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ARTICLE

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.

Keywords: entangled empires; Eurasia; Florida; sassafras; Vast Early Americas

This is an article about three entangled histories that spanned multiple 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 the word 'sassafras', which first 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: sideas about the Americas, 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.[1] Those three stories – of an object, a word, and an imagined place – are neither identical nor inseparable. They are the intertwined 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.[2] Powhatans called the tree *winauk*, a

†My thanks go to everyone who read and commented upon this article or the issues discussed within it, including the Eurasian Studies Reading Circle here at Nazarbayev University, and two anonymous peer reviewers; the many archivists and librarians who helped me track down the sources I rely upon here; the editors of the *Journal of Global History* for their patient encouragement; and the Wellcome Trust (grant no. 101554/Z/13/Z), the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, and Nazarbayev University for supporting this research. All remaining errors, omissions, and unfortunate oversights are entirely my own.

[1]On imagined and imaginative geography, see Edward Said, *Orientalism*, London: Penguin Classics, 2003, esp. p. 54.

[2]Mary R. Bullard, *Cumberland Island: a history*, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2005, p. 295.

name they also used to refer to a region in which it grew in abundance.[3] 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 the same tree *pauame*.[4] Modern Native Americans also use sassafras: the Rappahannocks made sassafras tea to treat fevers in 1970s Virginia, and sassafras tea is today drunk for both recreational and medicinal reasons by several Native American communities.[5]

Wissoe, *winauk*, and *pauame* all refer to one tree, called by modern botanists *Sassafras albidum*. Early modern European colonizers of the Americas, initially the French, and later the Spanish and British, encountered the growing tree in its American botanical context. That living tree 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 widespread use of the plant. In the 1560s, the Timucua of Florida showed 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 Timucua texts is the 1613 *Confessionario*. The only listed author 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.[6] The *Confessionario* notes how important herbal medicaments were to Timucua medicine, but does not specifically mention *pauame* or sassafras, and so what we know of Timucua expertise on *pauame* comes from European sources.[7]

It was the appropriation of Timucua expertise on *pauame* by French and Spanish colonizers 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.[8] Stephanie Gänger has established that sassafras was being sold in Turkish ports by the eighteenth century.[9] 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.[10]

[3]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, p. 11; Holly Dugan, *The ephemeral history of perfume: scent and sense in early modern England*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011, p. 94.

[4]*Ibid.*, p. 79.

[5]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.

[6]Francisco Pareja, *Confessionario en lengua Castellana y Timuquana con unos consejos para animar al penitente. Y assi mismo van declarados algunos effectos y prerrogariuas deste sancto sacramento de la Confession. Todo muy util y prouechoso, assi para que los padres confessores sepan instruyr al penitente como para que ellos aprendan à saber se confessar*, Mexico, 1613, http://www.archive.org/stream/confessionarioen00pare (consulted 9 September 2019); Alejandra Dubcovsky and George Aaron Broadwell, 'Writing Timucua: recovering and interrogating indigenous authorship', *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 15, 3, 2017, pp. 409–41.

[7]Tamara Shircliff Spike, 'Sucking, blood, and fire: Timucuan healing practices in Spanish Florida', *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 94, 2, 2015, pp. 143–68.

[8]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, p. 140.

[9]Stefanie Gänger, 'World trade in medicinal plants from Spanish America, 1717–1815', *Medical History*, 59, 1, 2015, p. 53.

[10]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, 1207. Maria Unkovskaya, *Brief lives: a handbook of medical practitioners in Muscovy, 1620–1701*, London: The Wellcome Trust, 1999, p. 74.

