

Disentangling commodity histories:

pauame and sassafras in the early modern global world.

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Abstract:

This article takes a close look at the history of an American tree now known as sassafras but known to the Timucua of early modern Florida as pauame. Sassafras root was a major anti-febrile medicament in the early modern world. The history of that medicament has thus far primarily been written in terms of the Spanish Empire, which commodified it in post-contact Eurasia. Yet Native Americans, in particular the Timucua, as well as the French, the British, and the Russians, all played major roles in the history of sassafras. That history involves several objects derived from the tree sometimes called sassafras; knowledge about those objects; and Eurasian ideas about the Americas. This article focuses on the issues of entangled empires, and commodity and knowledge exchanges, to show that early modern commodities were not unitary objects, but rather shifting entanglements of objects, words and ideas.

Key Words: sassafras; Russia; Spain; early modern; globalisation

Author Biography: Clare Griffin is Assistant Professor for the History of Science and Technology at Nazarbayev University, Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan. Her research interests relate to practical expertise, global interactions, knowledge exchange, and translation in the early modern world, particularly relating to the Russian Empire. She is currently completing a book on the Russian Empire's involvement in the early modern global medical drugs' trade.

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This is an article about three entangled histories that spanned multiple entangled early modern empires. It is about a physical object, a tree known to early modern Native Americans under several names, to early modern Eurasians as *sassafras*, and to modern botanists as *sassafras albidum*. It is about that word *sassafras*, which initially eclipsed American names for that American plant in late sixteenth century Eurasia, and then was adapted and expanded in the later era of binomial botanical nomenclature to refer to multiple botanical objects distinct in time and space. And it is about the necessary partner of the early modern meaning of *sassafras* in Eurasia, ideas about the Americas from whence it came to Europe. When consumers from Seville to Constantinople to Moscow to Kazan came to learn of *sassafras*, they did so in the context of Eurasians taking the real-world location of the Americas and making it into the imagined geography of the New World. Those three stories – of an object, a word, and an imagined place – are neither identical nor inseparable. They are the entangled histories vital to what early modern *sassafras* was.

Let us begin with the object, or more properly objects, that made up a vital part of the history of *sassafras* in the early modern world. There is a tree that grew, and still grows, in the South-eastern parts of North America. The place now known as Cumberland Island, Georgia, was called *wissoe* by the Tacatacuru, naming it after the tree that grew there.¹ Powhatans called that tree *winauk*, a name they also used to refer to a region in which it grew in abundance.² And in what is now southern Georgia and Florida, the Timucua, who would play a major role in the creation of the Eurasian interest in *sassafras*, called that same tree *pauame*.³ Modern Native Americans also use

¹ Mary R. Bullard, *Cumberland island: a history*, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2005, p. 295.

² Holly Dugan, *The ephemeral history of perfume: Scent and sense in early modern England*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011, 94.

³ Dugan, *The ephemeral history of perfume*, 79.

sassafras: the Rappahannocks made sassafras tea to treat fevers in 17th-century Virginia; sassafras tea is today drunk for both recreational and medicinal reasons.⁴

Wissoupe, winauk, and pauame all refer to one tree, called by modern botanists *sassafras albidum*. Early modern European colonisers of the Americas, initially the French, and later the Spanish and British, encountered this growing tree in its American botanical context. The tree sassafras was disarticulated by early modern Native Americans, with the various resulting discrete objects used for different purposes. Its roots were burnt and mashed to make a plaster. Its sticky leaves were used as an adhesive for building materials. But it was its anti-febrile qualities that led to the most globally wide-spread use of that plant. In the 1560s, the Timucua of Florida showed some French colonists how to make anti-febrile sassafras tea, which could be prepared in several fashions, but with a certain preference for using the root of the tree. One of the major extant Timucuan texts is the 1613 *Confessionario*. The only listed author of that work is the Spaniard Francisco Pareja, but Alejandra Dubcovsky and George Aaron Broadwell have argued that it was in fact compiled in collaboration with two unacknowledged Timucua speakers.⁵ The *Confessionario* notes how important herbal medicaments were to Timucuan medicine, but does not specifically mention pauame or sassafras, and so what we know of Timucuan expertise on pauame comes from European sources.⁶

It was the appropriation of Timucuan expertise on pauame by French and Spanish colonisers that led to the Eurasian interest in sassafras. Early modern Eurasians came to value sassafras, most often its root, for its anti-febrile qualities, although in Eurasia it was made into numerous recipes, both teas and other preparations. Harold J. Cook calls sassafras one of the most important New World specifics in early modern Western Europe.⁷ Stephanie Gänger has

⁴ Virgil J. Vogel, *American Indian Medicine*, Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990, p. 175; My thanks to Adrienne Keene and several other kind tweeters for sharing their expertise on and experiences of sassafras use in present-day Native American communities.

⁵ Francisco Pareja, *Confessionario en lengua castellana y timuquana con unos consejos para animar al penitente*, Mexico, 1613; Alejandra Dubcovsky and George Aaron Broadwell, 'Writing Timucua: recovering and interrogating indigenous authorship,' *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 15, 3, 2017, pp. 409-441.

⁶ Tamara Shircliff Spike, 'Sucking, blood, and fire: Timucuan healing practices in Spanish Florida,' *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, 94, 2, 2015, pp. 143-168.

⁷ Harold J. Cook, 'Markets and cultures: Medical specifics and the reconfiguration of the body in early modern Europe', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 21, 2011, pp. 123-145, see 140.

established that sassafras was being sold in Turkish ports by the eighteenth century.⁸ As early as 1602, the Moscow Kremlin was buying sassafras, a practice that continued for at least the next century and a half. As well as being used within the Kremlin itself, sassafras was sometimes used for Russian military medicine, and in efforts to expand official medicine into an empire-wide system. This led to it being sent to the city of Kazan in 1679, formerly the centre of the Khanate of Kazan before being conquered by the Russian Empire in 1552, some 800 kilometres East of Moscow.⁹ Although Eurasians increasingly valued American commodities, they did not value Americans. The same period that saw increasing sassafras use across Eurasia also saw the genocide of the Timucua, largely through the virgin-soil epidemics the European presence in the Americas created, epidemics the Europeans rarely did anything to quell and on multiple occasions actively facilitated. By 1680, the Timucua had lost 90% of their population.¹⁰ In considering sassafras-as-object coming into early modern Eurasia, we are looking at Europeans appropriating and profiting from expertise on sassafras root as an anti-febrile, whilst simultaneously killing the Timucua and other Native American experts on American medicinal flora whose knowledge was the very basis of all subsequent ideas about and uses of sassafras.

When we talk about sassafras in early modern Eurasia, we are talking not only about sassafras-as-object, but also, and perhaps more often, about sassafras-as-word. The textual and semantic history of the word sassafras is complex. If you were able to go back to the 1480s, and ask the Timucua about sassafras, they would not recognise that word. If you were to move on to the 1570s and ask the Spanish botanist Nicolás Bautista Monardes about that same word, he would tell you of a tree with valuable medicinal properties, that only grew in the Americas.¹¹ The sassafras of Monardes, the earliest textual sassafras, was a word Europeans came to know as relating to that object

⁸ Stefanie Gänger, 'World trade in medicinal plants from Spanish America, 1717–1815', *Medical history*, 59, 1, 2015, pp. 44-62, see p. 53.

⁹ N. E. Mamonov, *Materialy dlia istorii meditsiny v Rossii* [Materials for the history of medicine in Russia], St Petersburg: M. M. Stasiulevich, 1881, vol. 4, pp. 1204, 07. Maria Unkovskaya, *Brief lives: A handbook of medical practitioners in Muscovy, 1620-1701*, London: The Wellcome Trust, 1999, p. 74.

¹⁰ Paul Kelton, *Epidemics and enslavement: Biological catastrophe in the Native Southeast, 1492-1715*, Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2007, p. 83.

¹¹ Russell M. Magnaghi, 'Sassafras and its role in early America, 1562–1662', *Terrae Incognitae: The Journal of the Society for the History of Discoveries*, 21, 1997, pp. 10-21.

the sassafras root and the so-useful medicines made from it; this word was then used in multiple European and some non-European languages to write about this root from the sixteenth century on.

