Medical Publishing in Portugal in the First Half of the Seventeenth Century: A Good Business?

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The title of this chapter prompts a series of questions. Was there a distinctive medical book market, and if so what did it look like within the broader world of the book? Was it Portuguese, or might we better think in Iberian or even European terms? Was medical publishing a profitable activity? Let us attempt to address these issues, and explore the connections between producers and consumers (buyers, readers, censors) and how these relationships evolved over the course of the first half of the seventeenth century.

The Portuguese Medical Book Market (1600–1650): A Question of Statistics

There was a very significant increase in overall book production over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹ A simple glance at the figures for Portugal (Fig. 12.1) indicates a rise in production from 1,537 items between 1500 and 1599 to 3,818 for the first half of the seventeenth century.²

Nonetheless, there was no continuous or lineal evolution of the market. After an initial and clear increase, there was near stagnation. The highest and lowest levels of production can be observed within a very short period: 1638 saw the publication of 35 items, while 248 items were published just three years later (Fig. 12.2 and Fig. 12.3).

2 Antonio J. Anselmo, Bibliografia das obras impressas em Portugal no século XVI (Lisboa: Biblioteca Nacional, 1926) lists 1312 items, while Iberian Books has recorded some 1,537. However, Iberian Books records has only one sixteenth-century medical book not contained in Anselmo. See also Alexander S. Wilkinson, ‘Exploring the Print World of Early Modern Iberia’, Bulletin of Spanish Studies, lxxxix, 4 (2012), pp. 491–506. For seventeenth-century numbers, see Iberian Books.
In terms of the medical book market, 39 works were published by twenty-two authors in the first half of the seventeenth century, or an average of one item every two years.\(^3\) The peak occurred during the 1640s. In general terms,

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\(^3\) For a complete list, see Hervé Baudry, *Bibliografia Médica Lusa (Seventeenth-Century Portuguese Medical Book Bibliography)*, Nr. 1–37 (forthcoming). The 2 one-sheet cheap prints by Alexandrino (s.l., 1618) have not been taken into account. The total number of medical items for the sixteenth century (1556–1600) is 16 (of which 3 are reprints).