



THE ERADICATION OF SLEEPING SICKNESS ON THE ISLAND OF PRÍNCIPE

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Abstract

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the island of Príncipe was significantly transformed by the success of its cocoa plantations and sleeping sickness became a deadly epidemic. This situation led to the creation of an anti-sleeping sickness plan that was implemented in 1911 by a team headed by Dr. Bernardo Bruto da Costa. Although at odds with what were considered the best practices developed in other European countries, this plan resulted, for the first time in history, in the complete eradication of the disease and its vector in 1914. It was also in Príncipe that the first tsetse traps were developed and the first drug to treat sleeping sickness, Atoxyl, was tested.

The work of Bruto da Costa and his team represented an early case of a combined environmental and pharmaceutical intervention to defeat a disease that was threatening the then extremely famous and profitable "cocoa island". It also served as a justification for the maintenance of Portugal's control over the island that was being threatened during this period.