

Ancient medical texts, modern reading problems

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The word tradition has a very specific meaning in linguistics: the passing down of a text, which may have been completed or corrected by different copyists at different times, when the concept of authorship was not the same as it is today. When reading an ancient text the word tradition must be in the reader's mind. To discuss one of the problems an ancient text poses to its modern readers, this work deals with one of the first printed medical texts in Portuguese, the Regimento proueytoso contra ha pestenença, and draws a parallel between it and two related texts, A moche profitable treatise against the pestilence, and the Recopilaçam das cousas que conuem guardar se no modo de preseruar à Cidade de Lixboa E os sãos, & curar os que esteuerem enfermos de Peste. The problems which arise out of the textual structure of those books show how difficult is to establish a tradition of another type, the medical tradition. The linguistic study of the innumerable medieval plague treatises may throw light on the continuities and on the disruptions of the so-called hippocratic-galenical medical tradition.

Key words: plague treatises - Jacobi-Kamintus's treatise - textual transmission - textual tradition - early printing - textual modernization

In this paper I will try to show that the attested differences among copies of an ancient text was due in part to distinct needs and expectations of the intended audience, and are not, as commonly stated, a necessary result from a poor work in a printing house. For this, I will focus on one of the first known medical works printed in Portuguese, the *Regimento proueytoso contra ha pestenença* (1496?). *Regimento* parallels other medical works, and this paper turns its attention to two of them, *A Moche profitable treatise against the Pestilence* (1534), and *Recopilaçam das cousas que conuem guardar se no modo de preseruar à Cidade de Lixboa E os sãos, & curar os que esteuerem enfermos de Peste* (1580). The first two treatises are unequivocally part of the same textual tradition, but the same is not true to the third of them, in spite of the fact that *Recopilaçam* had some of the versions of *Regimento* as part of its sources.

The next section outlines some characteristics of the three treatises. A discussion follows the comparison.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Nowadays the Portuguese *Regimento* survives in two copies of the same edition, printed in Lisbon at the end of the XV century by Valentim Fernandes, a German printer who worked in Portugal from 1495 to 1518 (Rosa 1994). One of the copies stands in the Public Library at Évora, and the other, in the library of the ducal palace at Vila Viçosa, both in Portugal.

According to Roque (1979), the prime source for the Portuguese *Regimento* would be the medieval work *De pestilentia*, written by Johannes Jacobi, a doctor who lived in Montpellier by the XIV century. However, the Portuguese edition, as many others, presents the bishop

of Arus, Raminto (or *Ramitte*, *Canuto*, *Kanutus*, *Kamitus*, *Kamiutus*, *Kanunti*) as the author. Still according to Roque (1979), Raminto would have established a “syncretical text”, the *Tractatus de regimine pestilencico*, a work in which he added some parts of Jacobi's work, and omitted others.

The *Regimento proueytoso contra ha pestenença* is a translation from Latin, and a translation for a layman distant about a century from Jacobi. Friar Luiz de Raz († 1521?), the translator, occupied the Chair of Natural Philosophy at the University of Lisbon, and was a lecturer of Theology at the same University. It is difficult to imagine him as someone whose Latin knowledge was poor, as sometimes has been supported (see Roque 1979).

Two translations into Middle English and six printings antedated the English version by Thomas Paynell of *A Moche profitable treatise against the Pestilence*, extant in the British Lybrary. Paynell, a canon at Merton Abbey who translated other medical writings, worked the English translation from a French issue (Keiser 2003).

Recopilaçam das cousas que conuem guardar se no modo de preseruar à Cidade de Lixboa. E os sãos, & curar os que esteuerem enfermos de Peste was written by the Spanish doctors Tomás Álvares (fl. 15–) and Garcia Salcedo y Colonel (? – 1651). I refer to the 1580 edition extant in the National Library in Rio de Janeiro.

RESULTS

Regimento has five chapters in the following order: the prognosis of pestilence, its causes, the remedies against it, the fortifiers (or *confortations*) of the heart and other organs, and the last chapter, on bloodletting. The English edition has the five chapters present in the Portuguese edition, although the fifth chapter is not numbered and precedes three other parts not numbered, absent from the Portuguese edition: *To knowe urine*, *A remedy for the frenche pockes*, and a codicil entitled *To the reder*.

The Portuguese version has no section on urine; besides, it shows a comment on the misleading diagnosis

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the observation of urine may cause¹. According to *A Moche Profitable Treatise*, the careful examination of the urine may lead the doctor to diagnose movement of air (“ventosities”) in the guts, phlegm humor, pain in the reins, in the knees, and also the virginity of a maiden or pregnancy.