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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 that 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.[11] 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, while 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. The Timucua of the 1480s would not have recognized the word. By the 1570s, however, the Spanish botanist Nicolás Bautista Monardes used it to identify a tree with valuable medicinal properties that only grew in the Americas.[12] The sassafras of Monardes, the earliest textual sassafras, was a word that Europeans came to know as relating to the sassafras root and the medicines made from it; this word was then employed 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 commonplace inclusion in Eurasian botanical and medical texts of the early modern period, eventually led to the later creation of multiple textual sassafrases, which became increasingly distant from Monardes' meaning. In the nineteenth century, a European natural philosopher would take sassafras to refer to the same plant that Monardes described, but would use a slightly different term, the binomial classification *Sassafras albidum*.[13] A botanist from the mid twentieth century would also find this binomial familiar, seeing sassafras as a genus of plants, including not only Monardes' American plant but also two East Asian plants, *cha mu* and *tai wan cha mu*, then recently renamed and classified as *sassafras tzumu* and *Sassafras randaiense* respectively.[14] A paleobotanist of the 1980s would point to a newly discovered extinct North American plant that had recently been added to the sassafras genus, *Sassafras hesperia*.[15] In the modern world, then, there are multiple textual sassafrases; the word has come to relate to several plants from different times and places. We are here concerned only with the first textual sassafras, the word that Europeans used to understand the 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 them into sassafras, they were similarly creating the New World. The New World was the imagined geography that 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 new-found world*.[16] This trend was vitally important to the commodification of American goods in Eurasia: consumers

[11]Paul Kelton, *Epidemics and enslavement: biological catastrophe in the Native Southeast, 1492–1715*, Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2007, p. 83.

[12]Magnaghi, 'Sassafras', pp. 10–21.

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

[14]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 *tai wan 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.

[15]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.

[16]John Frampton, *Ioyfull 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.

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were sold the idea of a New World from which valuable new products were available. Considering sassafras outside the Atlantic world, it is therefore important to ask what the Ottomans, Ming, Mughals, Safavids, and Russians thought of the New World. 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', which 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 the British, Spanish, and Portuguese empires; and Matthew P. Romaniello has recently argued that the British and Russian empires were similarly entangled in the eighteenth century.[17] These works have demonstrated that earlier historiography viewing empires as separate entities had misrepresented those empires and the interactions between them. Here I propose the existence of an entwining that has not previously 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 the country's connections with western Europe.[18] There is a community of scholars working on Russia's American colonies of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[19] Although Russia's 1627 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.[20] 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 thereafter, demonstrates that Russia was already involved 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 on the activities of white Europeans, and have too often ignored, undervalued, or deliberately obscured the role that people of colour 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.'[21] 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.[22] Publications 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.[23]

[17]Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, ed., *Entangled empires: the Anglo-Iberian Atlantic, 1500–1830*, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018; Matthew P. 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.

[18]For example, Erika Monahan, *The merchants of Siberia: trade in early modern Eurasia*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016.

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

[20]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: Routledge, 2011, pp. 19–35. For a work focused on the post-1732 period that briefly discusses earlier developments, see N. N. Bolkhovitinov, *Rossiia otkryvaet Ameriky, 1732–1799 (Russia discovers America, 1732–1799)*, Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1991.

[21]Cañizares-Esguerra, *Entangled empires*, p. 5.

[22]Kapil Raj, *Relocating modern science: circulation and the construction of knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650–1900*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007; see also the 'Global histories of science' focus in *Isis*, 2010.

[23]Londa Schiebinger and Claudia Swan, eds., *Colonial botany: science, commerce, and politics in the 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: Routledge, 2008.

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 colonization of knowledge'.[24] A central question here is that 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.[25] 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.[26] By considering both the Native American and Russian material, bound together by the more loquacious western European middlemen, a more complete picture of the history of early modern sassafras is visible than when research is limited to the western European sources alone.

This article applies the concept of entanglement to the case study of sassafras. It begins with the creation of that specific French word as a part of the European appropriation of an American tree with American names; and investigates 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 in profiting from this new medicinal object in western Europe. The article then looks at 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 to both the Russian and the Ottoman empires. This is considered alongside 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. Finally, the article discusses Russia's enthusiasm for sassafras, an enthusiasm that began in the early seventeenth century and lasted at least until the middle of the eighteenth. Through thinking about entanglements, it can be seen that early modern commodities such as sassafras were entanglements of objects, words, and ideas, which shifted as the commodity was moved between languages, locations, and texts.

French words in Spanish texts

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 only the words for goods recorded in documents. Researching early modern sassafras more directly connects with names than with things. To write a global history of how a tree with multiple local names became essentialized 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 with the history of how the American tree and its dismembered objects became known as sassafras.