The popularity of the first textual sassafras, and its increasingly common place in Eurasian botanical and medical texts of the early modern period, eventually led to the later creation of multiple textual sassafrases, that became increasingly distant from Monardes' meaning. If you were to continue your time-travelling journey onwards to the nineteenth century, and ask a European natural philosopher what plant was meant by the word sassafras, they would tell you about the same plant that Monardes described, but highlight a slightly different term, the binomial classification *sassafras albidum*.¹² If you asked a botanist from the mid-twentieth century, they would also find this binomial familiar, but would tell you that sassafras was a genus of plants, including not only Monardes' American plant, but also two East Asian plants, *chamu* and *taiwan chamu*, then recently renamed and classified as *sassafras tzumu* and *sassafras randaiense* respectively.¹³ If you were to ask a paleobotanist in the 1980s, they would tell you about a newly-discovered extinct North American plant that had recently been added to the sassafras genus, *sassafras hesperia*.¹⁴ In the modern world then, there are multiple textual sassafrases; that word has come to relate to several plants from different times and places. We are here concerned with the first textual sassafras, the word Europeans used to understand that American tree and its products, and the one that Monardes did so much to promote in post-contact Eurasia.

As Europeans were taking Wissoe, winauk and pauame, and making it into sassafras, they were similarly creating the New World. The New World was the imagined geography Europeans created out of a combination of their experiences in the real world of the early modern Americas, and their preconceptions. Botanical texts were a part of this trend: indeed, Monardes' English translator, John Frampton, titled his translation 'Joyful News out of the

¹² John Loudon, *Arboretum et fruticetum Britannicum, or the trees and shrubs of Britain*, London: 1838, vol. 3, p. 1301.

¹³ Z-L Nie, J. Wen, and H. Sun, 'Phylogeny and biogeography of Sassafras (Lauraceae) disjunct between eastern Asia and eastern North America', *Plant Systematics and Evolution*, 267, 1-4, 2007, pp. 191-203.

On cha mu see http://www.efloras.org/florataxon.aspx?flora_id=2&taxon_id=200009085 (consulted 14 March 2019). On Taiwan cha mu see http://www.efloras.org/florataxon.aspx?flora_id=2&taxon_id=200009084 (consulted 14 March 2019). My thanks to Michael Stanley-Baker for his invaluable expertise and kind help on the East Asian part of this story.

¹⁴ J. A. Wolfe and W. C. Wehr, 'Middle Eocene dicotyledonous plants from Republic, northeastern Washington', *United States Geological Survey Bulletin*, 1597, 1987, pp. 1-25.

New-Found World'.¹⁵ This trend was vitally important as American goods were commodified outside of the Atlantic World. How did you sell new American goods to Eurasians? The selling of American goods went along with the circulation of ideas about the Americas from whence those products had come. We then need to ask the question: what did the Ottomans, Ming, Mughals, Safavids, and Russians, think of the New World? At the present moment, some parts of that question are easier to answer than others. Works like Frampton's, as well as an increasing proliferation of similar texts, introduced readers across Eurasia both to the existence of the Americas, and to the idea of the New World as a storehouse of valuable goods. These, then, were the three entangled histories that shaped the multiple early modern lives of sassafras: the American objects of tree, root, and tea, the European word sassafras, and Eurasian ideas of the New World.

Thinking of these as entangled histories naturally leads us to the literature on 'entangled empires', that has shown how empires were tangled up with each other, and how those entanglements shaped the early modern world. The volume edited by Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra shows how the Atlantic world was bound together by these entangled empires; Matthew Romaniello has recently argued that the British and Russian empires were similarly entangled in the eighteenth century.¹⁶ These works have demonstrated that earlier historiography viewing empires as separate entities had mis-represented those empires, and the interactions between them. Here I propose the existence of an entanglement that has never yet been given scholarly attention: that Russia was entangled in the Atlantic world in the seventeenth century. Much work has now been produced about Russia's Eurasian links before 1700, building on earlier works exploring Russia's connections with Western Europe.¹⁷ There is a community of scholars working on Russia's American colonies of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹⁸ Although Russia's 1627

¹⁵ John Frampton, *loyfull newes out of the newe founde worlde, wherein is declared the rare and singular vertues of diuerse and sundrie hearbes, trees, oyles, plantes, and stones, with their applications, as well for phisicke as chirurgerie*, London, 1577, book 2. See also Donald Beecher, 'John Frampton of Bristol, trader and translator', in Carmine G. Biase, ed., *Travel and translation in the early modern period*, Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006, pp. 71-90.

¹⁶ Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, ed., *Entangled empires: The Anglo-Iberian Atlantic, 1500-1830*, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018; Matthew Romaniello, *Enterprising empires: Russia and Britain in eighteenth-century Eurasia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. My thanks to Matthew Romaniello for the kind preview of his book.

¹⁷ For example, Erika Monahan, *The merchants of Siberia: Trade in early modern Eurasia*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016.

¹⁸ Susan Smith-Peter, 'Russian America in Russian and American historiography', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 14, 1, 2013, pp. 93-100.

tobacco ban has been studied, and some works on Russian America make passing mention of Russian knowledge of the Americas before 1700, there has never been an academic work devoted to Russia's involvement in the pre-1700 Atlantic world.¹⁹ In fact, the general, unvoiced, presumption, has been that there was no such involvement. This article, by following sassafras from Florida to Moscow in 1602 and after, demonstrates that Russia was already entangled in the Atlantic world by the start of the seventeenth century.

The 'entangled empires' literature is itself bound up with the historiographical trends of science and empire, global science, and calls to decolonize the history of science. A vital lesson of these academic movements has been to highlight how histories of science have focused only on the activities of white Europeans, and too often ignored, undervalued, or deliberately obscured the role people of color and non-Europeans played in knowledge-creation and circulation. As Cañizares-Esguerra has put it, "Scholars are just now beginning to realize that the European Renaissance and Enlightenment were not European inventions but vast encyclopedias of hybrid global knowledge processed and packaged in Europe."²⁰ Works such as Kapil Raj's *Relocating Modern Science* have demonstrated the vital role of South Asians in the creation of what was previously labelled European scientific knowledge, and the central importance of global exchanges in the creation of that knowledge.²¹ Works on science and empire, including edited volumes by Londa Schiebinger and Claudia Swan, and James Delburgo and Nicholas Dew, have shown how imperial projects and early modern science were fundamentally interdependent.²² Both trends have shaped how scholars write about the early modern global drug trade, with Samir Boumediene recently dubbing the European appropriation of Native American expertise on medicinal plants 'the colonisation of knowledge'.²³ Key here is the

¹⁹ On the tobacco ban, see Matthew P. Romaniello, 'Muscovy's Extraordinary Ban on Tobacco', in Matthew P. Romaniello and Tricia Starks, eds., *Tobacco in Russian History and Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, 2011, pp. 19-35. For a work focused on the post-1732 period that briefly discusses earlier developments, see N. N. Bolkhovitinov, *Rossiiia otkryvaet Ameriky, 1732-1799* [Russia discovers America, 1732-1799], Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1991.

²⁰ Cañizares-Esguerra, *Entangled empires*, p. 5.

²¹ Kapil Raj, *Relocating modern science: circulation and the construction of knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650-1900*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007; the 'Global Histories of Science' focus in *Isis*, 2010.

²² Londa Schiebinger and Claudia Swan, eds., *Colonial botany. Science, commerce and politics in early modern world*, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005; James Delbourgo, and Nicholas Dew, eds., *Science and empire in the Atlantic world*, New York and London: Routledge, 2008.

²³ Samir Boumediene, *La colonisation du Savoir. Une histoire des plantes médicinales du "Nouveau Monde" (1492-1750)*, Vaulx-en-Velin: Les Editions des Mondes à Faire, 2016. See also Harold J. Cook, *Matters of exchange: commerce, medicine, and science in the Dutch Golden Age*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007; Matthew James Crawford, *The Andean*

question posed by Sujit Sivasundaram of *how* to write 'globally oriented histories of science', and in particular how to do so when sources may be limited.²⁴ Sassafras in the early modern global world gives us the opportunity to provide one answer to that question. The sources for both the Native American and Russian chapters of that story are limited both in number and in detail in comparison to the Western European. Yet both are important, and in fact the Native American chapters, obscured as they sometimes are by colonial distortions, are vital. By considering both the Native American and Russian material, bound together by the more loquacious Western European middlemen, we see more of the history of early modern sassafras than restricting ourselves to the Western European sources alone would allow.

This article applies the concept of entanglement to the case-study of sassafras. We begin with the creation of that specific French word as a part of European appropriation of an American tree with American names. We see how the French and the Spanish learnt to disarticulate the sassafras tree into its useful parts from Native Americans, in particular the Timucua, and how the Spanish overtook the French to profit from this new medicinal object in Western Europe. We see how textual sassafras was promoted by Monardes and his translators across Iberia, Western Europe, and as far east as the Russian Empire, with sassafras-objects traded both to the Russian and Ottoman Empires. We consider the related textual tradition of European works on the imagined geography of the New World, their circulation among the elites of Eurasia, and how that might have impacted Eurasian attitudes to commodities from the Americas. And we end with Russia's enthusiasm for sassafras, an enthusiasm that began in the early seventeenth century, and lasted at least until the middle of the eighteenth. Thinking about entanglements helps us see that early modern commodities like sassafras were entanglements of objects, words, and ideas that shifted as the commodity was moved between languages, locations, and texts.