The section on the French pox is also absent from the Portuguese edition. This absence in the Portuguese translation is not surprising, since *Regimento* was probably printed in 1496 or even as early as 1491², and the disease came into attention and was named in Italy soon after 1494, when it was associated with the French troops (Grafton 1995). Paynell’s translation dates the emergence of French pox according to a conjunction of Saturn and Mars happened in 6 January 1496. The English translation by Paynell attributes the cause of syphilis to a conjunction of higher rank planets, Saturn, Mars and also Jupiter. Their rare conjunctions were seen as a warning of future radical changes (vide Carolino 2002).

For about 20 years syphilis would be described as a contagious and frequently fatal sickness. That scenario would be altered by the middle of the XVI century (Grafton 1995). Near the end of the XVI century, for instance, William Clowes (1544-1604) attested to have treated more than one thousand patients with French pox during five years at St. Bartholomew’s Hospital in London (Grafton 1995), where he worked from 1576 to 1584³. French pox was then widespread in Europe, but its victims were no longer segregated from other patients in the hospitals.

The last part in the English version, *To the reder*, presents guaiacum (“ligno guaiaco”) as a remedy superior to any other (“I thynke it is nothing nowe comparable to that that Hutten wrytheth de ligno guaiaco”). The reference to the work by von Hutten, translated by Paynell earlier (Keiser 2004), is explicit. As the doctor from Montpellier had done about his formulas, the German scholar attested his experience with the sickness and with the remedies against the French pox, and the benefits from guaiacum⁴.

Although very similar along the five chapters in common, the Portuguese and the English editions are differ-

ent in minor aspects. For instance where the Portuguese text presents the great doctor David⁵, a representation of Christ (Di Berardino 2002), the English version presents Jeremy⁶. Both issues the *Regimento proueytoso* and *A Moche Profitable Treatise* refer to ancient authoritative texts, a shelter for whoever wanted to write on any of all the important truths until the beginning of Modern Times (Grafton 1995). The treatises mention Hippocrates’ *Aphorisms* (ca. 400 BC), Aristotle’s *Meteorology* (ca. 350 BC), and Avicenna’s *Canon of Medicine* (ca. 1100 AD). Galen of Pergamum (ca. 2nd century AD) is not mentioned, but both treatises have the same structure of another plague treatise, this one written in Spanish and published in 1507 in Salamanca, the *Tratado util & muy prouechoso contra toda pestilencia & ayre corrupto* (in Silva s.d.), in which Galen is explicitly referred⁷. The *Moche Profitable Treatise* adds to the ancient authors the humanist scholar Ulrich von Hutten (1488-1523), who wrote a treatise on syphilis, *De morbo gallico*, in the 1520s.

One may say Raz and Paynell translated the same work, but they had different sources, and had different audiences in mind. Jacobi-Raminto’s work was still *profitable* in the 1530s, since epidemics of plague were still recurrent⁸, but from the first half of the 1500s on the crises were violent but more and more spaced out. At the end of XVI century plague was no more the main cause of mortality in Europe (Rodrigues 1990). The beginning of the XVI century would have other diseases, and among them a new type of pestilence, the French pox, was so widespread and fatal that deserved special attention.

⁵ *Regimento*, fo. A5: “Vistas as causas da pestilencia. agora ajamos de veer per que modo & como se deue homem de guardar da pestilencia & preseruar se della. pollo qual deues de notar que segundo diz o grande medico .scilicet. dauid. que primeiro se deue o homem de afastar do mal & inclinar se ao bem. scilicet. que homem primeiramente ha de confessar seus pecados humildosamente. polla qual causa grande remedio he em tempo da pestilencia a sancta penitencia & a confissam as quaaes precedem & sam muyto meliores que todas as mezinhas”.

⁶ *A moche profitable treatise*, fo. A5: “For almoche as we haue sene the causes of the pestilence, it is nowe conuenient to declare certayn remedies to withstande it. Wherefore ye shall note after the mynde of the supernatural phisition, spekyng by the mouth of Jheremie, that if a man will be surely cured, and haue a sure medecine, he must leaue his synnes, and confesse hym self with humilitie and great repentaunce. For in tyme of sykenes confession and penaunce shulde be preferred aboue al other medecines”.

⁷ *Tratado util & muy provechoso*, fol. 2v: “Como scriue Galieno seys cosas sin las quales no podemos viuir & vsando dellas como conuiene son causa de fazer sanidad & guardar las enlos cuerpos vsando dellas en manera contraria que es no conueniente es causa fazedora de passion & destruydora dela sanidad las quales son estas. El ayre las viandas & lo que le sigue como el beuer & medicinas lo tercero henchimiento & su contrario velar & dormir exercicio o mouimiento & su contrario las cosas que al anima acaecen como son ira plazer pesares”.

