorati: ex officina Josiae Staedelii, 1665) and includes Cardinal Cusa as a member of the Pyrrhonian sect together with “prae caeteris Franciscum Sanchez, cujus opusculum de multum nobili et prima universali scientia, quod nihil scitur, extat, quo in strenuum se collapsi ac iamdudum profligati Scepticismi restauratorem praebet” (p. 7).

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it necessary to publish an entire refutation of Sanches under the title *Sanchez aliquid sciens* (Stettin, 1665), attacking each paragraph of the *Quod nihil scitur* with copious references and quotations from the works of all the philosophers who had previously examined the possibility and non-possibility of knowledge, and justifying his own position doctrinally by referring to Saint Augustine.² Sanches's reputation as a sceptic lingered even as late as the eighteenth century, Pierre Bayle saying of him in his *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, "C'etoit un grand Pyrrhonien".³

Although Sanches's treatise on epistemology attacking Aristotle and his adherents was well known in the late Renaissance and the seventeenth century, running into six editions between 1581 and 1665, his fame suffered an eclipse as the debate over Pyrrhonism quietened down. Montaigne, Pascal, and Descartes emerged as the major French thinkers who had written on philosophical scepticism, leaving Sanches in relative obscurity. It was not until the beginning of this century that European scholars began to research extensively the life and works of this most interesting figure of the late French Renaissance whose importance as a precursor of Descartes has yet to be acknowledged fully.⁴ With the inclusion

² Daniel Hartnack's commentary in his *Sanchez aliquid sciens, h.e. in Francisci Sanchez . . .* (Stetini: apud Jeremiam Mamphrasium, 1665) was prompted by his first reading the *Quod nihil scitur* in the 1649 Rotterdam edition.

³ See the article on Sanchez, François, in the *Dictionnaire historique et critique par Mr Pierre Bayle*, troisième édition (Rotterdam: Michel Bohm, 1720).

⁴ Among early studies on Sanches the following are important: Ludwig Gerkrath, *Franz Sanchez. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der philosophischen Bewegungen im Anfänge der neueren Zeit* (Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1860); John Owen, *The Sceptics of the French Renaissance* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1893); the many articles of H.P. Cazac in the early part of the century and his extensive documentation on Sanches, which is now housed in the archives of the Institut Catholique de Toulouse; the first full-length study of Sanches by Emilien Senchet in his *Essai sur la méthode de Francisco Sanchez* (Paris: V. Giard & E. Briere, 1904); the lively chapter on Sanches in Fortunat Strowski's *Montaigne* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1906); the critical essay, "De los Orígenes del Criticismo y del Escepticismo" by Menéndez y Pelayo in his *Ensayos de Crítica Filosófica*, vol. XLIII of *Edición nacional de las obras completas de Menéndez y Pelayo* (Santander: Aldus, S. A. de Artes Gráficas, 1948); finally, the many studies of Portuguese scholars, notably the critical editions of Joaquim de Carvalho, *Francisco Sanches*

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of Sanches in Richard Popkin's masterly survey *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*, interest has grown among English-speaking scholars in the *Quod nihil scitur*. Perhaps Sanches will now be considered a unique representative of the philosopher-physician whose scientific background led him to question the very foundations of the Aristotelian structure of knowledge.⁵ A true sceptic in the profoundest sense of the term, that of an enquirer, Sanches preferred to terminate most of his philosophical and medical treatises with the question "Quid?" a symbol of his tireless quest for the truth and which his disciple Delassus, in the preface to the 1636 Toulouse edition of the complete works of Sanches, states that he affixed like an obelisk to his treatises.⁶ Now, an obelisk indicates in a classical text that a word or passage is totally uncertain or incomprehensible. Sanches questioned not only the works of others but also his own, since he believed that perfect knowledge is impossible and man can only reach an approximation of the truth. As a sceptic he did not believe in mathematical certainty: approximation was the only possible resolution of his particular form of scepticism.

The present critical edition and translation of the text of the *Quod nihil scitur* endeavours to situate Sanches in the history of the revival of Greek scepticism in France during the sixteenth century and to shed light on the close relationship between philosophy and

Opera philosophica (1955; Coimbra: Separata da *Revista da Universidade de Coimbra*, vol. XVIII, Imprensa de Coimbra, 1957), and Artur Moreira de Sá, *Francisco Sanches Prefácio e Seleção* (Lisbon: SNI, 1948).