This tree entered European consciousness thanks 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 colonize 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

[24]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 wonder drug: cinchona bark and imperial science in the Spanish Atlantic, 1630–1800*, Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016.

[25]Sujit Sivasundaram, 'Sciences and the global: on methods, questions, and theory', *Isis*, 101, 1, 2010, pp. 146–58.

[26]Alyssa Mt. Pleasant, Caroline Wigginton, and Kelly Wisecup have recently argued for the importance of including indigenous sources. See Alyssa Mt. Pleasant, Caroline Wigginton, and Kelly Wisecup, 'Materials and Methods in Native American and Indigenous Studies: Completing the Turn', *Early American Literature*, 53, 2, 2018, pp. 407–44.

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expeditions record many trees, notably one similar in appearance to the European laurel tree, which smelled 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. However, the colonists would not enjoy this new medicine for long, and never succeeded in making it a French-controlled product in Eurasia. The 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 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 Menéndez de Avilés went to the Florida coast, established the outpost of St Augustine, and then destroyed the nearby French settlement and killed the colonists.[27] Thus, Huguenots who had sought to avoid conflict with Catholics over religion in Europe 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 sassafras tea. These Spanish American colonists wrote to their friends and family in Europe, including about their experiences with Native American medicine.[28] When the colonists returned to Europe, they brought the remedies with them, and recommended them to others.[29] 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. And 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.[30] His interest in sassafras was sufficient to put it in the title of one of his books in 1571.[31] Within the book itself, Monardes describes the plant for us: a straight-trunked tree with tri-form leaves, about the size of a pine, and with a wonderfully sweet smell, which grows in Florida. He also recounts the history of the European encounter with this plant, and of the renaming of the Timucua's pauame tree as sassafras by the French. Most importantly, he sets up what was to become the key features of sassafras as a medicine in Europe: he lists a huge number of ailments which can be treated with sassafras, among them fevers, the ailment that sassafras was most commonly used to treat.[32] 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

[27]Magnaghi, 'Sassafras', pp. 10–13.

[28]Mauricio Sánchez-Menchero, '"From where they are now to whence they came from": news about health and disease in New Spain (1550–1615)', in John Slater, Maríaluz López-Terrada, and José Pardo-Tomás, eds., *Medical cultures of the early modern Spanish empire*, Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2014, pp. 91–106.

[29]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, p. 429.

[30]On Monardes and sassafras, see Ralph Bauer, 'The blood of the dragon: alchemy and natural history in Nicolás Monardes's *Historia medicinal*', in Slater, López-Terrada, and Pardo-Tomás, *Medical cultures*, p. 67; Dugan, *Ephemeral history of perfume*, p. 76.

[31]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 quellas partes, de grandes virtudes y marauillosos effectos*, Seville, 1571.

[32]*Ibid.*, pp. 27–58.

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plant, and relying upon Timucua medical knowledge he had only encountered at a 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.[33] As sassafras and the other American drugs were being written about in Spain, they were also being imported into the country: several tons of such medicaments arrived in Monardes' Seville in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.[34] As established by Teresa Huguet-Termes, these drugs do not show up in Spanish pharmacy texts as often as one 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.[35] 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. A century later, the inhabitants of the westernmost part of the Eurasian continent had learnt about the plant, could buy its root, consume it, and read about it in Monardes' book. As they did the last, it was under a European name: sassafras. The Europeans, as was their common practice when encountering American medicaments, took the object, renamed it, and reconceptualized 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 appropriations 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 the 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 reused either with or without citation, spreading his textual sassafras around western Europe. Sassafras itself was also increasingly to be found in other parts of Europe, 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 jackpot. 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 the history of sassafras in Europe beyond Iberia.

Monardes' work was translated multiple times into multiple languages.[36] Significantly, the translator who created the Latin version was Carolus Clusius, the influential botanist interested

[33]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.

[34]*Ibid.*, p. 368.

[35]*Ibid.*, pp. 359–76.

[36]Daniela Bleichmar, 'Books, bodies and fields: sixteenth-century transatlantic encounters with the New World', in Schiebinger and Swan, *Colonial botany*, pp. 83–99.

