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## AGOA DE INGLATERRA

by Paulo Lowndes Marques

The importance of the use of quinine to combat malaria over the centuries cannot be overestimated. Without this product of the bark of the Chinchona tree, large areas of the globe would have been inhabitable, certainly to newcomers. This was also true of riverside areas of Portugal specially in the south of the country. The valley of the river Sado was particularly afflicted and under the Marquis of Pombal natives from Africa were imported and settled in this rice growing area (specially towards the mouth of the river, in the Comporta region) in the hope they would resist better to the "sezões" as malaria is or was popularly known in Portugal. The Guadiana was also an afflicted area. All this within living memory.



*Dr. Jacob de Castro Sarmiento*

The purpose of this article is to refer to a very successful medicine based on quinine which was imported or at least discovered by a Jewish Portuguese medical doctor living in England. This "Agoa de Inglaterra" was so popular and profitable that several forgeries were made and sold. The protection of "the real thing" was the object of petitions to the King and various pamphlets at the time.

The discoverer of this medicine was a Dr. Jacob de Castro Sarmiento. He was born in Bragança in 1691 and died in London in 1762. He was a son of a poor Jewish family recently converted to Catholicism. He studied firstly in Mértola where he saw first hand the ravages of malaria, then went to the Jesuit University of Evora where he read Aristotelian Philosophy. He became a Master of Arts in 1710. Castro Sarmiento then went to Coimbra University where he completed his studies in medicine in 1717.

After a short stay in Beja he went to London in 1720 or 1721. Here he studied what was described as experimental philosophy such as chemistry, anatomy, mechanics, etc. There are arguments on why he left Portugal and perhaps the main reason was that he wished to practice his Jewish religion freely. There was and, I think, still is, a Portuguese synagogue where he was welcomed by other Portuguese Jews in London, such as Isaac Sequeira Samuda and the rabbi David Neto. Castro Sarmiento became an assistant doctor of the Beth Holim Hospital and to the Portuguese Embassy. The Portuguese diplomatic envoy at the time was Sebastião Carvalho e Melo who later became the all powerful Marquis of Pombal.

He became a member of the Royal College of Physicians and in 1730 was elected to the Royal Society.

In 1736 he became part of the faculty of the University of Aberdeen and in 1739 obtained a Doctorate in Medicine. He was the first Jew to obtain a doctorate in medicine in an United Kingdom university. One of his sponsors was Sir Hans Sloane, President of the Royal Society.

His research work was notable and fifty years before Jenner, he introduced in England a vaccine against smallpox. Castro Sarmiento was also a great defender of Bacon's and did much to publicise Newton's theories. Pombal was in touch with him on reforms he wished to introduce in the University of Coimbra and King D. José himself consulted him on his royal ailments.

He studied the causes and effects of malaria and became famous for the preparation and distribution of his "*Agoa de Inglaterra*" which, as stated, was much copied and the object of considerable bibliography.

Curiously, in 1756, he became involved in a considerable scandal in his synagogue being accused of having denounced some "new Christians" (the official designation of converted Jews) to the Inquisition in Beja. He was tried by his synagogue peers and acquitted. Those sitting in judgement were Mosseh de Medina, Ishac Cohen Peixoto, Joseph de Castro, Ishac 'Vas Martins, Ishac Nunes Fernandes, Joseph Telles da Costa, Ishac da Costa Alvarenga, Abraham Dias Fernandes and Mosseh Lopes Dias. His first wife Sara died in 1756 and is buried in the Portuguese Jewish cemetery at Miles End. Strangely, two years later, he married a Christian and parted from the Jewish community stating his position in a letter published in the Annual Register.

He wrote many books and pamphlets in Portuguese, Latin, Spanish and English on religious, scientific and medical subjects. On our subject he wrote: "*Do uso e abuso das minhas Águas de Inglaterra ou directório e instrução para se saber seguramente quando se deve ou não usar delas, assim nas enfermidades agudas, como em algumas crónicas, e em casos propriamente de Cirugia.*" London 1756.



Curiously the name of "*Agoa de Inglaterra*" for an anti-malaria medicine was not used first by Castro Sarmiento. He really made one which actually produced results. Before him Fernando or Moisés Mendes in 1681 began to produce this "*Agoa*" and is reputed to have secretly told the formula to the King, D. Pedro II (brother of Catherine of Braganza), who swore him to secrecy! But its appearance did not last either because of its insuccess or because of the death of Fernando Mendes. He incidentally also worked in London.

Castro Mendes did his best to protect his invention as by a special seal placed on his bottles. In his will, witnessed by the Countess of Midlerex, the member of parliament Edward Wortley Montague and John Pridiruing, Castro Sarmento left the manufacture (today we would say the patent) of his "Agoa" to this widow and his son Henrique de Castro Sarmento, both resident in London.

As stated there were many forgeries. The first ones by Castro Sarmento's own nephew, Captain André Lopes de Castro who had been apprenticed with his uncle but was sent back to Portugal in disgrace given his lack of application to his studies in medicine! He claimed his uncle had told him the formula and managed to register his own ownership which was recognised by the Prince Regent then in Brazil in 1815.



There were several others such as António José de Sousa Pinto who owned a pharmacy in Lisbon in 1809 and one José Cardoso Rodrigues Crespo, also a pharmacist who lived in 1788 in the Rossio and Ana Maria de Brito. The respective police records have several mentions of these forgeries as it was a protected formula. Curiously a work on the regional distribution of this "Agoa de Inglaterra" made in 1810 gives a good idea of how geographically malaria was spread over Portugal.

The use of this medicine went on well into the XIX century.

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Bibliography: Grande Enciclopedia Portuguesa e Brasileira.  
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