French words in Spanish texts

wonder drug: Cinchona bark and imperial science in the Spanish Atlantic, 1630-1800, Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016.

²⁴ Sujit Sivasundaram, 'Sciences and the global: on methods, questions, and theory', *Isis*, 101, 1, 2010, pp. 146-158.

There is a fundamental problem in considering the circulation of goods around the early modern global world. Often, we no longer have the objects themselves; we have the words for goods recorded in documents. When researching early modern sassafras, we deal more with *names* than with *things*. To write a global history of how a tree with multiple local names became essentialised down to one component part, and known under a single foreign name, we need to consider the entanglements and disentanglements of names and things, the processes by which objects are named, renamed, and unnamed. In short, we need to begin here with the history of how that American tree and its dismembered objects became known as sassafras.

This tree entered European consciousness due to sickly French invaders of Florida. In the early 1560s, French Huguenots, in what would become a familiar format for Europeans, travelled to the South-Eastern part of North America, in search of a place to colonise and make in their own image, a place free from the French Wars of Religion, then just beginning. The French initially viewed this land as a paradise, full of the most wonderful plants. French accounts from these expeditions record many trees, notably one similar in appearance to the European Laurel tree, which smelt sweet, and the root of which friendly locals brought them as healing tea in times of illness. This was the first use of this American medicament by Europeans.

The French in Florida renamed this medically-useful tree sassafras, and thought enough of its healing properties that they made initial moves to sell the root in Europe. The French colonists would not enjoy this new medicine for long, and never succeeded in making it a French-controlled product in Eurasia. The French Huguenots had left Europe behind, but they had not escaped European conflict. By the early 1560s, the Spanish empire was already using the sea routes around Florida to move valuable treasure shipments from the Americas back to Europe. Had the French settlements turned into fortified outposts, this would have threatened Spanish interests. And so in September 1565 Spanish forces led by Pedro de Menendez de Aviles went to the Florida coast, established the outpost of St. Augustine, then destroyed the nearby French settlement and killed the colonists.²⁵ French Huguenots

²⁵ Magnaghi, 'Sassafras', pp. 10-13.

sought to avoid conflict with Catholics over religion in Europe, but died fighting Spanish Catholics over territorial control in the Americas. All that was left of this ill-fated French mission was a word: sassafras.

The Spanish killed the French, took their settlements, and also their word, sassafras, a name for which they came to have much use. Other early encounters of the Spanish with the sassafras tree were similar to that of the French. Spain sent administrators over to its New World possessions, including the Florida region. It proved impractical and expensive for these people to have access to European drugs, and so they took to using local remedies, relying upon the knowledge and expertise of Native American medical practitioners, and their use of the sassafras tea. These Spanish American colonists wrote to their friends and family in Europe, including about their experiences with Native American medicine.²⁶ When these colonists returned to Europe, they brought these remedies with them, and recommended them to others.²⁷ This was the domestic, familial, and small-scale way in which sassafras first entered Eurasia. It would not stay small-scale for long.

Sassafras became fundamentally linked with a European medical practitioner: Nicolás Bautista Monardes. Monardes was a Spanish physician who lived his whole life within the Iberian Peninsula, never once visiting the Americas, yet his name became linked with the new Spanish colonies, and their medical products, when he decided to write about the American commodities arriving in his home town of Seville.²⁸ His interest in sassafras was sufficient to put it in the title of one of his books in 1571.²⁹ Within the book itself, Monardes describes the tree for us: a straight-trunked tree with tri-form leaves, about the size of a pine and with a wonderful sweet smell, which grows in Florida. He also recounts the history of the European encounter with this plant, and of the renaming of the Timucuan's pauame tree as sassafras by the French. Most importantly, he sets up what was to become the key features of sassafras as a

²⁶ Mauricio Sanchez-Menchero, "'From where they are now to whence they came from': News about health and disease in New Spain (1550-1615)", in John Slater, Marialuz Lopez-Terrada, and Jose Pardo-Tomas, eds., *Medical cultures of the early modern Spanish empire*, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2014, pp. 91-106.

²⁷ Timothy D. Walker, 'The medicines trade in the Portuguese Atlantic World: Acquisition and dissemination of healing knowledge from Brazil (c. 1580–1800)', *Social History of Medicine*, 26, 3, 2013, pp. 403-31, see p. 429.

²⁸ On Monardes and sassafras, see Ralph Bauer, 'The Blood of the dragon: Alchemy and natural history in Nicolás Monardes's *Historia medicinal*', in John Slater, Marialuz Lopez-Terrada, and Jose Pardo-Tomas, eds., *Medical cultures of the early modern Spanish empire*, pp. 67-88, see p. 67; Dugan, *The ephemeral history of perfume*, p. 76.

²⁹ Nicolás Bautista Monardes, *Segunda parte del libro des las cosas que se traen de nuestras Indias Occidentales, que siruen al uso de la medicina. Do se trata del Tabaco, y de la Sassafras: y del Carlo Sancto, y de otras muchas yeruas y Plantas, Simientes, y Licores: que agora nueuamente han venido de a aquellas partes, de grandes virtudes y maravillosos efectos*, Seville, 1571.

medicine in Europe: he lists a huge number of ailments which can be treated with sassafras, amongst them fevers, the ailment that sassafras was most commonly used to treat.³⁰ Less than a decade after the first Europeans to encounter sassafras, the French colonists, were killed by agents of the Spanish state, a Spanish author was using their French term for an American plant and relying upon Timucuan medical knowledge he had only encountered at a very literal distance, to become the most famous expert on that tree.

Monardes was the key figure in Iberian appreciation for American drugs in general, and sassafras in particular, but the popularity of sassafras can be seen from other Spanish developments. A number of other contemporary Spanish medical authors were also interested in sassafras, such as the Galenist Luis Mercado. Despite being medically conservative, Mercado held the very new American medicament sassafras in sufficiently high regard to include it in his *Consultationes morborum*, published posthumously in 1614.³¹ As sassafras and the other American drugs were being written about in Spain, they were also being imported into Spain: several tons of such medicaments were arriving in Monardes' Seville in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.³² As established by Teresa Huguet-Termes, these drugs do not show up in Spanish pharmacy texts as often as one then might expect. Yet this did not mean that they were not popular in Iberia. Rather, they seem to have been circulating alongside the usual, recorded, channels for medicaments, and so only infrequently enter the historical record.³³ The works of Monardes and Mercado, and the imports of Seville, show a significant level of interest in sassafras in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Spain.

In the 1480s, only the indigenous inhabitants of the North American continent made use of the medicinal properties of a particular root of a particular tree. By the 1580s, the inhabitants of the Westernmost part of the Eurasian continent had learnt about that plant, could buy its root, consume it, and read about it in Monardes' book. As they did the latter, they read about it under European name: sassafras. The Europeans, as was their common practice

³⁰ Monardes, *Segunda parte del libro*, pp. 27-58.

³¹ Teresa Huguet-Termes, 'New World *materia medica* in Spanish Renaissance medicine: From scholarly reception to practical impact', *Medical History*, 45, 3, 2001, pp. 368-70.

³² Huguet-Termes, 'New world *materia medica*', p. 368.

³³ Huguet-Termes, 'New world *materia medica*', pp. 359-76.

when encountering American medicaments, took the object, renamed it, and reconceptualised its medicinal properties, appropriating Native American medical knowledge and claiming it as European. The very term 'sassafras' thus indicates that we are dealing here with a colonial product: the object was obtained by colonial means, and both the name under which it was known in Eurasia, and the framing of knowledge about that object were similarly colonial appropriation of Native American expertise. The history of sassafras in Eurasia is first of all the history of a French word for an American plant in a Spanish text.