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in American *materia medica*.[37] Here ideas about sassafras, appropriated from Native American knowledge by European invaders of the Americas, and encoded by Monardes, were reframed by Clusius. According to José Pardo-Tomás, Clusius provided a faithful translation of Monardes' textual sassafras, but removed Monardes' 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.[38]

Clusius did much to promote American herbal medicines in Latinate Europe, with natural historians from Paris to Prague reading his work.[39] Yet by the time that he 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, including John Frampton's retitled English edition.[40] An important point to note here is the speed at which these translations appeared: Monardes published his Spanish text in 1571, Clusius his Latin translation in 1574, and Frampton his English text in 1577. A decade after the Spanish drove the French out of Florida, and half a decade after Monardes wrote his work in Spanish, it was already available in other western European languages, and thus 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 cites Monardes multiple times in this text, first printed some eighty years after Monardes' book.[41] He describes sassafras in some detail, noting its location as Florida and outlining its use against venereal disease, and gastric and uterine problems.[42] In doing so, he explicitly follows Monardes. Worm also relies upon Monardes for his information about other American medicaments, such as sarsaparilla.[43] He therefore took as his major authority on American plant medicaments a Spaniard who had never travelled to the Americas. Such followers of Monardes as Worm, as well as the translators of Monardes like Clusius and Frampton, helped popularize Monardes' favoured American specific of sassafras root outside 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 were being traded through London.[44] As early as 1621, a ship passing though the Danish Sound included 'sassafras hold' among its cargo.[45] In the 1660s, a merchant working for the Russian court was able to buy 90 kilos of sassafras in Hamburg, indicating a substantial stock of that drug on the Hamburg markets.[46] The 1724 Russian Tariff-Book lists sassafras as a good for which a regular tax had been set, information retained in a Dutch translation of the

[37]Huguet-Termes, 'New World *materia medica*', p. 366.

[38]José Pardo-Tomás, 'Two glimpses of America from a distance: Carolus Clusius and Nicolás Monardes', in Florike Egmond, Paul G. Hoftijzer, and Robert Visser, eds., *Carolus Clusius: towards a cultural history of a Renaissance naturalist*, Amsterdam: Edita-Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2007, pp. 189–90.

[39]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. 214–31.

[40]Frampton, *Ioyfull newes*.

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

[42]Ole Worm, *Museum Wormianum*, Leiden, 1655, vol. 2, pp. 171, 173–4.

[43]*Ibid*., pp. 159–60.

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

[45]Danish Sound Toll records online, http://dietrich.soundtoll.nl/public/cargoes.php?id=4065295 (consulted 28 August 2019).

[46]Clare Griffin, 'Russia and the medical drug trade', *Social History of Medicine*, 31, 1, 2016, p. 17.

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text.[47] 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 the Atlantic world by the eighteenth.[48] 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 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 sassafras, with limited success.[49] 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 the Spanish empire is *how* Raleigh's men went about their search for sassafras: they 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.[50] British attempts to find new sources for sassafras that they could control and profit from were in direct competition with the Spanish, but were also 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 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, as it was in Britain from 1633, it was as a botanical specimen rather than as a cash crop.[51] 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.[52]

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

[47]Stadsarchief Amsterdam, The Netherlands, collection no. 78, Archief van de Directie van de Oostersche Handel en Reederijen (Archive of the Directorate of the Baltic Trade and Shipping Companies), Item 399, 'Reglement van laden en lossen en tarief van inkomende en uitgaande rechten van de havens Petersburg, Viborg, Narva, Archangel en Kola (Rules on the loading and unloading and tariffs of incoming and outgoing goods of the ports of Petersburg, Viborg, Narva, Archangel and Kola)' (1724), pp. 30, 49.

[48]Gänger, 'World trade in medicinal plants'.

[49]On British attempts to find sassafras, see Dugan, *Ephemeral history of perfume*, p. 73; Charles Manning and Merrill Moore, 'Sassafras and syphilis', *New England Quarterly*, 9, 3, 1936, pp. 473–75. On French attempts, see Philip P. Boucher, *France and the American tropics to 1700: tropics of discontent?*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008, pp. 40–61; Magnaghi, 'Sassafras', pp. 10–21.

