Among the wonders and evils of the exotic places depicted in the *Voyage of Pyrard de Laval to the East Indies* (1601–1611), the Royal Hospital of Goa stands in magnificence and grandeur. After a long journey through the world, the French traveller François Pyrard arrived in Goa in 1608 feeling ill. Together with some of his shipmates, he was taken to the Royal Hospital. Its grandeur mesmerized them: “We could hardly believe that this was a hospital, when seeing it from the outside, as it looked like a grand palace, except for the inscription *Hospital do Rey Nosso Senhor.*”2

The high quantity and “quality” of the people (*gens de qualité*) who looked for the hospital services impressed Pyrard, for many of them had arrived in palanquins, a means of transportation typically used by the rich and influential.

Pyrard’s travel memories contain many laudatory remarks about the layout and functions of the hospital. The stone stairwell was high and quite magnificent (*fort magnifique*), leading to an upper floor where, in normal times, the patients were lodged. There were also times when demand was exceptional, such as when the caravels arrived filled with hundreds of people suffering from all kinds of ailments picked up at sea and on land, from scurvy to assorted fevers and stomach disorders. On

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those occasions, the hospital reportedly lodged up to 3,000 at once.\textsuperscript{3} When François Pyrard was there, he estimated that the occupation was of 1,500 patients.\textsuperscript{4}

Those numbers are extraordinary when compared to today’s hospitals occupancy, rarely over a thousand beds, and to the main hospital of Lisbon at that time (Todos os Santos), which had capacity for a few hundred—or, in the most generous speculations, up to a thousand.\textsuperscript{5} We should also note that only about 1,500 Portuguese and their descendants lived then in the city of Goa, out of a total of 75,000 people (about 20,000 Hindus and 50,000 local Christians).\textsuperscript{6} Clearly, the hospital served more than the local population, and as we shall see, not the local population.

The hospital furniture and decorations were described in detail by Pyrard. The \textit{esquifes} (or \textit{catres}, hospital beds/stretchers) were finished in red lacquer or in golden or multi-colour polish. Beds were made with fresh mats and linen on the arrival of new patients. The bedding, which was changed every three days, consisted of cotton sheets, cotton-filled pillows, mats and covers in cotton and in silk that were decorated with assorted figures and colors. Everything was a true wonder.

The services provided there were also depicted as remarkable: on arrival a barber shaved the patients thoroughly; a servant washed them with warm water, and gave them appropriate clothing and room equipment, including a clay jar, a chamber pot, and a handkerchief. When leaving, they would get a change of clothes suitable for life outside. The patients’ needs were thoroughly accommodated by the staff, among whom the upper echelons were Portuguese and the subordinates were “Brahmins or Christian Goa Canarins.”\textsuperscript{7}

\textsuperscript{5} Although it is hard to estimate the number of beds, we know that in 1672 there were fourteen wards in the All Saints Hospital of Lisbon. Four of them were for people with fevers (three for men and one for women) and then a pair of each (male/female) for the wounded, for the bed-ridden, the ill, the alienated, the convalescent, Santos 1925, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{6} Pearson 2001, p. 404.
\textsuperscript{7} Pyrard 1998, Vol. 2, pp. 524–525. The term “Canarins” was frequently used by Europeans to refer to the locals in a derogatory manner. Sometimes it was used specifically for local Christians, other times for the Hindus, also referred as “Gentios”, which corresponds to “Heathen” or, to keep the tone, “Gentile”. Goa scholars have argued that the term “Canarim” should not be taken as derogatory, as it meant, literally, “inhabitant of Kanara” (Kanada, or Karnata), the region south of the Konkan (Goa) and north of the Malabar; it had been mistakenly used by the Europeans to refer also to the peoples of Goa—who, in turn, would better see themselves as “Konkan”, a regional and linguistic distinction that is used today as an identity reference for Goa, see Dalgado 1919, vol. I, pp. 197–198.