The British seek Spanish treasure

A French word in a Spanish text is how sassafras lived within the Iberian Peninsula. Following the publication of Monardes' text, the medicament sassafras, primarily the root, quickly became both known and desirable outside of the Iberian Peninsula, across the rest of Western Europe. This circulation of knowledge and object took several forms. The Monardes text was directly translated, or his words re-used either with or without citation, spreading his textual sassafras around Western Europe. Sassafras itself was also increasingly to be found in the Europe to the East of the Iberian Peninsula, notably in major ports and trading centres like London. As the other major empires of Western Europe became aware of this exciting, and valuable, new product, they went looking for the source. The British in particular explored regions on the borders of Spanish colonies in the Americas, hoping to hit a fragrant jack-pot. The Spanish texts using sassafras-as-word excited interest in sassafras-as-medicament, which promoted the sale of the sassafras root, which in turn fuelled efforts by the British and others to find the sassafras tree. Text, trade, and imperial gazumping, went hand-in-hand-in-hand in the history of sassafras in Europe beyond Iberia.

Monardes's 1571 Spanish-language text on sassafras was translated multiple times into multiple languages.³⁴ Significantly, the translator who created the Latin version was Carolus Clusius, the influential French botanist interested in American *materia medica*.³⁵ Here ideas about sassafras, appropriated from Native American knowledge by European invaders of the Americas, and encoded by Monardes, were then reframed by Clusius:

³⁴ Daniela Bleichmar, 'Books, bodies and fields. Sixteenth-century transatlantic encounters with the New World', in Londa Schiebinger and Claudia Swan, eds., *Colonial botany*, pp. 83-99.

³⁵ Huguët-Termes, 'New world *materia medica*', p. 366.

according to José Pardo-Tomás, Clusius provided a faithful translation of Monardes's textual sassafras, but removed Monardes's sassafras image, and added a commentary linking Monardes' sassafras tree from Florida to the *molle* tree of Peru, another American plant with a wondrous scent.³⁶

Clusius did much to promote American herbal medicines in Latinate Europe, with natural historians from Paris to Prague reading his work.³⁷ Yet by the time Clusius made his translation of Monardes, Latin no longer dominated Western European intellectual production as it once had. By the end of the sixteenth century, Western European medical men, who once would have read and written about their subject exclusively in Latin, were increasingly doing so in their vernacular, as Monardes had done when he chose to compose his works in Spanish. Other Western European vernacular translations of Monardes appeared, like John Frampton's retitled English edition.³⁸ An important point to note here is the speed at which these translations appeared: Monardes' Spanish text came out in 1571; Clusius produced his Latin translation in 1574; and Frampton his English text in 1577. A decade after the Spanish drove the French out of Florida, half a decade after Monardes wrote his work in Spanish, it was already available in other Western European languages, accessible to other Western European readers.

Alongside such full-length translations as those by Clusius and Frampton, various European medical men referenced Monardes in their own works. One such figure was the famous Danish physician and natural philosopher Ole Worm, whose Latin-language natural philosophical work *Museum Wormianum* was hugely popular and widely read in Western Europe. Worm cited Monardes multiple times in *Museum Wormianum*, first printed some eighty years after Monardes' text.³⁹ Worm describes sassafras in some detail. He notes its location as Florida and outlines its use against venereal disease, gastric and uterine problems.⁴⁰ In doing so, he explicitly followed Monardes. Worm also

³⁶ José Pardo-Tomás, 'Two glimpses of America from a distance: Carolus Clusius and Nicolás Monardes', *Carolus Clusius: Towards a cultural history of a Renaissance naturalist*, Amsterdam: Edita-Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2007, pp. 173-193, see 189-190.

³⁷ Jana Černá, 'A powerful antidote, a strange camel and Turkish pepper: Iberian Science, the discovery of the new world and the early modern Czech lands', *Early science and medicine*, 21, 2-3, 2016, pp. 214-231.

³⁸ Frampton, *loyfull newes out of the newe founde worlde*.

³⁹ S. P. Luppov, *Kniga v Rossii v XVII veke* [The book in Russia in the seventeenth century], Leningrad: Nauka, 1970, p. 206.

⁴⁰ Ole Worm, *Museum Wormianum*, Leiden, 1655, vol. 2, pp. 171, 173-74.

relied upon Monardes for his information about other American medicaments, such as sarsaparilla.⁴¹ For Worm, Monardes, a Spaniard who had never travelled West, was the major authority on American plant medicaments. Such followers of Monardes like Worm, as well as the translators of Monardes like Clusius and Frampton, helped popularise Monardes' favoured American specific of sassafras root outside of the Iberian Peninsula.

And popular it was. Patrick Wallis has shown that it was being traded through London from at least 1617 until the 1770s. The quantities were often significant: by 1699, more than 10,000 pounds of sassafras was being traded through London.⁴² As early as 1621, a ship passing through the Danish Sound included 'sassafras hold' amongst its cargo.⁴³ In the 1660s, a merchant working for the Russian court was able to buy 90 kilograms of sassafras in Hamburg, indicating a substantial stock of that drug on the Hamburg markets.⁴⁴ The 1724 Russian Tarif-Book lists sassafras as a good for which a regular tax had been set, information retained in a Dutch translation of the text.⁴⁵ This suggests a regular trade in that item into Russia in the early eighteenth century, perhaps specifically via the Dutch. And as Gänger has established, sassafras and other American specifics that were brought to Western Europe in the sixteenth century were traded well outside of the Atlantic World by the eighteenth.⁴⁶ The presence of sassafras both within Western Europe and in Eurasia beyond the Atlantic World during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries demonstrates a notable market for that particular medicament.

At the same time as reading about and buying sassafras, Western Europeans outside of Iberia also decided to try to find their own sources for sassafras, in the hopes of taking the Eurasian sassafras trade out of the hands of the Spanish. Both the French and the British attempted to challenge the Spanish and obtain their own sources of

⁴¹ Worm, *Museum Wormianum*, vol. 2, pp. 159-60.

⁴² Patrick Wallis, 'Exotic drugs and English medicine: England's drug trade, c.1550-c.1800', *Social History of Medicine*, 25, 2012, pp. 20-46.

⁴³ Danish Sound Toll records online <http://dietrich.soundtoll.nl/public/cargoes.php?cname=Sassafras%20hold> (consulted 22 January 2019)

⁴⁴ Clare Griffin, 'Russia and the medical drug trade', *Social History of Medicine*, 31, 1, 2016, pp. 2-23, p. 16.

⁴⁵ Stadsarchief Amsterdam, collection no. 78, Archief van de Directie van de Oostersche Handel en Reederijen: Item 399, Reglement van laden en lossen en tarief van inkomende en uitgaande rechten van de havens Petersburg, Viborg, Narva, Archangel en Kola (1724), pp. 30, 49.

⁴⁶ Gänger, 'World trade in medicinal plants'.

sassafras, with limited success.⁴⁷ The supposedly mysteriously disappearing British colony of Roanoke was placed on that North Carolinian island in part because of the presence there of sassafras. The British colonialist Walter Raleigh obtained a permit to trade sassafras as a monopoly in Britain, and Raleigh so valued that medicament that he conflated British colonial success in the Americas in general with British success in finding their own sources of sassafras in particular. Most telling for the history of sassafras outside of the Spanish empire is *how* Raleigh's men went about their search for sassafras: Raleigh's men read Spanish texts, and travelled to the borders of Spanish territory, all in an attempt to use the Spanish successes regarding sassafras to create a similarly successful British sassafras trade.⁴⁸ British attempts to find new sources for sassafras that they could control and profit from were in direct competition with the Spanish, but also were directly based on Spanish efforts.

One reason for the British to so closely follow the Spanish in their search for sassafras was the issue of cultivation. Both the failed British colony of Roanoke, and the later and more successful British colony of Jamestown, put much effort into obtaining sassafras, but, in contrast to the successful tobacco plantations at Jamestown, sassafras was collected not cultivated. When sassafras was eventually cultivated, like in Britain from 1633, it was as a botanical specimen rather than as a cash crop.⁴⁹ The major issue here seems to be the part of the tree that was so valuable in the early modern world: the root. As sassafras was primarily valued for its roots, the sassafras harvest destroyed the crop, meaning that cultivating it commercially was not an attractive option. Instead, the Jamestown colonists, following the example of the earlier French and Spanish colonists, and that of the Native Americans, took advantage of the reportedly substantial quantity of sassafras growing in the region and simply dug up the mature trees as needed.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ On British attempts to find sassafras, see Dugan, *The ephemeral history of perfume*, p. 73; Charles Manning and Merrill Moore, 'Sassafras and syphilis', *The New England Quarterly*, 9, 3, 1936, pp. 473-475. On French attempts, see Philip P. Boucher, *France and the American Tropics to 1700: Tropics of discontent?*, Baltimore, MA: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008, pp. 40-61; Magnaghi, 'Sassafras and its role in early America', pp. 10-21.

⁴⁸ Graham Roebuck, 'Sassafras', in Helen Ostovich, Mary V. Silcox, and Graham Roebuck, eds., *The mysterious and the foreign in early modern England*, Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 2008, pp. 170-186.