⁸ There are records for epidemics of plague in Portugal for the years 1190-1191, 1202, 1223, 1333, 1356, 1384, 1423, 1433, 1435, 1437-1438, 1448, 1458, 1464, 1477, 1480-1497 (Marques 1987).

¹ *Regimento*, fo. A3v: “mas ajnda tam sobejamente se agraua ha natureza que nom sinte sy ser ferida nem emferma. & jsto porque aparecem boas ourinas & boas augoas. & boas digestiões. empero ho enfermo vay caminho da morte. E por tanto muytos medicos que em os enfermos soomente esguardam as ourinas superficialmente falam. & lygeyramente sam emganados”.

² Innocência Silva (1858-1958) dates Fernandes’ editon as prior to 1491: “O beneficiario José Caetano de Almeida, bibliothecario que foi d’el-rei D. João V [1708-1750 – mcr] em um de seus apontamentos manuscritos diz [...] que o livro de que se tracta fôra impresso em 1491, sem contudo indicar o modo como adquirira tal noticia”.

³ See <http://www.st-mike.org/medicine/clowes.html>

⁴ Paracelsus (1493-1541) would maintain that the benefits guaiacum could produce were nothing but a commercial scam planned by the family Fugger, of Augsburg, who held the import monopoly on that wood from the New World (Grafton, 1995).

In 1569, during one of the epidemics of plague in Portugal along the XVI century, the doctors Tomás Álvares and Garcia Salcedo y Colonel were called from Seville to Lisbon by King Sebastian (1556-1578). Their prime task was to improve the treatments to plague in use by the Portuguese doctors⁹. Their knowledge must present answers to the questions they had heard from different Portuguese doctors¹⁰. Both professionals compiled everything they could¹¹. Their work would be reprinted in 1580 and in 1598, years of new epidemics of plague. When reading their compilation, it is possible to recognize parts that are similar to some in the *Regimento*. However the *Recopilaçam* seems nearer to the modern reader than the *Regimento*. Punctuation had gained new principles, and new punctuation signs were introduced in written Portuguese; acute and grave accents on the vowels were introduced to show stress or vowel quality and crasis; the tilde is basically the only abbreviation; the font was no more the gothic. Portuguese as a language is also different, although some ancient forms are still present¹². It is possible that the readers living about ninety years after the edition by Fernandes of Jacobi-Ramintus' work could not understand it any more. In this sense a comment by Friar Manuel do Sepulcro (1742) on the great linguistic changes Portuguese had undergone from 1495 to 1515 may support that hypothesis¹³.

The modernization made by the Spanish doctors affected the contents too. The arabic influence of a kind of work known as *lapidarius* is present, and many recipes in the book had gems as ingredients¹⁴. Their recipes were very expensive, as the adjectivation to *triacas* suggests: *triaga magna*, *triaga de esmeraldas*. The *bolus armenicus* is also prescribed.

⁹ Álvares & Salcedo y Colonel, fo. 1^v: "Y como el principal fin para que [V.A.] nos mado por sus Reales cartas venir fue, para que [a los?] medicos desta Ciudad comunicassemos los remedios que este mal podia tener".

¹⁰ Álvares & Salcedo y Colonel, fo. 2: "y en su presencia se moueron [y] determinaron las dudas que cada vno quiso mouer [] por auerse nos mandado diessemos por escripto lo que fuesse conueniente pera remediar tanto daño, nos parecia hazer una breue recopilacion".

¹¹ Álvares & Salcedo y Colonel, fo. 2^v: "emos procurado de no dexar cosa de lo que bien escriuieron los que dello tractaron, antes añadiendo algunas particularidades muy necessarias para la cura fundada en razon y larga experiencia (como en ellas se podra ver) en lo qual no poco trabajo hemos tenido por la breuedad del tiempo, y peligro de la tardança".

¹² In place of the modern termination in *-ão* the old termination in *-am* is present in some words, as *nam* (modern *não*), *sam* (modern *são*), but many words have the modern orthography, as *opilação*, *inflamação*.

¹³ Manuel do Sepulcro (1792): "E não ha duvida que mayor mudança fez a lingua Portugueza nos primeiros vinte annos do reynado de D. Manoel, que em cento e sincoenta annos dahi para cá como o vemos pelos escritos, em verso, e prosa, de huns, e outros tempos".

¹⁴ Álvares & Salcedo y Colonel, fo. 107: "O trazer pedras preciosas principalmente Esmeraldas & Iacintos, & trazendo se que toquem aa carne sam melhores".