[50]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. 170–86.

[51]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.

[52]Dugan, *Ephemeral history of perfume*, p. 92.

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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 being attacked by Native Americans.[53] As numerous Native American groups were massacred by European invaders during 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 monopolize American natural resources were once again substantially determined by violence.

The Spanish empire found significant 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 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. It is thus necessary to turn here to Eurasian ideas of the New World, and, more specifically, to the sequence of events that led to the rest of Eurasia finding 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.[54] 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.[55] 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

[53]*Ibid*., p. 92.

[54]Osher Map Library, 'The diffusion of Columbus's 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).

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

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rest of Eurasia came to know of both the Columbus voyages and the Americas is less well established.

Some work has been done on what the Ottomans, in particular, 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 admiral Piri Reis. According to the map itself, it was partly based on information secretly collected about the Columbus voyage.[56] 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.[57] Chinese officials could read about the European invasions of the Americas by at least 1623.[58] Across the early sixteenth to the early seventeenth centuries, major Eurasian empires outside 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 Guangdong by the first decade of the seventeenth century.[59] 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.[60] In contrast to the enthusiasm for this new commodity displayed by the tobacco-growers of Fuijian and Guangdong, 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.[61] Russian concerns aside, 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 centuries? Early modern Russian knowledge of and interest in the Americas has been almost entirely essentialized to their experience with Alaska. In 1732, a Russian Academy of Sciences expedition sailing east from Asia sighted land: what is known today as Alaska. In the early nineteenth century, it was called Russian America, as the 1732 sighting turned into creeping Russian colonization of that region, which only ended in 1867, with the sale of the territory to the United States.[62] The importance of that first sighting of land in 1732 has 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.[63] Between the idea of 1732 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.

[56]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. 323–30.

[57]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 / Journal of Ottoman Studies*, 40, 2012, pp. 1–38.

[58]Zhang Zhishan, 'Columbus and China', *Monumenta Serica*, 41, 1993, pp. 177–87.

[59]Carol Benedict, *Golden-silk smoke: a history of tobacco in China, 1550–2010*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011, p. 17.

[60]Rudolph P. Matthee, *The pursuit of pleasure: drugs and stimulants in Iranian history, 1500–1900*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005, pp. 119–20.

[61]Romaniello, 'Muscovy's extraordinary ban'.

[62]Ilya Vinkovetsky, *Russian America: an overseas colony of a continental empire, 1804–1867*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

[63]Bolkhovitinov, *Rossiia otkryvaet Ameriky*, pp. 6–7.

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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,[64] [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.[65]

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 emphasize this issue, 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 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. This convinced Columbus that land was near, and helped him quell a mutiny.[66] 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 gained 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.[67] In 1674, a report was created for the Ambassadorial Chancery by Andrei Vinius, a notable Dutch-Russian administrator, on Spain and its American colonies, a text that focused on military activities and the production of precious metals.[68] 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 Americas. Thus, 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: '6–27 September [1667]. Translation from Dutch printed newssheets. From the Spanish lands from the town of Madrid. 6 September. It is known here that our caravan [*sic*] of Indian ships with silver has arrived safely in St Lucia,

[64]According to the pre-1700 Russian calendar.
[65]Maxim Grek, *Sochinenia (Essays)*, Kazan: n.p., 1862, vol. 3, p. 44.
[66]Loudon, *Arboretum et fruticetum Britannicum*, p. 1301.
[67]Bolkhovitinov, *Rossiia otkryvaet Ameriky*, p. 7.
[68]Kees Boterbloem, *Moderniser of Russia: Andrei Vinius, 1641–1716*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 85.

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and they say that the silver in those vessels totals 1,200 million gold coins.'[69] 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 sassafras.[70] 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.[71] 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 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.[72] 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 taken: such 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* (medical practitioners), despite the frequent efforts of Europeans to downplay or conceal their importance.[73] Without the expertise of *curanderos*, 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 in the context of their 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.[74] During the same period, the government also sent out servitors on fact-finding expeditions, such as one designed to find a Russian-controlled

[69]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.