⁴⁹ Loudon, *Arboretum et fruticetum Britannicum*, p. 1301. Sassafras was certainly being cultivated as a botanical specimen in the Americas by the early nineteenth century. See William Dandridge Peck, *A Catalogue of American and Foreign Plants: Cultivated in the Botanic Garden, Cambridge, Massachusetts*, Cambridge, MA: Hilliard and Metcalf, 1818, p. 81.

⁵⁰ Dugan, *The ephemeral history of perfume*, p. 92.

This approach was not always successful: in 1622, the British Jamestown tobacco planters were fined by the Virginia Company for failing to meet their quota of 30 pounds of sassafras root annually, a fact that was likely related in part to the reliance on wild specimens, but also in part to the attack on the colony by the Powhatan confederacy in the same year, which led to the deaths of around a quarter of the British colonists. It may be that the sassafras harvest was more disrupted than the tobacco harvest because the former involved venturing into the forest in search of wild specimens, and so was more dangerous than harvesting cultivated tobacco fields; Martin Pring's journal of his time in early seventeenth-century Virginia recounts a story of his band of sassafras collectors were attacked by Native Americans.⁵¹ As numerous Native American groups were massacred by European invaders across this period for standing in the way of colonial grasping at American natural resources, as in 1565 Spanish forces had killed those French colonists of Florida who had named sassafras and whose presence in the region was deemed dangerous to Spanish commercial interests, so British attempts to establish their own sassafras supply were disrupted by the Powhatan confederacy and other Native American groups pushing back against the British presence in the region. The successes and failures of the attempts by European invaders to monopolise American natural resources were once again substantially determined by violence.

The Spanish Empire found substantial success in promoting the use of sassafras root as a medicament in Western Europe. This led to two consequences, one foreseen and desired, the other apparently unforeseen and certainly not desired. The first was increased trade in Spanish-controlled sassafras. Following the publication of Monardes' volume, and the translations and citations of his work across Western Europe, Western Europeans became keen to buy and use this new product of the New World. This was all intended by, and directly advantageous to, the Spanish Empire which then controlled the sassafras supply to Eurasia. The second outcome was attempts by other Western European empires to obtain their own supplies of the precious root. Taking those same texts as information, and inspired by those same trading successes, British adventurers travelled to the borders of the Spanish American colonies to try their own hands at finding the root. This was an unwelcome outcome for the Spanish, as it threatened

⁵¹ Dugan, *The ephemeral history of perfume*, p. 92.

their monopoly. Yet it was bound up with their successes. The Spanish and British empires were entangled with each other over sassafras, through texts about sassafras, and through exchange of and competition for sassafras root.

The New World in the making of the early modern global world

As Europeans read about sassafras-as-word, and searched for, used, and sold sassafras-as-root, they did so in the context of the continuous remaking of the Americas into the New World. This was particularly vital for the final part of this process: as sassafras-as-object was being peddled to the Ottoman and Russian Empires, those polities – not directly involved in the Atlantic Exchange – needed a sense of the location from which sassafras had sprung. So, what do we know about Eurasian ideas of the New World? More specifically, when did the rest of Eurasia find out about the first Spanish expeditions to the Americas, the Columbus voyages of 1492 and after?

The earliest news came from Columbus himself, in the form of a letter he wrote in 1493 to Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain; this was printed in Spanish in 1493, then translated into Latin and German, and the various editions circulated from Lisbon in the West, to Antwerp in the North, and Rome in the South. However, Columbus believed that he was describing islands off the coast of East Asia, not a new continent.⁵² Debates over the relationship between the lands which Columbus had visited and the known world in general and Asia in particular continued at least into the 1530s.⁵³ By the end of the fifteenth century, the literate elite of Western Europe were broadly aware that Columbus had found something of interest, which solidified into ideas about the Americas as a separate geographic unit during the sixteenth century. The history of how the rest of Eurasia came to know of the both the Columbus voyages and the Americas is less well established.

Some work has been done on what the rest of Eurasia, notably the Ottomans, knew about the European invasions of the Americas. In 1513, one of the earliest extant Eurasian maps of the Americas was created by the Ottoman

⁵² The diffusion of Columbus' letter through Europe, 1493-1497, <http://www.oshermaps.org/special-map-exhibits/columbus-letter/iv-diffusion-columbuss-letter-through-europe-1493-1497> (Consulted 21 May 2018).

⁵³ Martin Lehmann, 'Amerigo Vespucci and his alleged awareness of America as a separate land mass', *Imago Mundi*, 65, 1, 2013, pp. 15-24.

Admiral Piri Reis. According to the map itself, it was partly based on information secretly collected about the Columbus voyage.⁵⁴ In 1583, the New Report, a text on the Americas, was created for Ottoman elites from Italian and Spanish sources, and then circulated in multiple versions in Turkish and Persian well into nineteenth century.⁵⁵ Chinese officials could read about the European invasions of the Americas by at least 1623.⁵⁶ Across the early sixteenth to the early seventeenth centuries, major Eurasian empires outside of the Atlantic world informed themselves of the Atlantic exchange.

Eurasian awareness of the Americas can also be gauged by tracking certain American commodities around early modern Eurasia. According to Carol Benedict, both the date and manner in which tobacco first came to China are disputed, but this American plant was already being grown as a cash crop in coastal Fujian and parts of Guandong by the first decade of the seventeenth century.⁵⁷ Rudolph Matthee notes that tobacco was sufficiently well known in both Iran and Central Asia by 1612 for Uzbek emissaries sent from Khurasan by Vali Muhammad Khan to ask their Iranian hosts for the weed.⁵⁸ In contrast to the enthusiasm for this new commodity displayed by the tobacco-growers of Fujian and Guandong, and the Uzbek emissaries, the Russian empire was notably less pleased: the earliest recorded import of American tobacco to Russia was in 1609, and Russia banned importing tobacco in 1627 (with some minor exceptions), a ban that lasted until 1698.⁵⁹ By the start of the seventeenth century, one particular American commodity, tobacco, was already well known, if not universally liked, in Eurasia.

By the time that Uzbek emissaries were asking Iranians for tobacco in the early seventeenth century, Russians were already importing a different American commodity, sassafras. So when did the Russian Empire find out about the Americas from which they would source some of their official medicaments across the seventeenth and eighteenth

⁵⁴ Abbas Hamdani, 'Ottoman response to the discovery of America and the new route to India', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 101, 3, 1981, pp. 323-330.

⁵⁵ Baki Tezcan, 'The many lives of the first non-Western history of the Americas: From the New Report to the History of the West Indies', *Osmanlı Araştırmaları / The Journal of Ottoman Studies*, 40, 2012, pp. 1-38.

⁵⁶ Zhang Zhishan, 'Columbus and China', *Monumenta serica*, 41, 1993, pp. 177-187.

⁵⁷ Carol Benedict, *Golden-silk smoke: A history of tobacco in China, 1550-2010*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011, p. 17.

⁵⁸ Rudolph P. Matthee, *The pursuit of pleasure: Drugs and stimulants in Iranian history, 1500-1900*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005, 119-120.

⁵⁹ Romaniello, 'Muscovy's Extraordinary Ban on Tobacco'.

centuries? Early modern Russian knowledge of and interest in the Americas has been almost entirely essentialised to their experience with Alaska. In 1732, a Russian Academy of Sciences expedition sailing East from Asia sighted land. That land is known today as Alaska. In the early nineteenth century, it was called Russian America, as the 1732 sighting turned into creeping Russian colonisation of that region which only ended in 1867, with the sale of the territory to the United States.⁶⁰ The importance of that first sighting of land in 1732 has then been taken as the *de facto* beginning of Russian-American interactions, with the great historian of Russian America, N. N. Bolkhovitinov, comparing its importance to 1492.⁶¹ Between the idea of 1731 as the inception of Russian American contact, and the tobacco ban that ran until 1698, existing histories leave little space for the Russian elite to have had meaningful engagement with the Americas, or with American products, before 1700.

