

# Quinine's Predecessor: Francesco Torti and the Early History of Cinchona (The Henry E. Sigerist Series in the History of Medicine)

Professor Saul Jarcho



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The history of cinchona has traditionally begun with the romantic - and now discredited - story of Francisca Henriquez Ribera, the Countess of Chinchon. According to legend, the Countess became seriously ill during an outbreak of fever in Lima around 1623. Her husband, the Viceroy, learning of a medicinal tree bark used by the local Indians, ordered the bark tested and administered to his wife. Following her prompt recovery, the countess championed the use of bark among the general populace, and thousands of lives were saved. The drug became known as "pulvis Comitissae", the powder of the Countess, and later - misspelled by Linnaeus - as "cinchona". In "Quinine's Predecessor", Saul Jarcho unravels a tangle of myth, hearsay and fact to establish the definitive history of cinchona bark - the still-important source of modern quinine. Jarcho explains the discovery of the healing property of the substance, also known as the Peruvian bark or Jesuits' bark, and traces the routes by which it was transmitted from South America to Spain and other countries. He recounts the controversy and resistance surrounding its acceptance by medical practitioners. And he offers the most complete account to date of the important work of Francesco Torti, who used the bark successfully in treating cerebral and other especially dangerous malarial infections.

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