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A horse-cloth for Uganda, or how an account by a transhumant veterinary connects histories, animal diseases and continents

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ABSTRACT

The picture of a 'pony in pajamas' is used to construct the backstory of a deadly animal disease in three parts. First, by focusing on the figure of the 'author' of the cloth depicted in the picture, Scottish veterinarian Robert John Stordy, one can examine the repercussions of transhumant biographical itineraries. Second, a focus on regional epizootics helps alter scales defining the local versus the global. Third, the global circulation of mules and the medicines used to cure them illustrate displacement of objects and knowledge that shaped the understanding of sickness and its remedies. Thus, the remedies and horse-clothes used in Uganda not only speak of things and beings that linked distant geographies and contexts, they also mark the multiple hubs where these connections did occur, propelled in part by commercial interests, biographical itineraries and, of course, randomness.

KEYWORDS

Robert John Stordy; veterinary science; trypanosiomasis; animal management

"A HORSE CLOTH FOR UGANDA. A special pattern of clothing, designed by Mr. W. J. (sic) Stordy, veterinary officer, Uganda Transports, is to be worn by riding ponies night and day while passing through the 'fly-district' on the road from Mombasa to Uganda. It consists of a head-piece only, and the eyes and nostrils of the animal are protected by mosquito nets. The value of the clothing is expected to be of great service in the transport work" (Figure. 1).[1]

Introduction: a pony in pajamas; East Africa–London (1899)

No image accompanied this note in the periodical, *Veterinary Journal*. Rather, a photograph was published in January 1899 in the London monthly, *The Veterinarian*. Taken by a travel companion of Robert John Stordy (1873–1943), a Scot working in East Africa, it documented one of the measures by which a convoy of 25 carts, 5 ponies, 108 mules, 2 lieutenants and a medical officer crossed the tsetse belt with the loss of only 1 mule and 2 sick officials.

In the following pages, I use this photograph to reflect on the practice of history of science when research is confined to a region, a discipline or a historical period. The picture of a pony in pajamas can certainly lead us to examine pathology and veterinary science in colonial Africa at the turn of the nineteenth century, but I want to suggest that

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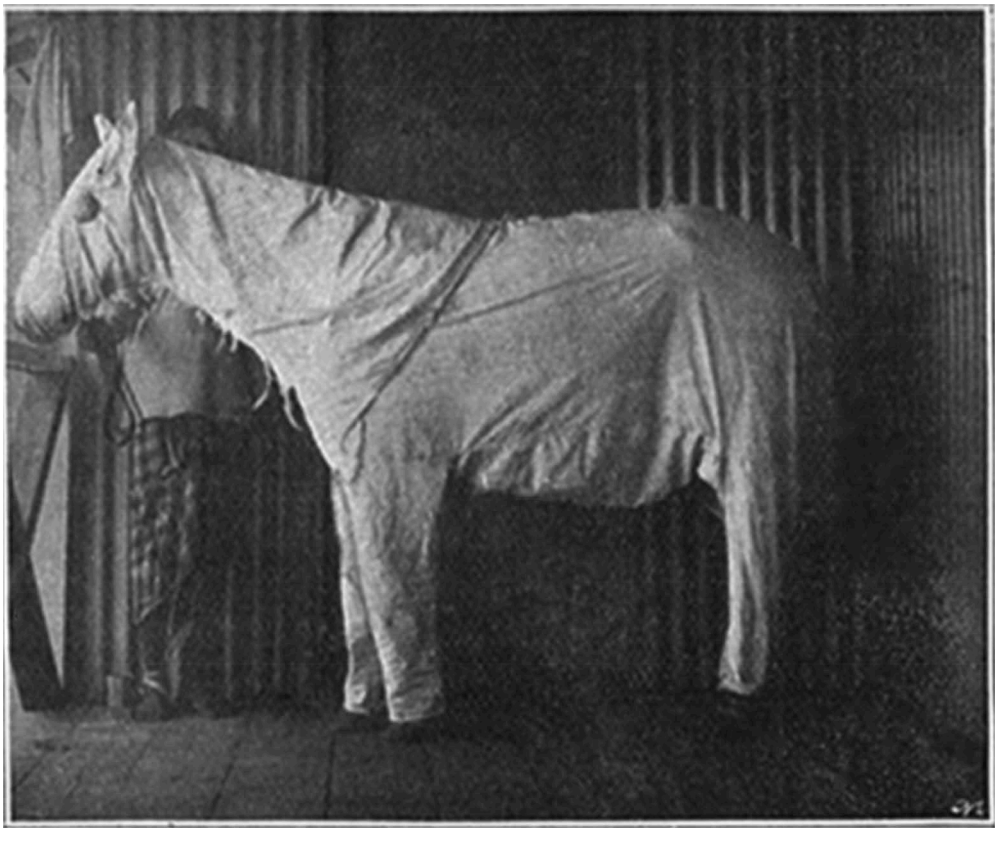