Yet the elite of the Russian empire knew of the Americas before the Alaska sighting of 1732, and indeed before the earliest-known imports of tobacco in 1609, or of sassafras in 1602. The earliest recorded mention of the Americas is in a document created for the Russian court around 1530, when Maksim Grek, a Greek monk long in service to the Muscovites, wrote an account of the Columbus voyages in Old Church Slavonic:

Ancient people did not know, or did not want, to travel through Gadir [Cadiz]; modern Spanish and Portuguese people, sailing in great ships with much danger, have recently, 40 or 50 years ago, at the end of the seventh century,⁶² [done so] and found many islands, some empty, and a great land called Kuba, the extent of which is not known by those who live there. Finding this, they travelled around the whole southern land, even to the East of the Winter Sun, to India, to the seven islands known as the Moluccas, in which grow cinnamon and cloves and other fragrant aromatics, which until now were not known to a single human, and now are all known to the king of the Spanish and the Portuguese.⁶³

⁶⁰ Ilya Vinkovetsky, *Russian America: an overseas colony of a continental empire, 1804-1867*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

⁶¹ Bolkhovitinov, *Rossiiia otkryvaet Ameriky, 1732-1799* [Russia discovers America, 1732-1799], pp. 6-7.

⁶² According to the pre-1700 Russian calendar.

⁶³ Maxim Grek, *Sochinenia* [Essays], Kazan: [N. Pub], 1862, vol. 3, p. 44.

In the 1530s, as Western Europeans continued to debate precisely where Columbus had been, the Moscow court was reading about that uncertain geography.

A significant feature of the Grek account is its focus on the natural wealth of the lands to which Columbus had travelled. Early modern Eurasian accounts of the Americas commonly focus on this issue of American natural riches, and the biological and botanical differences of the Americas from Eurasia. The association of desirable commodities and the Columbus voyage in particular is a feature of numerous texts: three centuries after Grek composed his text, the British botanist John Loudon would enliven his botanical description of sassafras by recounting a tale of Columbus finding the Americas via none other than sassafras. The scent of sassafras, so the story goes, was so pungent that it wafted as far as Columbus' ship when the latter was still out of sight of land, convinced Columbus land was near, and helped him quell a mutiny.⁶⁴ This story of sassafras tells us more about its later perception by Eurasians than its actual role in the first Atlantic encounter. More importantly, the accounts of American botany by Grek in the 1530s and Loudon in the 1830s reflect the immediate and long-lasting importance placed by Eurasians on the natural wealth of the Americas.

Following the Grek account, the Russian elite then had access to a number of other texts about the Americas during the next two centuries. By the middle of the sixteenth century, they could read about Ferdinand Magellan's 1519 Spanish-sponsored expedition to find a route from the Americas to East Asia.⁶⁵ In 1674, they could read a report by Andrei Vinus, a notable Dutch-Russian administrator, on Spain and its American colonies for the Ambassadorial Chancery, a text that focused on military activities, and the production of precious metals.⁶⁶ Throughout the seventeenth century the Russian court kept itself informed of developments to the West via edited translations of Western European newspapers produced for the exclusive use of the Russian court, a group of documents referred to by historians as the *Vesti-Kuranty* [News and Newspapers]. These documents frequently make mention of the

⁶⁴ Loudon, *Arboretum et fruticetum Britannicum*, p. 1301.

⁶⁵ Bolkhovitinov, *Rossiiia otkryvaet Ameriky* [Russia discovers America], p. 7.

⁶⁶ Kees Boterbloem, *Moderniser of Russia: Andrei Vinus, 1641-1716*, New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 85.

Americas. Just like the Ottomans, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Russian court kept track of developments in the Americas.

One such *News and Newspapers* document states: '6th-27th September [1667]. Translation from Dutch printed newsheets. From the Spanish lands from the town of Madrid. 6th September. It is known here that our caravan [sic] of Indian ships with silver has arrived safely in St Lucia, and they say that the silver in those vessels totals 1200 million gold coins'.⁶⁷ This reference is typical: mentions of the Americas in the *News and Newspapers* are commonly concerned with war, military movements, and trade, although the commodity in question is usually silver, not saffras.⁶⁸ That there are references to the Americas in the *News and Newspapers* is a rather neglected fact, as even work by Daniel Waugh and Ingrid Maier on the speed of news arriving in Russia does not deal with how and when news from the Americas reached Moscow.⁶⁹ Yet this is hugely important: the *News and Newspapers* were official documents, produced for the Tsar and his advisers, and read out to them to keep them informed of contemporary developments outside of the Russian Empire. Even more importantly, Maier has shown that these documents were edited as they were translated, leaving out sections in which the court had no interest.⁷⁰ The presence of the Americas in the *News and Newspapers* directly indicates an official Russian interest in the region, an entanglement of the Russian and Spanish empires through the circulation of news regarding American events.

A notable point about the *News and Newspapers* is the actors and locations being mentioned. The ships in question in the 1667 excerpt were Spanish Imperial galleons; St Lucia was a European port in the Americas. This is typical for Russian documents about the Americas, just as it is common for the Western European texts from which they were

⁶⁷ A. M. Moldovana and Ingrid Maier, eds., *Vesti-Kuranty, 1656g., 1660-1662g., 1664-1670g. Chast 1. Russkie teksty* [News and Newspapers, 1656, 1660-1662, 1664-1670. Part 1. Russian texts], Moscow: Rukopisnye pamiatniki drevnei Rusi, 2009, p. 235.

⁶⁸ See for example, A. M. Moldovana and Ingrid Maier, ed., *Vesti-Kuranty, 1656g., 1660-1662g., 1664-1670g. Chast 1. Russkie teksty* [News and Newspapers, 1656, 1660-1662, 1664-1670. Part 1. Russian texts], Moscow: Rukopisnye pamiatniki drevnei Rusi, 2009, pp. 128, 514; S. I. Kotkova, ed., *Vesti-Kuranty, 1645-46, 1648g.* [News and Newspapers, 1645-1646, 1648], Moscow: Nauka, 1980, p. 164.

⁶⁹ Ingrid Maier and Daniel C. Waugh, 'How well was Muscovy connected with the world?', *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte*, 75, 2009, pp. 17-38.

⁷⁰ Ingrid Maier, 'Newspaper translations in seventeenth-century Muscovy. About the sources, topics and periodicity of *Kuranty* "Made in Stockholm" (1649)', in Per Ambrosiani, Elisabeth Löfstrand, Laila Nordquist, and Ewa Teodorowicz-Hellman, eds., *Explorare necesse est. Hyllningskrift till Barbro Nilsson*, Stockholm: Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, 2002, pp. 181-190.

taken: European documents about the Americas commonly devote more attention to Europeans in the Americas than they do to Native Americans. This limited representation of Native Americans in European texts, either erasing their existence from American affairs, or erasing their role in creating texts on the Americas, fundamentally misrepresents the workings of the early modern world in general, and botanical exchange in particular. Matthew Crawford has shown that European knowledge of cinchona bark was fundamentally based on the expertise of indigenous Andean *curanderos*, despite the frequent efforts of Europeans to downplay or conceal their importance.⁷¹ Without *curanderos* expertise, there would have been no Eurasian cinchona trade, just as without Timucua expertise on pauame there would have been no Eurasian sassafras trade. Russian documents on the Americas lack what Eurasian documents on the Americas often lack: a clear acknowledgement of the agency of specific, knowledgeable, and proactive Native Americans.

Russian interest in European empires in the Americas should be seen alongside Russian information-gathering about other regions, including their own empire. Throughout the seventeenth century, the Russian empire was administered through a bureaucracy centred on the Moscow Kremlin, which linked together all administrative branches of the government, including regional governors. This system passed information from department to department, and between provincial centres and the Moscow Kremlin, on a wide range of issues.⁷² During the same period, the government also sent out servitors on fact-finding expeditions, like one designed to find a Russian-controlled source for that other valuable early modern medical commodity, rhubarb, in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to avoid continued reliance on supplies from China.⁷³ In the eighteenth century, the government continued to send expeditions to explore its own empire, which resulted in the creation of texts on the nature of the Russian

⁷¹ Crawford, *The Andean wonder drug*, pp. 26-30.

⁷² Clare Griffin, 'Bureaucracy and knowledge creation: The Apothecary Chancery', in Simon Franklin and Katherine Bowers, eds., *Information and empire: Mechanisms of communication in Russia, 1600-1850*, Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2017, pp. 255-286.

⁷³ Erika Monahan, 'Locating rhubarb: Early modernity's relevant obscurity', in Paula Findlen, ed., *Early modern things. Objects and their histories, 1500-1800*, London and New York: Routledge, 2013, pp. 227-251; Matthew P. Romaniello, 'True rhubarb? Trading Eurasian botanical and medical knowledge in the eighteenth century', *Journal of Global History*, 11, 1, 2016, pp. 3-23.

Empire.⁷⁴ The Russian Empire was also interested in its Asian neighbours, creating a spying network that gathered information on their major rival, the Chinese.⁷⁵ This gathering of information was a part of the entanglement of empires, with the Russian empire entangled with both its Eurasian neighbours, and the European colonies far across the Atlantic, through the medium of knowledge exchange.

