

# “Healing Knowledge in the Portuguese Colonial World: Medical Descriptions as Works of Ethnography, Botany and Literature”

A Lecture by  
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Historians of medicine have largely undervalued, or failed to appreciate entirely, the importance of Portuguese global exploration and colonial settlement, especially relating to botanical prospecting, the treatment of tropical diseases, and the circulation of non-European indigenous medical methods. The Portuguese learned most of what they knew about tropical medicine from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries by interacting with indigenous healers in territories they colonized in Africa, India, China, Malaysia, and Brazil. Portuguese colonial agents then disseminated these techniques and medicinal substances throughout their colonial holdings, eventually transferring information about native medicinal plants and remedies back to Europe. Several of the descriptive medical guides written in the Portuguese colonies in Asia and South America during the 16th-18th centuries can be seen simultaneously as works of ethnography, botany, and literature. Beyond expanding our understanding of how medical knowledge evolved during the colonial period, examining such works can also inform modern ethical debates about patents and cultural proprietary knowledge.

Questions? Contact Erin Lamb, Ph.D., associate professor of biomedical humanities and director of the Center at [lambeg@hiram.edu](mailto:lambeg@hiram.edu) or 330.569.6139.



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**4:15 p.m.**

**Alumni Heritage Room**