⁵ See Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), which is a revised and expanded edition of *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1960). Popkin's analysis of the *Quod nihil scitur*, pp. 37–41, and the information contained in his notes on Sanches, pp. 259–61, are by far the best materials available in English.

⁶ See Francisco Sanchez, *Opera medica. His iuncti sunt tractatus quidam philosophici non insubtiles* (Tolosae tectosagum: apud Petrum Bosc, 1636), p. ē 3r. Delassus states: "Nam alieni operis se censorem exhibuit, impulsus sacro veritatis amore, nec plus suis quam aliorum operibus detulit, propriis enim non pepercit, omnibus siquidem tractatibus in umbilico vel extremo apice notam illam Quid? ceu obeliscum affixit".

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medicine which existed in the universities. No more convincing demonstration of this alliance between philosophy and medicine can be offered than the distinguished career of Sanches himself at the University of Toulouse, where he was renowned for his contributions to both disciplines and enjoyed the honour of serving as regius professor in both faculties.

II

Francisco Sanches (Franciscus Sanchez) was probably born on July 16, 1551, in Túy, a city of northwestern Spain, situated on the right bank of the river Minho, opposite Valença do Minho in Portuguese Galicia.¹ Túy belonged to the Portuguese diocese of Braga and, according to the civil register of Braga, Sanches was

¹ There is much debate among scholars concerning the Portuguese or Spanish origins of Sanches (Sánchez), which reflects, I believe, the indiscriminate use of the adjectives “Lusitanus” and “Hispanus” in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the life of Sanches, written by his disciple Delassus at the request of Sanches’s sons Guillaume and Denys, and which prefaces the 1636 Toulouse edition of his *Opera medica* and the philosophical treatises, it is stated that Sanches was born in Braga: “Bracara Lusitaniae urbs insignis natales nostro praebuit Professori, . . .” (p. ã r.). Delassus then relates that, because of the uncertainties of the time, Sanches’s father, Dr. António Sanches, emigrated to Bordeaux, where Sanches continued his studies, with the result that he was more indebted to France than to Spain: “ut plus Gallico caelo debeat quam Hispano” (p. ã r.). A similar confusion exists in the official documents in the archives of the universities of Montpellier and Toulouse. In the archives of the faculty of medicine at Montpellier, Registre des Matricules 1573, 21 octobre, fol. 49, v°, Sanches declared: “Ego Franciscus Sanctius Hispanus natus in civitate tudensi interrogatus fui”. Other official documents for the baccalaureate diploma, B.A., and Ph.D. degrees in the Montpellier archives refer to “Franciscus Sanctis, Hispanus, diocensis Bracarenensis”. See Evaristo de Moraes Filho, *Francisco Sanches Na Renascença Portuguesa* (Lisbon: Ministério da Educação e Saúde, 1953), p. 35, for a complete documentation on this issue. In the archives of Toulouse University, however, he is always described as “Franciscus Sanchez Lusitanus”. See Joaquim de Carvalho, *Opera philosophica*, pp. 161–2. According to documents found by Severiano Tavares, Sanches was really born in Valença do Minho. See his article “Francisco Sanches. O homem”, *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia*, 7, fasc. 1 (1951), pp. 118–19. Consequently Sanches’s place of birth is given variously as Túy, Braga, and Valença do Minho.

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baptised there on July 25, 1551, his parents being named in the register as Dr. António Sanches and Filipa de Souza.² The family lived in Braga, where Sanches attended the very old and famous school until the age of eleven.³ In 1562 his father decided, probably because of the severe economic conditions in Portugal and the uncertain political and religious climate, to move the family to Bordeaux, where his brother Adám-Francisco Sanches was in business and had been granted letters of citizenship. Bordeaux had long been a safe haven for the Spanish and Portuguese Jews who had fled the terrors of the Inquisition. The French kings had followed a policy of encouraging foreigners to settle in Bordeaux, since the city had been greatly depopulated following the expulsion of the English in 1454 and the ravages of the plague of 1473, which had brought about a considerable decline in commerce. By an edict of Louis XI in February 1474, foreigners were granted free disposal of their property and the right to pursue commerce without having to take out citizenship papers. In 1550 Henry II had granted letters-patent to all Portuguese merchants and others who were called “New Christians”, enabling them to dwell in any French city they chose and to enjoy all the privileges of French citizens.⁴