Information-gathering was often fuelled by trading ambitions. An increasingly substantial body of scholarship now exists on Russia's trade with the East, which was comparable to its trade with Western Europe.⁷⁶ Indeed, Stephen Frederic Dale has argued that Astrakhan, the port city in the far south of the Russian Empire on the Caspian Sea, through which goods arriving from the East were officially required to pass, was as important as Arkhangelsk, the Northern port that was the major entrepôt for goods arriving from the West, to Russia's foreign trade in the seventeenth century.⁷⁷ Other regional trade centres, such as the market at Lake Yamysh (located in present-day Republic of Kazakhstan), whose importance has recently been highlighted by Erika Monahan, also facilitated a major East-West trade from which the Russian Empire benefitted.⁷⁸ Russia then engaged in a major trade with Asia, facilitated by a number of Central Asian middlemen-merchants.⁷⁹ The Russian empire was entangled with other empires around the early modern global world through both exchange of information, and exchange of commodities.

The significance of the Americas to Western Europe in general and the Spanish Empire in particular was in part based on the reactions of the rest of Eurasia. When the Spanish empire tried to sell the plant medicaments of the

⁷⁴ Rachel Koroloff, "'In Imperio Rutheno' Johann Amman's *Stirpium rariorum* (1739) and the foundation of Russia's botanical empire' in Yota Batsaki, Sarah Burke Cahalan, and Anatole Tchikine, eds., *The botany of empire in the long eighteenth century*, Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection Washington, D.C., 2017, pp. 235-56.

⁷⁵ Gregory Dmitrievich Afinogenov, 'The Eye of the Tsar: Intelligence-Gathering and Geopolitics in Eighteenth-Century Eurasia', PhD thesis, Harvard University, 2015.

⁷⁶ For an overview of Russia's foreign trade in this period, see Jarmo T. Kotilaine, *Russia's foreign trade and economic expansion in the seventeenth century: Windows on the world*, Leiden: Brill, 2005.

⁷⁷ Stephen Frederic Dale, *Indian merchants and Eurasian trade, 1600-1750*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 78.

⁷⁸ Monahan, *The merchants of Siberia*.

⁷⁹ Scott Cameron Levi, *The Indian diaspora in Central Asia and its trade, 1550-1900*, Leiden: Brill, 2002; Audrey Burton, *The Bukharans: A dynastic, diplomatic, and commercial history, 1550-1702*, Richmond: Curzon Press, 1997; Sebouh Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The global trade networks of Armenian merchants from New Julfa*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.

Americas as special, new, unique to the New World, they had to do so alongside peddling knowledge of that new (to Eurasians) continent. The Eurasian empires, already entangled with each other, also increasingly became entangled with the Atlantic world via exchanges of commodities and exchanges of ideas about the New World. Russia was a part of this. Despite the focus in the literature on 1732, ideas about the New World had been available to the Russian elite for at least two centuries by the time the Alaskan coast was sighted by that fateful Russian expedition. From the earliest mention of the continent in Russian documents as some far-flung oddity full of new aromatics in the 1530s, through to accounts of the Europeans sourcing, and conflict over the sourcing, of precious metals there in the seventeenth century, for the Russian empire natural wealth like sassafras was a defining part of the New World.

Russia appropriates the West

By the 1580s, the Spanish, French, and British had all read the word sassafras, and were interested in obtaining and using sassafras. By the 1670s, sassafras was sufficiently well-thought of, and in sufficient supply, in Russia for the official medical department of the empire to send it to Kazan, far within the boundaries of the Russian Empire, eastern-most of the European polities, and so quite some way from the Seville where it had entered Europe and been described by Monardes. The presence of sassafras so far East was a part of a much longer-term enthusiasm for American *materia medica* in general, and sassafras in particular, in early modern Russia. Following the first recorded import of that drug in 1602, sassafras then made a regular appearance in official medical imports across the seventeenth century, periodically was listed in various official medical documents until at least the 1750s, and appeared in a number of Russian-language medical books being produced in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The inclusion of sassafras in the supplies sent to Kazan, then, was not accidental. By 1679, official Russian medical circles were well convinced of the value of sassafras, which was why time and money was spent sending it out to Kazan. As Western Europeans had sailed West to appropriate Native American knowledge of the medicinal properties of the sassafras tree, so the Russian Empire took on their Western neighbours' name for, and usage of, that plant.

Frustratingly for historians, Russian sources on sassafras are often not specific about what object they are referring to: most documents only use the word 'sassafras' (or variant spellings thereof); some note that it is sassafras tree, but should that be taken to mean they are using the wood of the tree? The documents give little guidance here. More rarely, we get a reference to a preparation based on sassafras, such as sassafras oil or sassafras essence.⁸⁰ Neither reference mentions if such preparations were from the root, the bark, the wood, or the leaves of the tree. Given the particular focus on sassafras roots in the Western European sources official Russian medicine relied upon for foreign *materia medica*, we can hypothesize that the objects behind the words may have been sassafras roots. Such an identification must necessarily be tentative. Here, sassafras-as-word obscures from view the specific nature of sassafras-as-object.

Russia regularly imported sassafras. Among the import records of the official medical department, the Apothecary Chancery, sassafras was one of the most consistently purchased medicaments in the second half of the seventeenth century.⁸¹ Interesting is *how* Russians acquired sassafras. Despite the major role of the Spanish in the Eurasian sassafras trade, the Spanish do not seem to have directly sold sassafras to Russia. Russia and Spain set up direct trading relations only in 1728, and V. N. Zakharov has found little trace of Spanish-Russian trade until the middle of the eighteenth century.⁸² The British, who also tried to gain control of the sassafras market, also appear in Russian records. The first known purchase of sassafras in 1602 was from London, and given the substantial numbers of British medical practitioners who worked in that department, there may well have been further informal imports of sassafras from Britain across the century.⁸³ On the other hand, Russia also imported sassafras from countries not directly involved in struggles over sassafras in the Americas, notably both the Netherlands and the German lands.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Mamonov, *Materialy* [Materials], ii, pp. 334-46; RGADA f. 143 op. 2 ed. khr. 748.

⁸¹ Griffin, 'Russia and the medical drug trade', 16.

⁸² Ana María Schop Soler, *Un siglo de relaciones diplomáticas y comerciales entre España y Rusia: 1733-1833*, Madrid: Ministerio de asuntos exteriores, 1984, pp. 28-31; V. N. Zakharov, *Zapadnoevropeiskie kuptsy v rossiiskom torgovle XVIII veka* [Western European merchants in Russian trade of the eighteenth century], Moscow: Nauka, 2005, pp. 200-209, 218-30.

⁸³ On the 1602 import document, see Wilhelm Richter, *Geschichte der Medicin in Russland* 3 vols, Moscow: N. S. Vsevoloski, 1813-17, I, pp. 448-55. On the origins of medical practitioners at the Russian court, see Maria Unkovskaya, *Brief Lives: A Handbook of Medical Practitioners in Muscovy, 1620- 1701* (London: Wellcome Trust, 1999); Sabine Dumschat, *Ausländischer Mediziner im Moskauer Russland*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2006, and Unkovskaya, *Brief lives*.

⁸⁴ Griffin, 'Russia and the medical drug trade', pp. 16-17.

Once again, following sassafras shows the entanglements of the early modern world, where sassafras was both jealously guarded and widely sold.

Numerous other Russian documents speak to the importance of sassafras in official Russian medicine. In 1633, sassafras was among the medicines sent out to the Russian army by the Apothecary Chancery, but sassafras never became a regular part of those army supplies.⁸⁵ In 1645, Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich was prescribed it for what would prove to be his final illness.⁸⁶ Other high-ranking members of court were also prescribed it in the 1650s and 1660s.⁸⁷ By 1657 the Apothecary Chancery library, full of Western European medical texts, included a copy of the *Museum Wormianum* with its Monardes-influenced chapter on sassafras.⁸⁸ In 1667, an Apothecary Chancery physician composed a report that tangentially dealt with American drugs, including sassafras.⁸⁹ In 1698, Apothecary Chancery staff presented Peter the Great with a medical book including a recipe using sassafras.⁹⁰ The eighteenth-century successor to the Apothecary Chancery, the Medical Chancellery, kept sassafras in stock at least into the 1750s.⁹¹ The 1783 *Pharmakopoea navalis Rossica* included sassafras.⁹² From 1602 until at least the late eighteenth century, sassafras was a common part of official Russian medicine.