Figure 1. A Pony in pajamas, a pattern of clothing by Robert Stordy (Source: Stordy, Robert. "The Uganda transport – through the tsetse fly belt of British East Africa," *The Veterinarian* (1899)).

it may also unravel a complex web of itineraries and transfers in diverse continents.[2] My purpose is to propose a kaleidoscopic representation of the recent past. Each of the three parts of the paper focuses on one of many elements that could be used separately to tell history. The first part, referring to an individual, raises the relevance of biographical itineraries, specifically whether new histories of science can connect what local and national historiographies have cut asunder. The second part, referring to regional and global epizootics, helps rewire the local and the universal in High Modernity. Finally, the third part, on the export of draft animals and the medicines used to cure them, reframes a discussion of illness and remedies. Going beyond a history of a disease, a discipline or a certain region, the paper reflects upon threads across time and space, and, secondly, upon the possible roads one may take to bypass Euro-America and the limitations of national histories in their various forms.[3]

A veterinarian on the move: from Europe to South America and back (with a long layover in East Africa), 1898–1943

In 1898, Robert Stordy, educated in Edinburgh and London, took up his first appointment in British East Africa as Veterinary Officer to Uganda Transport Service, a position he held until

1900, when he was promoted to Chief Veterinary Officer.[4] His arrival to Africa overlapped with the first years of what was going to be one of the most lethal sleeping sickness outbreaks. Known as the Uganda epidemic, between the close of 1900 and the end of 1905, it killed over a quarter of a million people, depopulating entire regions of the British Protectorate.[5] The 1890s also witnessed the expansion of two epizootics: rinderpest or cattle plague and *nagada*, which devastated livestock from fever, anemia and emaciation. This was the context of Stordy's horse-cloth invention, a palliative to the illnesses affecting mount and draft animals, an isolating means to secure the connection between the hinterland and the port, the administration and military control of the two British Great Lakes colonial territories.

In the Great War, Stordy was transferred to the military department and became Director of East African Veterinary Services. Returning to England in 1917, he joined the Army Veterinary Corps and was posted to France. Late in his life, Stordy served in England as Chief Executive Officer of the National Air Raid Precautions Animals Committee from 1939–1941, responsible for the so-called WWII 'cat and dog massacre'.[6] Previously, between 1920 and 1931, Stordy had taken a position as veterinary advisor to the Government of Peru, working to bring sheep and lamas to the standards of the international commerce of wool, killing or unsexing the unfit.[7] While in Peru, Stordy was astonished with the 'absence of non-preventable disease in the regions of the Sierre (*sic*) and Cordillera' underlining that the Government, 'under its able and progressive President [Augusto Leguía], is adopting measures to prevent its introduction'.[8] Even when Scottish shepherds and stud animals were being taken to Peru, the free mobility of animals and plants across continents had by the 1920s become a state problem, epitomized in the massacre of poultry and pets in England in the decade to come.[9]

Stordy's biography is far from uncommon; such an itinerant life can be found in the bureaucrats of the Spanish Monarchy and in the lives of travelling quacks, whalers, muleteers, missionaries, navy surgeons and medical personnel circulating in the British and French empires.[10] This itinerant veterinarian – whose name is mentioned in the history of several apparently non-connected stories – leads us to pose the question of whether one can write histories of science that bypass America, Europe or Africa. Is it possible to write the history of, for instance, animal management isolating what was done in England from the experiences in Peru or Uganda? Stordy, in this vein, speaks of the need to understand Uganda for writing the history of the Andes in Peru.

Scales: local names, regional diseases, global parasites

When Stordy published his pony in pajamas, the causes of the East Africa epizootic had not yet been exactly determined. Observation on the microscope had directed attention to blood parasites: the genus *Trypanosoma*, first described in frogs in 1841 by the Hungarian David Gruby, was discovered in mammals 40 years later. Still in 1900, its variations remained dubious, and there were no reliable methods to protect animals and humans from sicknesses that travelled by unidentified vectors.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, the military in Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, Brussels and London had received similar reports about the death of the frontier mounts and draft animals from a mysterious disease known as *surra* in India, *nagada* in Africa and *mal de caderas* (hip illness) in the Americas. By 1880, the veterinary surgeon Griffith Evans observed in Punjab the presence of a protozoon flagellate in the blood of infected animals.