It was Guy Patin who started the controversy over Sanches’s religious beliefs by stating in his *Patiniana* that Sanches was born of Jewish parents.⁵ His father, Dr. António Sanches, was a highly

² The most conclusive evidence concerning Sanches’s date of birth, which is usually given as 1550, or 1551, is the registration of his birth in the civil register of Braga. José Machado describes this discovery in the *Boletim da Biblioteca Pública e Arquivo Distrital de Braga*, 1920, pp. 127–32. Joaquim de Carvalho has pointed out that the ecclesiastical laws of the diocese of Braga required baptism no later than nine days after the birth of a child (*Opera philosophica*, p. 161).

³ For Braga’s reputation see Jean de Launoy, *De scholis celebrioribus*, vol. IV of *Opera omnia* (Lutetiae Parisiorum: typis-viduae E. Martini, 1672).

⁴ See Arnaud Detcheverry, *Histoire des Israélites de Bordeaux* (Bordeaux: Imprimerie de Balarac Jeune, 1850), and Francisque Michel, *Histoire du commerce à Bordeaux*, 2 vols. (Bordeaux: Imprimerie de J. Delmas, 1866).

⁵ Guy Patin, *Naudaeana et Patiniana ou Singularitez remarquables prises des conversations de Mess. Naudé et Patin* (Paris: Florentin & Pierre Delaulne, 1701), pp. 72–3.

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esteemed physician, and medicine was one of the professions in which Jews had excelled in Spain and Portugal, since it was little practised by Christians.⁶ According to Henri Cazac, it is likely that the family of Sanches was closely related to the famous “Marranos” (New Christians) of Aragon who had held distinguished offices at the courts of John I of Aragon and Ferdinand the Catholic until the time of the plot of the Judeós conversós against the Holy Office (1484–6).⁷ After the Edictogeneral de Expulsión of March 31, 1492, many Jewish families had sought safety in the French provinces of Guyenne, Languedoc, and Provence. Even the Jewish converts to Christianity felt threatened by the zealous preoccupation with the purity of the blood displayed by the members of the Inquisition.⁸ Cazac states that the Sanches family first established itself on the border of Spanish and Portuguese Galicia before emigrating to France in the middle of the sixteenth century.⁹ An additional factor in persuading many Portuguese in the liberal professions to leave the country, and to seek their fortune in France, may have been the establishment of the Inquisition in Portugal in 1536, allied to the increasing spiritual domination of the Jesuits at court and their monopoly of teaching in the humanities.¹⁰

In view of these historical and religious circumstances, many scholars have inclined to the opinion that Francisco Sanches was a “New Christian”. Yet there are no contemporary references to Sanches as a “New Christian”. But, then, neither do Montaigne’s contemporaries refer to his Jewish heritage through his mother, Antoinette de Louppes, a rich descendant of Portuguese Jews, the Lopez family. Moreover, as Thomas Platter points out in his *Notes*

⁶ For a discussion of the importance of the Jews in medicine see Américo Castro, *The Structure of Spanish History*, trans. Edmund L. King (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1954), pp. 491–6.

⁷ See Cazac papers, Boîte II, in the archives of the Institut Catholique de Toulouse.

⁸ See Américo Castro, *Structure of Spanish History*, pp. 521–44.

⁹ See Cazac papers, Boîte II.

¹⁰ For information on the Jesuits’ campaign against French humanism in Portugal, see Theophilo Braga, *Renascença*, vol. II of *História da Litteratura Portuguesa* (Porto: Livraria Chardron, de Lello & Irmão, 1914), pp. 584–602.

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de Voyage, the name of “Marrans” was regarded as an insult and one could be fined for using the term in Montpellier.¹¹ Sanches himself went to great pains to assure his readers of his orthodox Catholic beliefs and habitually ended his philosophical and medical treatises, written during his tenure at the staunchly Catholic University of Toulouse, with the traditional prayer “*Laus Deo virginique Mariae*”.¹² His piety was praised by his disciple D Lassus, and the sincerity of his faith was never doubted by his contemporaries, even during the dark times of religious persecution in the Catholic stronghold of Toulouse.¹³ It is perhaps indicative of the deep Catholic faith of Sanches that two of his sons became priests.¹⁴