Sassafras consistently appeared in official Russian medical documents across the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries; it is much harder to track that medicament in unofficial medicine. In part this is a documentary issue: there are many more extant documents on official Russian medicine than on unofficial medicine. There are, however, a number of extant Russian-language medical books from this period, including a number aimed at a lay

⁸⁵ Mamonov, *Materialy* [Materials], vol. 1, p. 31-32.

⁸⁶ Mamonov, *Materialy* [Materials], vol. 1, pp. 120-23; *Akty Istoricheskie, sobrannye i izdannye Arkheograficheskoiu kommissiui* [Historical documents, collected and published by the archeographic commission], St Petersburg: Tipografiia Ekspeditsii zagotovleniia Gosudarstvennykh bumag, 1841-42, vol. 3, p. 404, no. 246.

⁸⁷ 1664 prescription to Prince I. D. Miloslavskii Mamonov, *Materialy* [Materials], vol. 2, pp. 290, 306. 1665 prescription to Prince I. D. Miloslavskii RGADA f. 143 op. 2 ed. khr. 748. Collection of prescriptions from 1672 and 1673 Mamonov, *Materialy* [Materials], vol. 3, p. 813.

⁸⁸ E. A. Savel'eva, ed., *Katalog knig iz sobraniia Aptekarskogo prikaza* [Catalogue of books from the collection of the Apothecary Chancery], St Petersburg: Al'faret, 2006, p. 188.

⁸⁹ RGADA f. 143, op. 2, ed. khr. 738.

⁹⁰ Clare Griffin, 'In search of an audience: Popular pharmacies and the limits of literate medicine in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Russia', *Bulletin for the History of Medicine*, 89, 2015, pp. 705-732, see 714. Russian State Historical Museum (Henceforth, GIM), Uvar. 172, ll. 24r-25v.

⁹¹ RGADA f. 346, book 1.131, p. 14v.

⁹² Margery Rowell, 'Russian medical botany before the time of Peter the Great', *Sudhoffs Archiv*, 1978, pp. 339-358, see 357.

readership.⁹³ Of these lay medical texts, only one mentions sassafras: *Florin's Economy*. *Florin's Economy* is a Russian translation of a German household advice text, produced by the Russian Academy of Sciences.⁹⁴ Sassafras is mentioned multiple times in this text, often together with that other American herbal medicine, sarsaparilla, as in a recipe on weakness which was included in both Russian editions.⁹⁵ *Florin's Economy* was a rather unusual text for the Russian Academy of Sciences to be producing; before the 1760s, it more commonly printed Latin- and German-language works for intellectuals at home and abroad.⁹⁶ The Russian-language *Florin's Economy* was aimed instead at a lay audience, literate in Russian but perhaps not in Latin or German. *Florin's Economy* was created using a technology (the printing-press) that the Russian state entirely controlled, and it was printed and re-printed by an official institution.⁹⁷ Although the audience for *Florin's Economy* was outside of the immediate sphere of officialdom, the creation of that text was official. From the early seventeenth century through to the late eighteenth century, sassafras was more strongly connected to official than to unofficial Russian medicine.

The early modern Russian empire was a significant end-user of sassafras. Across the seventeenth century, the Apothecary Chancery regularly bought and prescribed this drug, especially to its elite courtly patients, but also sometimes to more humble sufferers such as army servitors. The department also owned, and produced, works including information about sassafras. Those trends continued into the eighteenth century, with the Medical Chancellery continuing to prescribe sassafras, and the Academy of Sciences printing a work that recommended it. Outside of the court, support for sassafras may have been more ambivalent; extant documents on unofficial Russian medicine do not have much to say about sassafras. The view from Moscow is one of official support for a product

⁹³ Griffin, 'In search of an audience'.

⁹⁴ *Florinova Ekonomiiia, s nemetskago na rossiiskoi iazyk sokrashcheno perevedena i napechatana poveleniem eia Imperatorskago Velichestva Vsemilotsiveishiia Velikiia Gosudaryni Imperatritsy Anny Ioannovny Samoderzhitsy Vserossiiskia* [Florin's economy, concisely translated from the German to the Russian and printed on the order of her Most Beneficent Imperial Highness Grand Princess and Empress Anna Ioannovna, Autocrat of All the Russias], St Petersburg: Imperatorskaia Akademiia Nauk, 1738; *Florinova Ekonomiiia v deviaty knigakh sostoiashchaia; s nemetskago na rossiiskoi iazyk sokrashcheno Sergiem Volchkovym. Izdanie vtoroe* [Florin's economy composed of nine books, concisely [translated] from German to Russian by Sergei Volchkov. Second edition], St Petersburg: Imperatorskaia Akademiia Nauk, 1760.

⁹⁵ *Florinova Ekonomiiia* [Florin's economy], 1738, p. 288. *Florinova Ekonomiiia* [Florin's economy], 1760, p. 325.

⁹⁶ Alexander Iosad, 'Sciences strange and diverse: Europeanization through the transfer of scientific knowledge in Russia, 1717-65', PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 2017.

⁹⁷ Simon Franklin, 'Printing and social control in Russia 1: Passports', *Russian History*, 37, 2010, pp. 208–37; Franklin, 'Printing and social control in Russia 2: Decrees', *Russian History*, 38, 2011, pp. 467–92.

that may have had more limited appeal outside of the Kremlin. Yet that official support is still hugely important. For nearly two centuries, one of the largest empires of the early modern world, an empire which included not a few botanical treasures of its own, and which had substantial access to medicaments from Asia, still chose to devote time and attention to that New World drug from the other side of the early modern global world.

Conclusion

We began this history of sassafras with the issue of how this is a plant with multiple names, and the name of multiple plants. Those complications are both problematic and enlightening for historians of the early modern global world, as it allows us to look at the multiple, global existences of an object used over a broad geography. Without the material remains of the early modern global drug trade (mostly consumed or lost long ago), what we are following is names, and names changed. 'Sassafras' did not exist until those French misadventures in 1560s Florida, yet the tree that word was attached to was known, and well known at that, by the indigenous inhabitants of the region. Native Americans made a substantial contribution to the workings of the early modern global world: their knowledge of medicinal plants in particular made a huge impact on Eurasia, when their knowledge was colonised, and their medicaments appropriated, by the Western Europeans who mobilised both for profit in Eurasia. Highlighting the problems of even thinking of this as a history of sassafras, then, allows us to direct attention to major knowledge-makers and brokers of the early modern global world, who dealt not in sassafras, but in wissoe, winuak and pauame. Following the important work revealing just how seriously the excessive focus on white Europeans has distorted the history of science and medicine, we need to explicitly acknowledge the vital contributions of Native Americans like the Timucua to early modern global medicine, and we should call them what they were: experts.

That the Russian Empire could be so interested in sassafras, a tree that only grew an ocean away, was long known only to Native Americans, and brought into Eurasia by the Spanish Empire, tells us something important about the entangled nature of the early modern world. The Atlantic world empires in particular have been discussed as

entangled. But the concept of entanglement has a broader utility for understanding the early modern global world. The history of sassafras was the history of shifting entanglements of objects, words, and ideas, as they moved between multiple entangled empires. The living tree and the tea that could be made from its roots were vital in the Native American part of this history; the root of that tree linked the Native American and Eurasian parts of this story, as it was the root, and numerous recipes including it, that were the key objects on the other side of the Atlantic. The multiple American names for that tree were meaningful in the Americas, whereas the derivatives of that tree were always referred to as sassafras in Eurasia; those American and European words were only linked by the root of that tree. And the importance of that root in Eurasia was always bound up with Eurasian ideas of the New World, created out of American experiences but filtered through what Europeans expected, and wanted, to find. In the early modern world, entanglements were not only an issue of how empires related to one another; rather, the complicated commodity histories of this period can be better understood as shifting entanglements of objects, words, and ideas.

Following the entanglements that shaped the multiple lives of sassafras also highlights certain undervalued connections of the early modern global world. Thus far, scholarship has placed Russia in that global world as a border region and middleman between the states of Europe and the civilizations of Asia. And Russia was indeed a major player in Eurasian interactions. Tracking sassafras shows something different. The question of Russia's pre-1732 perception of the Americas has rarely been asked, let alone begun to be answered. After that first account of the Americas in Old Church Slavonic in the 1530s, the Russian elite were interested in monitoring European involvement in the Americas through translations of Western European newsheets, and in taking advantage of the new American medicaments available in Eurasia as a result of that process, sassafras among them. In contrast to the total silence of existing work relating to the place of Russia in the Atlantic world, here we see how the entangled nature of early modern empires with the entanglements of objects, words, and ideas that made up 'sassafras' meant that Russia could be an enthusiastic end-user of a plant growing half a world away.