While 'not new in reality', still in the early 1880s this epizootic was considered 'quite new to science' and observed as a local or regional event.[11]

Around 1900, pathologists tended to believe that those regional diseases were caused by parasites transmitted by means of biting flies.[12] Isolation from the flies and extermination of the animal reservoirs of trypanosomes – including game – were the measures discussed in the veterinary offices but resisted by British big-game hunters, many of whom were governors and highly placed officials.[13] Debates over the disease's agents and reservoirs pointed not only to flies, wildlife and livestock, but also the paths of the army, colonial administrators, overseas traders and the animals they ate, harnessed or bred.

Worldwide, veterinarians and pathologists transfused flagellates from one species to another, infecting healthy animals to prove the nature of the sickness' transmission and origins. In 1902, when *surra* was diagnosed among the horses transferred from Asia into the American Philippines, the disease had acquired such a dimension that the new term trypanosomiasis was created to name any infection of any animal with parasites belonging to the flagellate family. It included about 50 vernacular names for diseases with similar symptoms affecting camels, ponies, dogs, bullocks, elephants and cats in Africa, South America and Asia.[14] Stordy's picture of the pony in pajamas was then reproduced in the *Emergency report on surra* (1902), the first global synthesis of this sickness, which mapped the connections and disconnections among people, species, languages, nations and empires that health officials needed to understand in order to fight the disease. The study of the regional names of the sickness speaks not only of this awareness but also of a framework for histories of science crossing national, linguistic and disciplinary borders.

Replacements and displacements in space and time: draft animals, pharmaceuticals and nineteenth-century hybrid concoctions

The reports on *mal de caderas* in tropical South America often mentioned that given that so many horses died, people in Mato Grosso were known to ride oxen, which became known as *bueyes caballos* (horse oxen) or *bueyes de cabalgadura* (riding oxen).[15] While in Brazil and Bolivia, oxen took on the role of horses, in East Africa, rinderpest – a disease today eradicated – transformed mules into replacements for bullocks. Thus, Stordy commented,

> Our duties consist in conveying the effects, equipment, and ration of troops serving in Uganda, from Nairobe to Kampala, a distance of roughly 400 miles. The transport was originally intended to be worked by bullocks as well as mules. The recent epidemic of rinderpest, however, annihilated our bovines.[16]

For their traction and transportation, the Uganda Transport worked with 102 mules that in March 1898 had arrived from Cyprus via the Suez Canal, territories under British control since the late 1870s. The mules of Cyprus were indeed much esteemed for both military and sporting purposes, reported to be the best of all that were obtained in the Mediterranean world.[17] Once Cyprus became a British colony in 1878, they were exported widely to Egypt, India, South Africa and other British colonies.[18]

That Cypriot mules were cheap and marketed as less prone to sickness, possibly the reason why Stordy did not dress them in their cotton pajamas – a word (literally leg-clothes) and a garment coming from India that became popular in England as lounge-wear for men from about 1870, remaining a luxury item until the beginning of the

twentieth century.[19] Pajamas were reserved only for ponies – probably the valuable Arab stallions imported to serve female donkeys (jennies) to breed hinnies.[20]

In this hierarchy, Cypriot mules were protected with remedies used against fever and infections, a concoction of chemicals and botanicals: balls composed of arsenic, quinine and gentian, smeared with solution of Jeyes's fluid, each of them a byproduct of interconnected stories, empires and traditions.[21] The fluid, for instance, was a disinfectant liquid patented in 1877 by the British chemical manufacturer John Jeyes, used – until today – by the British Royal Family's household, as well as in English hospitals to prevent the spread of infections.[22] On the other hand, gentian – a large root of bitter taste– has been employed since Ancient times. Found in the Alps, Pyrenean mountains and in several parts of France and Italy, in modern times it was exported from Germany. The extract of gentian was a digestive bitter, a febrifuge, a remedy for rabies, agues, malarial fevers and the plague. Early in the nineteenth century, gentian was an ingredient of a bitter infusion and a tincture; the only simple preparation in use was the extract.[23] A century later, gentian – as gentianic acid or gentisin – was an element of several remedies and tonics for humans sold in Germany and America: Gentianin, Siccosote syrup, Alokathol, Petro-creosote, Neurosedate, Hydra-Casca, Pro-Ferrin, Eutonicin and Antidiabeticum of Bauer. The latter also included African cola, British India cinchona and *condurango*, the new panacea arriving from South America, drawing upon the allure that Peruvian bark, quinine or cinchona has enjoyed as a wonder medicine since the late eighteenth century.[24] As the Uganda case shows, by 1900, quinine was cheap and employed as a febrifuge also for draft animals. By those years, indeed, it had been moved from one side of the world to the other by British entrepreneurs, who in the 1860s broke the Spanish monopoly on it and introduced domesticated Peruvian bark into India, Burma and Ceylon with commercial success.[25]