[70]See, for example, *ibid.*, pp. 128, 514; S. I. Kotkova, ed., *Vesti-Kuranty, 1645–46, 1648g. (News and newspapers, 1645–1646, 1648)*, Moscow: Nauka, 1980, p. 164.

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

[72]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: hyllningsskrift till Barbro Nilsson (tribute to Brabro Nilsson)*, Stockholm: Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, 2002, pp. 181–90.

[73]Crawford, *Andean wonder drug*, pp. 26–30.

[74]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. 255–86.

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source for that other valuable early modern medical commodity, rhubarb, in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to avoid continued reliance on supplies from China.[75] 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 empire.[76] The empire was also interested in its Asian neighbours, creating a spying network that gathered information on their major rival, China.[77] This gathering of information was a part of the entanglement of empires, with the Russian empire entwined both with its Eurasian neighbours and with 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.[78] 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 to Russia's foreign trade in the seventeenth century as Arkhangelsk, the northern port that was the major entrepôt for goods arriving from the West.[79] Other regional trade centres, such as the market at Lake Yamysh (located in what is now the Republic of Kazakhstan), whose importance has recently been highlighted by Erika Monahan, also facilitated a major East–West trade from which the Russian empire benefited.[80] Russia engaged in a major trade with Asia, facilitated by a number of Central Asian middlemen-merchants.[81] The Russian empire was entangled with other empires around the early modern global world, through both acquisition 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 Americas as special, new, and 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 intertwined 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 on 1732, ideas about the New World had been available to the Russian elite for at least two centuries by the time that 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 of precious metals there in the seventeenth century (and conflict over that sourcing), for the Russian empire natural wealth like sassafras was a defining part of the New World.

[75]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. 227–51; 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.

[76]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, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection Washington, DC, 2017, pp. 235–56.

[77]Gregory Dmitrievich Afinogenov, 'The eye of the tsar: intelligence-gathering and geopolitics in eighteenth-century Eurasia', PhD thesis, Harvard University, 2015.

[78]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.

[79]Stephen Frederic Dale, *Indian merchants and Eurasian trade, 1600–1750*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 78.

[80]Monahan, *Merchants of Siberia*.

[81]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, CA: University of California Press, 2011.

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, easternmost of the European polities, and so quite some way from Seville, where it had entered Europe and been described by Monardes. The presence of sassafras so far east was 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 throughout the seventeenth century, was periodically 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 that medicament, 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 it is unclear whether that should be taken to mean the wood of the tree, or simply an indication that the origin of the medicament was tree rather than, say, a flower. 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.[82] Neither reference mentions whether 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 that 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 the specific nature of sassafras-as-object.

Russia regularly imported sassafras. According to the import records of the official medical department, the Apothecary Chancery, it was one of the most consistently purchased medicaments in the second half of the seventeenth century.[83] What is interesting is *how* Russians acquired sassafras. Despite the major role of the Spanish in the Eurasian sassafras trade, they 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.[84] The British, who similarly tried to gain control of the sassafras market, do 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 the Apothecary Chancery, there may well have been further informal imports of sassafras from Britain across the century.[85] However, Russia also imported sassafras from countries not directly involved in struggles over the plant in the Americas, notably both the Netherlands and the German lands.[86] Once again, following sassafras shows the entanglements of the early modern world, where sassafras was both jealously guarded and widely sold.

[82]Mamonov, *Materialy*, vol. 2, pp. 334–46; Russian State Archive of Ancient Documents, Moscow (henceforth RGADA), f. 143 (Records of the Apothecary Chancery), op. 2, ed. khr. 748.

[83]Griffin, 'Russia and the medical drug trade', p. 16.

[84]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. 200–9, 218–30.

[85]On the 1602 import document, see Wilhelm Richter, *Geschichte der Medicin in Russland*, 3 vols., Moscow: N. S. Vsevoloski, 1813–17, vol. 1, pp. 448–55. On the origins of medical practitioners at the Russian court, see Sabine Dumschat, *Ausländischer Mediziner im Moskauer Russland*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2006; and Unkovskaya, *Brief lives*.

[86]Griffin, 'Russia and the medical drug trade', pp. 16–17.