The Collège de Guyenne in Bordeaux, which Sanches attended from 1562 to 1571, was one of the foremost schools in France at that time.¹⁵ Founded as a college in 1533 by the municipality of Bordeaux, the Collège de Guyenne during the remarkable administration of André de Gouveia attracted distinguished teachers and scholars such as Mathurin Cordier, George Buchanan, Elie Vinet, and Marc-Antoine Muret. Gouveia, before coming to Bordeaux in 1534, had been the principal of the Collège de Sainte Barbe in Paris, which was a centre for Portuguese students and scholars under the official protection of King Manuel of Portugal.¹⁶ As a

¹¹ See Félix et Thomas Platter à Montpellier, 1552–1559, 1595–1599. *Notes de voyage de deux étudiants bñlois* (Montpellier: C. Coulet, 1892), p. 196.

¹² It is interesting that this prayer does not figure at the end of the *Quod nihil scitur*, nor at the end of the *Carmen de cometa anni M.D.LXXVII*, both written and published before Sanches was appointed to the chair of philosophy in 1585 at the highly Catholic University of Toulouse.

¹³ “*Praeterea mirum eius in Deum devotionem, quem tanquam bonorum omnium fontem perpetuum certim restitutae sanitatis authorem indicavit, non possum quin recolam*” (*Opera medica*, p. ē 4r.).

¹⁴ See Senchet, *Essai sur la méthode de Francisco Sanchez*, p. XVI.

¹⁵ Senchet, *ibid.*, gives the date of Sanches’s attendance at the Collège de Guyenne as 1562–69.

¹⁶ See J. Quicherat, *Histoire de Sainte Barbe* (Paris: Hachette, 1860), I, p. 125. André de Gouveia persuaded Portuguese scholars such as his brother, António, and Jean de Costa to come to Bordeaux from the Collège de Sainte Barbe. Diogo de Teive came to the Collège de Guyenne from Toulouse. The Portu-

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consequence of Gouveia's principalship of the Collège de Guyenne, close links were forged between Bordeaux and Portugal, especially after 1547, when Gouveia was asked by John III of Portugal to return to his native land in order to undertake a new reform of the University of Coimbra.¹⁷ Gouveia was rightly called by one of his most famous pupils, Michel de Montaigne, who attended the college from 1539 to 1546, "le plus grand principal de France".¹⁸ The Collège de Guyenne became renowned in Portugal for its programme of humanistic studies. Sanches's father would certainly have heard of the reputation of the Collège de Guyenne from his brother and would have a natural preference for settling in Bordeaux, rather than in other cities of south-west France.

The years that Sanches spent in study at the college were among the most prosperous and successful in its history. Many of the remarks Sanches makes in the *Quod nihil scitur* about his own education and that of his contemporaries can be better understood if one considers the programme of studies that he followed at the Collège de Guyenne. Fortunately an ample documentation exists, since Elie Vinet, who had followed Gouveia from the Collège de Sainte Barbe to Bordeaux in 1539, and had served both as principal and professor of Greek and mathematics during the years Sanches spent at the college, has described in his *Schola Aquitana* the curriculum, timetable, and organisation of the Collège de Guyenne.¹⁹ The primary aim of the college was to form students

guese scholars enjoyed a privileged status at the college. For a history of the college, see Ernest Gaullieur, *Histoire du Collège de Guyenne* (Paris: Sandoz & Fischbacher, 1874), and Roger Trinquet's *La Jeunesse de Montaigne* (Paris: Nizet, 1972), pp. 409–507, for many invaluable corrections of details in Gaullieur.

¹⁷ André de Gouveia invited several professors from the Collège de Guyenne to accompany him to Coimbra, such as George Buchanan, Nicolas de Grouchy, and Guillaume Guérente. Unfortunately, many were denounced to the Inquisition as Lutherans. George Buchanan was thrown into prison and others were banned from teaching in Portugal as a result of Jesuit intrigues. See Theophilo Braga, *Renascença*, pp. 583–7.

¹⁸ Michel de Montaigne, *Essais* (Paris: Gallimard, 1950), I, 26, p. 213.

¹⁹ Elie Vinet, *Schola Aquitana*, trans. Louis Massebieau (Paris: Le Musée pédagogique, 1886).

