



DOCTOR THOMAS: FROM ATOXYL TO A PECULIAR TRAJECTORY IN THE AMAZONIA

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Abstract

In this paper I present an overview of the trajectory of Harold Howard Shearme Wolferstan Thomas, a researcher from the Liverpool School of Tropical Diseases who enjoyed brief prominence in British medicine at the time he was transferred to Amazonia, where he would establish productive relations with native physicians in the first decades of the XXth century. In 1900, the 4th ultramarine expedition of the Liverpool School had set sail for the Amazon region to investigate yellow fever, precisely when the transmission of the disease by mosquitoes was demonstrated in Cuba. Five years later, two other researchers from that Liverpool School disembarked in Manaus. Thomas and Breinl's mission was still the investigation of yellow fever. In the interval between the two expeditions, dynamic processes occurred in the realm of tropical medicine, especially regarding trypanosomiasis.

In this field Thomas gained recognition, when he showed that atoxyl was effective in the treatment of humans and animals infected by trypanosomes. The substance was tested in 1907 in Marajó island by Adolpho Lutz, then the director of the Bacteriological Institute of São Paulo. Thomas remained as director of the Manaus Yellow Fever Research Laboratory until his death. He involved himself with local health problems and with physicians that where in the forefront of Amazonian public health and experimental medicine – an unusual course for European researchers sent in missions to colonies and zones of influence of imperial metropolises. In the 1950's Thomas was 'rediscovered' when he became one of winners of the prize conferred by the Belgian government to the discoverers of the treatment of Sleeping Sickness.