

The *Flora Cochinchinensis* of João de Loureiro still breaking new ground in science

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Abstract

This project materializes from the historical and scientific interest which the *opus* of João de Loureiro continues to arouse and that requires philologists to work on his *Flora Cochinchinensis*. The author's studies are meaningful to Botany, Pharmacy and Medicine, but also for Literary Studies or Cultural Studies, particularly with regard to the impact of the Portuguese Science in the European context or to the East-West relationship mediated by the Jesuits. The translation of the *Flora Cochinchinensis*, by guaranteeing full access to the work of one of the most promissory European scientists of the eighteenth century, ultimately, provides an opportunity for scientific progress.

The four decades the Portuguese Father João de Loureiro lived in the Levant studying the oriental flora and its therapeutic applications resulted in a noteworthy scientific enhancement, mainly, botanical and pharmacognostical.

Moved by his acknowledged intellectual curiosity and the difficulties involved in accessing European pharmacy, this Jesuit missionary devoted himself to botanical research, supported by the studies of Dioscorides and Linnaeus. As an effect of the interest that aroused the arrival in Sweden and England of *herbaria* containing previously unrecorded species collected by Loureiro, he was, first, invited to go to London by Joseph Banks and made a member of the Royal Society and, a few years later, would also join in the Lisbon Academy of Sciences.

Ended his eastern periplexus, the Jesuit would return to Lisbon to see his major work — the *Flora Cochinchinensis* — published in 1790 at the expense of the Portuguese Academy. This *Flora* included 185 new *genera* and nearly 1300 species from Cochinchina, Philippines, Sumatra, Canton or Mozambique, and, recognized its superior merit, three years later in Berlin, at the initiative of Karl Ludwig Willdenow, a new edition of this *opus* would be given to the press.

Confirming the importance of Loureiro's work are the subsequent references in important studies of Botany, especially by Hance (1868) and Merrill (1935). And, despite the obstacle that would constitute its writing in Latin, the *Flora Cochinchinensis* has overcome the challenge of oblivion. Indeed, researches such as those of Hill and Stanberg (2009) or Vaz (2010), continue to support themselves in the studies of the Portuguese missionary. Moreover, the labor of João de Loureiro has also provided a source for the History of Science and of Literature and Culture, remaining a milestone, with regard to the role of the Jesuits in scientific exchange between Europe and the East, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, as suggested, citing Loureiro, Rinaldi (2006), or Bleichmar et alii (2009).

The manifest importance of the *Flora Cochinchinensis* and, coupled with it, the recurring request for the succour of Latin scholars investigators confess denote the relevance of its full translation. In fact, the Latin, formerly the *lingua franca* among the men of science, is no longer a domain of today's communities of botanists, pharmacists and physicians, to whom the work continues to interest. Thus, scientific advance obliges to the intervention of the translator on a text that does not know, despite its many reprints, an issue in another than its primeval language.

The present translation endeavor precisely intends to address this last pressing need. Proposing a Portuguese edition of the *Flora Cochinchinensis* and an incremental multilingual web portal — in Portuguese, English, Latin, and Pinyin — covering the more significant taxonomic and therapeutic information, this project will enable new studies from the work of Loureiro and will, eventually, contribute to acquaint the classicists about the immense undone work in scientific translation of late Latin expression *opera*.

Conclusion

This work, in short, targets to ensure a timely response to the challenges of an interdisciplinary integrated scientific posture. Therefore, the results obtained will, certainly, allow promising strides not only in the knowledge of the Portuguese scientific literary production of Latin expression, but also in the History of Science and in the current scientific inquiry in the areas of plant taxonomy and medicinal properties and therapeutic uses of certain species, once specialists will, finally, be given a global insight of the *Flora Cochinchinensis* of João de Loureiro.