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well versed in Latin: “Latino sermoni cognoscendo haec schola imprimis destinata est”.²⁰ Cicero’s letters, orations, and oratorical treatises were the main Latin prose texts used in all classes, according to the level of ability, as models of style. Consequently it was natural for Sanches to write all his works in Latin, the language of the educated public and of all academics, even though, as he tells his reader in the preface to the *Quod nihil scitur*, he should not look for an elegant polished style, or verbal trickery, which was Cicero’s manner. Indeed, the Latin of Sanches is deceptively simple: he parodies the rhetorical techniques used by the Scholastics, incorporates the strong vigorous concrete language of his contemporaries into the witty tirades, and constantly moves from elliptical philosophical statements to long discussions of the scientific evidence which negates a particular Aristotelian proof of knowledge, so that at times one has the impression of reading a scientific treatise.²¹

Students entered the Collège de Guyenne usually at the age of seven and finished the ten classes at the age of seventeen. Rhetoric was stressed increasingly during the last four years; students were also taught some elementary Greek through public lectures and, in their final two years, mathematics. As Woodward points out, “The existence of higher groups in philosophy and of public lectures in Greek and mathematics indicates the overlapping of school and university”.²² Indeed, the Collège de Guyenne also offered the first two years of university courses in the faculty of arts, since the University of Bordeaux had a very poor reputation in the arts. Readers in philosophy taught these courses, which consisted mainly of a study of Aristotelian logic in the first year, followed by courses in natural philosophy in the second year, when the principal texts studied were Aristotle’s *Physica* and the

²⁰ Ibid., p. 6.

²¹ See André Mandouze’s preface to the elegant French translation of the *Quod nihil scitur* by Andrée Comparot, *Il n’est science de rien* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1984), where he analyses the problems of translating such a difficult Latin text.

²² See William Harrison Woodward, *Studies in Education in the Age of the Renaissance* (Cambridge, 1906; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), p. 143.

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De caelo.²³ Vinet tells us that students were called *dialecti*, or *logici*, in the first year, and *physici* in the second year. It is more than likely that Sanches followed these courses before going on to the University of Bordeaux to begin his studies in medicine, if one accepts Cazac's statement that Sanches pursued his studies in Bordeaux to the level of the *maîtrise ès arts*, the equivalent of the modern French baccalaureate, before leaving for Italy in the early spring of 1571.²⁴ A further fact that supports Cazac's argument is that Sanches himself states in one of his medical works, the *Observationes in praxi*, that discharges from the chest and stomach were to be considered symptoms of serious illness, since he had observed the deaths of his own father and uncle from the flux in January 1571.²⁵ It was probably after these tragic family events that Sanches made his way to Italy, travelling through Languedoc and Provence, then visiting the northern Italian universities of Pisa, Bologna, Padua, Venice, Ferrara, and Florence before finally taking up residence in Rome, where his cousin from Lisbon, Duarte Paulo, lived.²⁶ Sanches's stay in Italy from 1571 to 1573 was to mark an intellectual turning-point in his life, for it was there that he first came into contact with the new interpretations of Galen's *Ars medica*, in which the question of method was a primary issue and the whole Aristotelian theory of demonstration was challenged.²⁷ It was also in Italy that he was introduced to the

²³ Woodward, *ibid.*, pp. 139–54, gives a very useful account of the history of the Collège de Guyenne and of its programmes, based on Elie Vinet's *Schola Aquitanica*, which was first published in 1583. Vinet gives the following list of texts for philosophy: Porphyry, *Introduction*; Grouchy, *Préceptes*; Aristotle, *Categories*, *Peri Hermeneias*, *Prior Analytics* and *Posterior Analytics*, *De sophisticis elenchis*, *Physics*, *De caelo*. These texts were those normally prescribed for the university arts course.

²⁴ See Cazac papers, Boîte II.

²⁵ Sanches writes in his *Observationes in Praxi* in *Opera medica* (p. 368): "Secundum est, in morbis thoracis, alvi fluxum in malis habendum esse; quod nos etiam in Antonio Sanchez, parente nostro colendissimo, medicinae professore eximio, Patruoque Adamo Francisco observavimus".

²⁶ "Erat autem haec uxor Domini Duarte Paulo Viliponensis qui Romae habitabat nobis consanguineus, ubi nos eam vidimus" (*ibid.* p. 366).

²⁷ For a discussion of Galen's method see Neal Ward Gilbert, *Renaissance Concepts of Method* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), pp. 100–5.