Prologue to the Reader

It is an accepted view, deriving from the divine Plato, that the law of nature imposes the obligation on us that we are not born solely for ourselves but also for others. Recollecting this debt (to others), I resolved on the composition of this treatise, whose title is A description of Ethiopia Minor and the Province of Serra Leca. I have divided it into two parts. In both parts there is accurate information derived from various friends who are as experienced and knowledgeable in relation to the subject as they are truthful. Those in this region whom we have involved having sounder information (?), their kindness, which has been fortunately great, has served to bury the disrepute of those Letters sent by the padres, in keeping with the ancient custom of the Church, from the most remote parts of the globe. For one letter, added at the end of the book entitled "Relação anual das cousas de Jão", etc., a letter which throughout tends to be fictitious in respect of the holy religion of the Jesuits, has been sowing disrepute regarding regard our enterprise and our organisation. On this subject the religious who came to this Ethiopia, as they had not supplied the information, had at the time the book came into their hands, no light other than that given in the false Relaçao. They could not be expected to be more critical since the topics in question involved far-away lands. The accuracy (of such writings) depends less on the good faith of those who compile them than on the truthfulness which ought to be maintained by those who provide information on such exotic matters. Accuracy, or lack of it, is the fons et origo from which course and flow, either respect for a work, or contempt for it.

Should the present work produce an excess of unfavourable judgements which censure it as of little worth, this will be to raise it in estimation (?); and all discredit will in fact redound in greater credit (?).

Manuel Alvares.