CHAPTER THIRTEEN

‘LUSITANI PERIT’:
PORTUGUESE MEDICAL AUTHORS, NATIONAL IDENTITY
AND BIBLIOGRAPHY IN THE LATE RENAISSANCE

In a recent article on Portuguese scholarship in Oxford, Thomas Earle set out to investigate the role of Portuguese scholarship in forming minds in early modern Europe. He acknowledged that books published in Portugal itself had very little impact abroad; authors relied on republication by members of the book trade who consecrated part of their activities to the dissemination of such books in different market zones. These were in the main speculative publishers operating out of one of the great centres of printing (Antwerp, Basle, Paris, Lyon, Frankfurt, Venice). There were also Portuguese writers of Latin works (principally in the higher faculties of theology, law and medicine) who found a way of being published directly outside their native country. Hieronymus Osorius (Jerónimo Osório)¹ is a theologian who offers a case in point of both these forms of diffusion, his De gloria, for example, being speculatively reprinted in Florence by Laurentius Torrentinus and Basle by Petrus Perna after being published by Ludovicus Rodericus in Lisbon in 1542.²

Osorius is not described as ‘Lusitanus’ on the titlepages of all of his works, although he may have been sufficiently eminent to have been recognized as Portuguese without the addition of the denominator. But another figure, Zacutus (Zacuto), whose name is always attached to ‘Lusitanus’ clearly recognized Portuguese scholars (most of them

¹ I have referred to Portuguese authors in their Latin form, adding the vernacular form to their first mention only. I wish here to express my gratitude to Joanna Weinberg, who read a draft and made very helpful suggestions.

physicians) as a coherent group whom he lists separately as ‘Lusitani periti’, distinguishing them from ‘juniores elegantes et docti’ (a very nearly complete list of prominent early modern medical writers, including some Spaniards); these lists appear in the preliminaries to Zacutus Lusitanus’s complete works which appeared posthumously in 1644. It is worthy of note that although his great-grandfather was born in Salamanca, and he himself was driven into exile, Zacutus still called himself ‘Lusitanus’. What did he mean by this? And what was the function of denominators indicating national or civic affiliation on titlepages? Why were they put there by publishers and what did the readers of their books make of them? To answer these questions, I shall first look at the history of their use in learned circles in Europe from the Middle Ages onwards; then ask what was the relationship between ethnicity (or place of birth) and character, before turning to the denominator ‘Lusitanus’ and its use by émigrés and bibliographers in the rather special case of medicine. This will lead me to give a brief account of the character of Portuguese (or rather Iberian) medicine as evinced by scholarly publications available in Europe. I shall finally turn to Zacutus’s select list of ‘Lusitani periti’, and trace their presence in the Book Fairs, in medical bibliographies, and in libraries. This will allow me, I hope, to say something from a European and bibliographical perspective about the specific character of Portuguese medical writing in the late Renaissance as an example of a tradition incorporating a national identity.

The Geographical Denominator in Learned Discourse and on Title Pages

From the very beginning of the age of print, the birthplace of the printer or publisher (as opposed to author) was often given either in the incipit or the colophon, sometimes by nationality, sometimes by town. Not surprisingly in view of the birthplace of printing itself, this was most often Germany or a German town. The practice of producing title pages themselves (a very rare feature of manuscript production) developed slowly over the first half-century of the age of printing; it is said by Margaret Smith in her monograph on the subject to be a consequence

---