In my work I have pointed out the relationship between certain forms of thought and knowledge, on the one hand, and processes of creolisation in the Indian Ocean, on the other, especially through the agency of comparatively marginal figures who were nonetheless inserted in various trade and imperial networks (Rosa 2015: Introduction). By ‘creolisation’ here I mean changing configurations of ideas and practices in people’s experiences and imaginaries, as well as in landscapes (understood as bringing together people, plants, animals, and buildings, as well as shaping gardens and orchards), arising from displacements and interactions across ocean routes or large swathes of territory (Rangan et al. 2015: 143). Vergès (2010: 146) also indicates that oceanic creolisation processes depend on specific sites that are nonetheless inserted in histories of migration and larger connected and global histories. It is apposite to bring up here that the processes which interest me moreover often unfold within the historical creation of imperial oecumenes that have allowed for the expansion of trade and the exchange of ideas over vast territories – and also for the concomitant unfolding of processes of creolisation. I have in this way worked on historical figures and texts arising at nodal points in-between various early modern and modern imperial oecumenes, particularly those involving Indian Ocean port cities. My point is that those traditional emporia have been important centers not only in what concerns trade, but also in the fashioning of transoceanic and transcontinental creolised cultural formations. My current project is concerned with how various marginal figures, first and foremost Orta himself, were connected to and helped shape a Middle Eurasian-wide Renaissance largely based on empires.

This project therefore aims at reading the life and work of Garcia da Orta from a perspective including aspects of both comparative and connected histories in Middle Eurasia and the Indian Ocean. It also intends to discuss the plants and drugs mentioned in Orta’s famous work (Orta 1913 [1563]). It continues my previous work (especially chapter 6 in The Portuguese in the Creole Indian Ocean. Essays in Historical Cosmopolitanism), and, more recently, research work carried out under the auspices of the Nantes Institute for Advanced Study on African and Indian Ocean Islamic networks. My aim here is to concentrate on exploring the links between Orta and his work, on the one hand, and wider networks of knowledge and religion as well as plant diffusion, on the other, and, furthermore, see how...

1 Middle Eurasia comprises the regions stretching from the Indian subcontinent to the Mediterranean.
these may insert themselves into or help shape larger Indian Ocean and Middle Eurasian cultural formations.

Doing a ‘heretical’ reading of Orta’s text (following in the footsteps of Jeffrey Kripal’s innovative work) involves therefore navigating around the edges of the inquisitorial framework no doubt hovering above his text just as over his life. Three paths have proposed themselves in this case: 1) a mapping out of both land-based and oceanic networks of mystical and philosophical exchange, especially as these might be related to Orta’s life and work, profiting from indications in his own text; 2) inquiring into the role of plants and drugs in Renaissance European, but also Indic and Islamicate, science, magic, and mysticism (the three domains were not necessarily clearly divided at the time); 3) and last but not least, looking into the actual, variegated use of at least some plants in various Indian Ocean and Middle Eurasian locations.