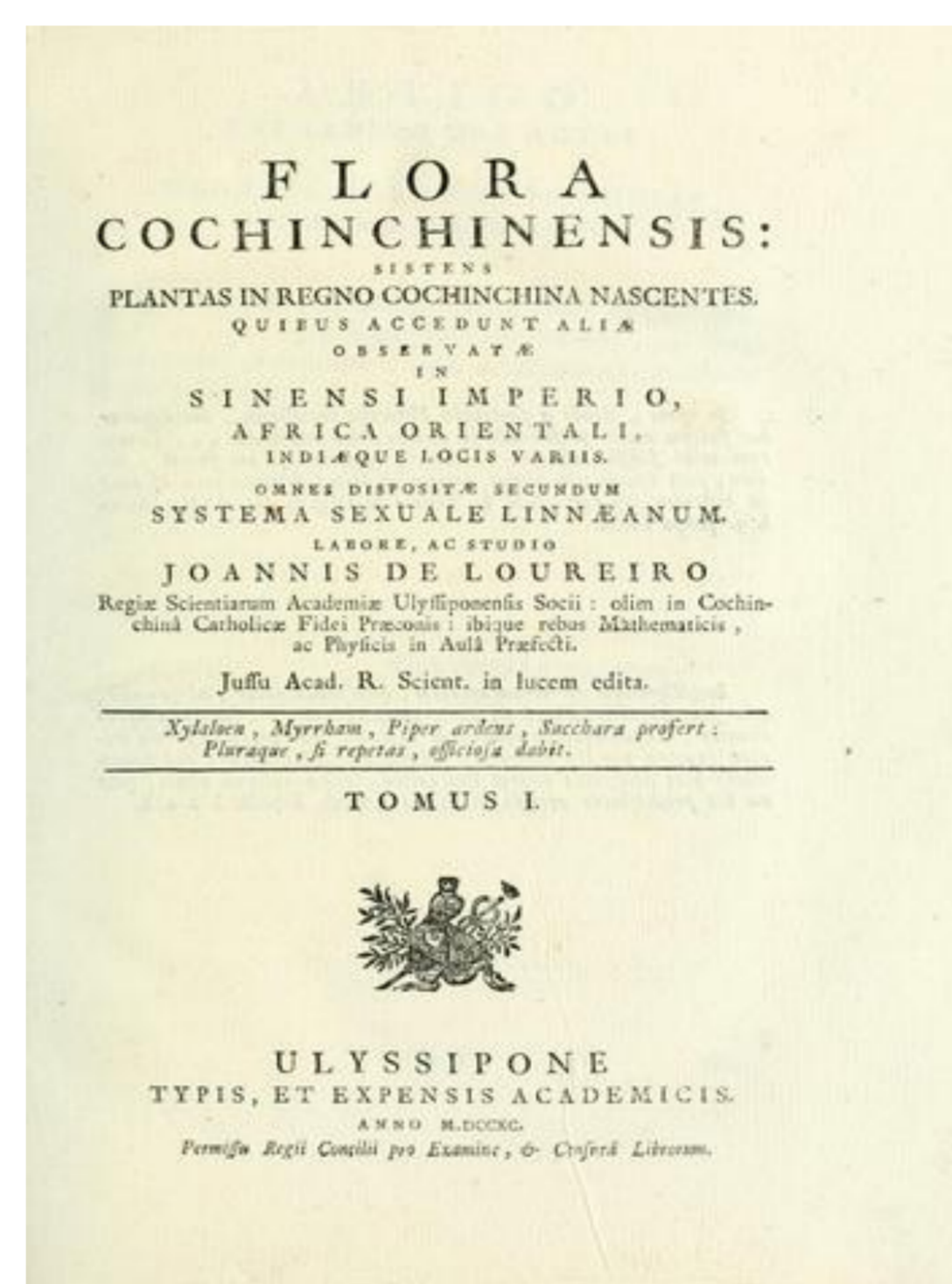


Fig 1. Cover of the first edition of the *Flora Cochinchinensis* by João de Loureiro.



Fig 2. Original plant specimen of *Argyreia acuta* Lour. collected by João de Loureiro (Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle — Paris).



Fig 3. Illustration by L. Snelling of *Osmanthus fragrans* Lour. formally described by João de Loureiro (Kew Royal Botanical Gardens — London).



Fig 4. Original plant specimen of *Aerides odorata* Lour. collected by João de Loureiro (Kew Royal Botanical Gardens — London).

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