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Numerous other Russian documents speak to the importance of sassafras in official Russian medicine. In 1633, it was among the medicines sent out to the Russian army by the Apothecary Chancery, but it never became a regular part of those army supplies.[87] In 1645, Tsar Mikhail Fedorovich was prescribed sassafras for what would prove to be his final illness.[88] Other high-ranking members of court were also prescribed it in the 1650s and 1660s.[89] 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.[90] In 1667, a physician from the Apothecary Chancery composed a report that tangentially dealt with American drugs, including sassafras.[91] In 1698, other colleagues presented Peter the Great with a medical book including a recipe using sassafras.[92] The eighteenth-century successor to the Apothecary Chancery, the Medical Chancellery, kept sassafras in stock at least into the 1750s.[93] The 1783 *Pharmakopoea navalis Rossica* included sassafras.[94] Thus, from 1602 until at least the late eighteenth century, sassafras was a common part of official Russian medicine.

While 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 readership.[95] Of these lay medical texts, only one mentions sassafras: *Florin's economy*. This is a Russian translation of a German household advice text, produced by the Russian Academy of Sciences.[96] 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 of the first two Russian editions.[97] *Florin's economy* was a rather unusual text for the Russian Academy of Sciences to be producing; before the 1760s, the Academy more commonly printed Latin- and German-language works for intellectuals at home and abroad.[98] The Russian-language *Florin's economy* was aimed instead at a lay audience, literate in Russian but perhaps not in Latin or German. The book was created using a technology (the printing press) that the Russian state entirely controlled, and it

[87]Mamonov, *Materialy*, vol. 1, p. 31–2.

[88]*Ibid.*, pp. 120–3; *Akty Istoricheskie, sobrannye i izdannye Arkheograficheskoiu kommiseiu (Historical documents, collected and published by the Archeographic Commission)*, St Petersburg: Tipografiia Ekspeditsii zagotovleniia Gosudarstvennykh bumag, 1841–42, vol. 3, p. 404, no. 246.

[89]1664 prescription to Prince I. D. Miloslavskii, in Mamonov, *Materialy*, vol. 2, pp. 290, 306. 1665 prescription to Prince I. D. Miloslavskii, in RGADA, f. 143 op. 2, ed. khr. 748. Collection of prescriptions from 1672 and 1673 in Mamonov, *Materialy*, vol. 3, p. 813.

[90]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.

[91]RGADA, f. 143, op. 2, ed. khr. 738.

[92]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, p. 714. Russian State Historical Museum, Moscow, Collection of Graf A. S. Uvarov, no. 172, fols. 24r–25v.

[93]RGADA, f. 346 (Records of the Medical Chancellery), book 1.131, fol. 14v.

[94]Margery Rowell, 'Russian medical botany before the time of Peter the Great', *Sudhoffs Archiv*, 1978, p. 357.

[95]Griffin, 'In search of an audience'.

[96]*Florinova ekonomiia, 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 ekonomiia v deviati 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.

[97]*Florinova ekonomiia*, 1738, p. 288; *Florinova ekonomiia*, 1760, p. 325.

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

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was printed and reprinted by an official institution.[99] Although the audience for *Florin's economy* was outside the immediate sphere of officialdom, the creation of that text was official, corroborating the evidence that, 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 the plant, and the Academy of Sciences printing a work that recommended it. Outside the court, support for sassafras may have been more ambivalent; extant documents on unofficial Russian medicine do not have much to say about it. The view from Moscow is one of official support for a product that may have had more limited appeal outside 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 a New World drug from the other side of the early modern global world.

Conclusion

I 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 they allow 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 are 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 colonized, and their medicaments appropriated, by the western Europeans who mobilized both for profit in Eurasia. Highlighting the problems of even thinking of this as a history of sassafras 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*, *winauk*, 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, that was long known only to Native Americans, and that was brought into Eurasia by the Spanish – tells us something important about the intertwined 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 entwined 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 the tree were always referred to as sassafras in Eurasia; the American

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

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and European words were only linked by the root of the 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 as a 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 newssheets, and in taking advantage of the new American medicaments available in Eurasia as a result of that process, sassafras among them. Moving past the total absence of early modern Russia from existing histories of Atlantic exchanges, here we see how the entangled nature of early modern empires, combined 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.

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