Thus, the remedies and horse-cloths used in Uganda not only speak of things and beings that linked distant geographies and contexts, they also mark the multiple hubs where these connections did occur, propelled in part by commercial interests, biographical itineraries and, of course, randomness. In this way, pony pajamas allow us to reflect upon the connections that transform seemingly local occurrences of plants, animals, diseases and remedies into globally shaped issues.

Epilogue

In 1885, the physicians that accompanied the military campaign against the Native population in the Argentine Chaco, witnessed how animals died from *mal de caderas*, reducing the mobility of the expedition. The commission was stuck in the middle of the forest, creating an opportunity to dissect and observe the tissues of dead animals. Argentine physicians – unaware of Evans' endeavors in Punjab – attributed the cause of this disease to an inner parasite. They mocked the veterinarians of the Brazilian Emperor, who remained unsure about the cause of the disease. This story could have led to national rivalries, to peripheries and disconnections, to a debate posed in terms of nations, linguistic traditions and empires, a story, which would settle down in the territories defined by national historiographies. Rather, the story followed German botanist Carl von Martius's advice, who in his 'How to Write the History of Brazil' (1840), emphasized that an understanding of the new South American nation's history should be connected to the history of the exploitation of tropical Asian trees. Namely, to

the circulation of goods on a global scale as well as to the impact that world trade had on the configuration of modern nations.[26] As a botanist, Martius sensed, South America was in some way related to Asia through the work of history. In this vein, the stories behind the pony pajamas affirm von Martius's sentiment and help demonstrate that, here, there and everywhere, local circumstances can be used to inform larger questions in history.

Notes

1. "Notes and News", Veterinary Journal, 46, 1898, 462.
2. On the globalization of veterinary science, Brown and Gilfoyle, *Healing the herds*.
3. Pyenson, "An End to National Science." Also the literature about "national" history and its limitations and on tropical medicine, which has received attention recently.
4. Jones and Boulton, *Stordy*; and Playne and Gale, *East Africa*, 49.
5. Lyons, *Colonial Disease*, 70.
6. Kean, *The Great Cat and Dog Massacre*.
7. Contreras and Cueto, "Caminos"; and Jacobsen, *Mirages*.
8. Stordy, "The breeding," 134; and also "Animal Husbandry."
9. See note 6.
10. Podgorny, "Charlatans."
11. Evans, "On a Horse Disease."
12. Chagas disease, also known as American tripanosomiasis, is transmitted by hemiptera (Triatominae). In 1902 the vectors had not yet been described. See Kropf and Sá, "The discovery of *Trypanosoma cruzi*"; and Zabala, "Historia de la enfermedad."
13. Headrick, "Sleeping Sickness."
14. Salmon and Stiles, *Emergency report*.
15. "La Comisión Científica al Chaco. De nuestro corresponsal. El mal de caderas. Descubrimiento de su causa por el Dr. Holmberg," La *Nación*, 17 April 1885, quoted in Podgorny, "Mentiras de Perogrullo," 17.
16. Stordy, "The Uganda Transport," 13.
17. Bates, *The Abyssinian difficulty*.
18. Savile, *Cyprus*, 82–3; Fisher, *Cyprus*; and Ohnefalsch-Richter, *Griechische Sitten*, 156.
19. Watson, *The textile manufactures*, 57, remarked that the pajama was worn in India in public "by both sexes, and although its use is as yet greatly confined to the Mahomedan part of the population, the younger members of the Hindu community in the larger towns are beginning to adopt it." Although not treated here, histories of cotton, the fabric of the pony's pajama, could be used to explore further connections.
20. Great Britain, *Report*; and Varnaba, "Fighting Asses," 498–9.
21. Stordy, "The Uganda Transport," 15.
22. Woodman, "On sanitary science," 173.
23. Hill, "Gentian"; *Materia Medica*, 575–7.
24. Hill, "Peruvian Bark;" *Materia Medica*, 671–3; and *Modern Materia Medica*; Crawford, *The Andean Wonder*; and Gänger, *A Singular Remedy*. On condurango as a panacea, I am indebted to Elisa Sevilla's still unpublished work.
25. Markham, *Peruvian Bark*, III-IV, *Travels*; and Philip, "Imperial Science."
26. Podgorny, "The elk," 47.

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