DISCUSSION

When reading an ancient text the modern reader contacts a testimony of a different time, when neither copyright nor the concept of plagiarism were concerned. As noted by Febvre and Martin (1997) the profession of author would be born with the press. Before that, nobody had a monopoly on a text, which might be copied by whoever wanted to. More than that: anyone might copy a text and change it, or add comments to it, or even suppress parts of it. So the fixity of the written text, a feature we are used to consider an inherent one, shared by all the issues of any text, took no part in that different cultural setting.

In virtue of the differences the extant copies of ancient writings may present, part of the linguistic study of the known issues of a text tries to map its tradition, or the complex of reproductions of a text, no matter if extant or disappeared. Tradition is a concept closely related to the one of transmission, the process of successive reproductions of a text (Xavier & Mateus 1990). Jacobi or Jacobi-Ramintus' work was an editorial success, since it had many editions in Latin, in French, and in English.

The way the transmission of ancient texts took place makes the modern reader deals with a broader concept of translation. Until the XVI century the Portuguese verb *traduzir* ('to change from one language into another') was not recorded. In its place was in use the verb *tralladar*, but *tralladar* ('to copy, to transpose, to transfer') comprised both activities the translation from one language into another and the rewriting of a text in the same language, introducing new words in place of the ones that had fallen into disuse, or introducing a different syntax, more suitable for the new readers.

Roque (1979) saw the suppressions and all other kinds of variants he met in the Valentinian edition of *Regimento* as evidences of the poor quality of the Portuguese edition when compared to French or Latin copies. Roque (1979) tried to provide additional support to his argument by mentioning a comment Esteves Pereira had made on the Portuguese edition of *Vespasian* printed by the same Valentim Fernandes in 1496. If to accept Roque's argument, this point raises an intriguing question, since in the beginning of press, many scholars began to work to printers as proof correctors, whose work was concerned with both the supervision of the quality and correctness of the text, and the decision to choose the best textual model to be the source for the new edition to come. And what is more: According to the terms of some printing contracts the printer must provide a corrector, in general, a bachelor (Atanásio Lopez 1953). In spite of his criticism on printings by Fernandes, it is easy to perceive that Esteves Pereira's edition of *Vespasian* (Pereira 1905) has corrected Fernandes' edition without criterion¹⁵. On the other hand

¹⁵ Esteves Pereira's edition substituted quasi-modern Portuguese forms for the old ones (as introducing *deolho* in place of archaic *deilho*, 'I gave it to him'). He introduced sequences with no textual support, as *e el rei* where Fernandes' edition had *achey*, an honorific title then in use in the Far East. Pereira's readings may be compared with the ones in the edition by D. Hook & P. Newman (1983), generally very different.

the many writings Fernandes has left are evidences of his attention to the textual models for his printings, as his prologues to *Auto dos Apostolos*¹⁶ and to *Marco Paulo*¹⁷ demonstrate.

I tried to show that the three works focused in this paper, while related, are part in different cultural settings, and must not be read as poor versions of an ancient original. The translations by Luiz de Raz and by Thomas Paynell may sound awkward to a modern reader, but a modern reader was not part in the intended audience those scholars had in mind. Missing excerpts are not necessarily a product of a forgetful printer or translator. In the case of medical writings, they may evidence different ways of carrying out medical treatments.

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¹⁶ Fernandes' prologue to his edition of *Os Autos dos Apóstolos*, by Bernardo de Brihuega: “o original per que auia de empremir os outros liuros nom tinha prologo, pera saber quem fora ho autor que o fizera [...] Pello qual reuolui todos meus liuros ata que achei hui liuro intitulado genesi alfonsij”.

¹⁷ Fernandes' prologue to his edition of *Ho liuro de Marco paulo. Ho liuro de Nicolau veneto. O trallado da carta de hui genoues das dittas terras*, fo. A3: “Outrosy os latinos em sua cosmografia poe as ditas prouincias & terras taes nomens. que ho simprez & nom letrado os nom pode entender assi como o vosso regno de Portugal he chamado pello latim Lusitania & a cidade de Seuilla Hyspalis. & a ilha de Ingraterra Albion. E assi mesmo corrompem os taes vocabulos pella diuersidade das linguas que desuairadamente pronunçiam os ditos vocabulos. & depois as tralladações delles de hia lingua em outra. & sobre todo taaes vocabulos se corrompem dos ignorantes escriuães. que com pouca diligencia & muy incorrecta os escreuem. & assy se hui mal escreue sobreueem o outro & escreue muyto peyor. polla qual ficam taes vocabulos corruptos. ou per ventura fora de seu verdadeiro principio E esto depois causa grande duuida em os autores quando nom concordam em os taaes vocabulos. pello qual suplico humilmente & rogo a todos aquelles que vaam pera aquellas terras. das quaes ho presente liuro faz mençam. que taes vocabulos queiram emendar como oje se chamam & perdoem”.