PHYLLOCALIS VARIEGATUS – AN INTERMEDIATE HOST OF ANGIOSTROGYLYLUS COSTARICENSIS IN SOUTH BRAZIL

C. GRAEFF-TEIXEIRA*/*, J. W. THOMÉ **, S. C. C. PINTO*, L. CAMILLO-COURA*** & H. L. LENZI*

Instituto Oswaldo Cruz, *Departamento de Patologia †Departamento de Medicina Tropical, Caixa Postal 926, 20001 Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brasil **Fundação Zoobotânica do Rio Grande do Sul e Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul ***Faculdade de Medicina, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Brasil

Molluscs collected in five localities in the State of Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil) were digested and examined. The infected slugs were identified as Phyllocalis variegatus and the larvae found were inoculated per os into mice. After 50 days, worms with the characteristics of Angiostrongylus costaricensis were recovered from the mesenteric arterial system. The results establish the role of P. variegatus as intermediate host of A. costaricensis in south Brazil, where many cases of abdominal angiostrongyliasis have been diagnosed.

Key words: Phyllocalis variegatus – Angiostrongylus costaricensis – veronicellid slugs – abdominal angiostrongyliasis

Angiostrongylus costaricensis Morera & Céspedes, 1971 (Nematoda: Angiostrongylidae) is a nematode living within the ileo-colic branches of the mesenteric artery of the vertebrate host. The main definitive hosts are rodents, while veronicellid slugs are implicated as intermediate hosts (Morera, 1973).

A. costaricensis was first described in Costa Rica, where extensive studies have been done on the disease, the parasite and its hosts (Morera, 1967; Céspedes et al., 1967; Morera, 1970; Morera, 1973). In south Brazil many cases of human abdominal angiostrongyliasis have been detected in Pathology Services (Ziliotto et al., 1975; Campos et al., 1977; Iabuki & Montenegro, 1979; Agostini et al., 1984; Ayala et al., 1982; Ayala, 1987).

Besides Costa Rica, successful searches for naturally infected molluscs were reported from Ecuador (Morera et al., 1983) and Honduras (Kaminsky et al., 1987). This study was carried out to verify the presence of A. costaricensis in molluscs and to identify its intermediate hosts in the State of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Veronicellid slugs and other molluscs (Bradybaena similis Férussac, 1821; Deroce ras laeve Müller, 1774 and Limax sp.) were collected around the houses of patients in five cities in Rio Grande do Sul: Arvorezinha, Criansual, Getúlio Vargas, Ilópolis and Palmeira das Missões. After maceration and digestion with artificial gastric juice the material was left overnight in Baermann funnels (Wallace & Rosen, 1969). The larvae found were inoculated per os into Swiss albino mice, which were killed on the 50th day of infection and had their aorta and mesenteric arteries dissected under the stereomicroscope. The same procedure was performed on the animals that died spontaneously. Intra-arterial worms were fixed with Raillet-Henry solution. Length and maximum width were taken on camera lucida drawings, while other measurements were obtained from photomicrographs of the anterior and posterior ends. A number of infected slugs were fixed for taxonomic study.

RESULTS

Eight out of 51 slugs (15.7%) from Cri ssional and 2/10 (20%) from Ilópolis were found infected. In both places all slugs were identified as Phyllocalis variegatus Semper, 1885 (Mollusca: Veronicellidae) (Fig. 1).
Twenty adult worms (16 females and 4 males) were recovered from the aorta and mesenteric artery of the infected mice. Their measurements are presented in the Table and characteristics of male and female posterior ends are shown in Fig. 2. The examination of Deroceiras laevae (n = 66), Bradybaena similaris (n = 69) and Limax sp. (n = 6) was negative.

**DISCUSSION**

In the redescription of A. costarcensis, adult worms were obtained from the cotton rat – *Sigmodon hispidus* Say & Ord, 1825 – the most important definitive host in Central America (Morera, 1973). The differences between our measurements and those from Morera (1973) may result from variation in the age of the parasites and from the use of distinct definitive hosts. However, the location of the adult worm – inside the mesenteric artery – and the morphology of the copulatory bursa are characteristic of *A. costarcensis* (Morera, 1973). The localization of worms in the thoracic aorta was seen only in recently dead mice, probably meaning a post-mortem migration in the rodent.

*Angiostrongylus siamensis* Ohbayashi, Kamiya & Bhaibalaya, 1979 and *A. costarcensis* are similar in development and migration route within rodents, but they have distinctive morphological characteristics (Kudo et al., 1983).

The exposure of laboratory grown molluscs to first stage larvae passed in the feces of infected mice allowed us to maintain the cycle. Preliminary studies failed to find the infection in rodents captured in the area of occurrence of the disease.
Phyllocaulis variogatus is a veronicellid slug with a wide geographic distribution; it occurs in south Brazil, Paraguay and north of Argentina and Uruguay (Thorné, 1976). Some resting specimens can reach 6 cm in length.

The identification of the intermediate hosts in Costa Rica, initially described as Vaginulus plebeius (Morera & Ash, 1970) is under reevaluation. The finding of naturally infected P. variogatus stresses the importance of the family Veronicellidae in the cycle of A. costaricensis.

Our results establish the presence of Angiostrongyulus costaricensis in molluscs for the first time in Brazil. Several new cases of abdominal angiostrongyliasis have been diagnosed lately in the southern States of Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, Paraná and São Paulo (Ayala, 1987; Graeff-Teixeira et al., 1987). We believe that the improved knowledge of this parasitosis among the medical personnel could be an important factor for the detection of a higher number of cases.

RESUMO

Phyllocaulis variogatus — hospedeiro intermediário do Angiostrongyulus costaricensis no sul do Brasil — Moluscos coletados em cinco localidades no Estado do Rio Grande do Sul (Brasil) foram analisados. As lesmas infectadas foram identificadas como Phyllocaulis variogatus e as larvas encontradas foram inoculadas por os em camundongos albinos. Após 50 dias, parasitos com as características de A. costaricensis foram recuperados do sistema arterial mesentérico. Estes resultados estabelecem o papel do P. variogatus como hospedeiro intermediário de A. costaricensis no sul do Brasil, onde diversos casos de angiostrongilíase abdominal têm sido diagnosticados.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Phyllocaulis variogatus — Angiostrongyulus costaricensis — veronicellifeos — angiostrongilíase abdominal

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to Dr Pedro Morera (University of Costa Rica) for assistance and criticism, to G. J. Vieira and J. C. Cruz for preparation of the figures and to R. F. L. Ribeiro for secretarial support. This work was made possible through cooperation of Dr J. C. Togni, Dr C. Dull, A. S. Morais, J. Morais, Dr E. J. Bassani, E. Concatto, P. Sberse, S. Triques, Dr C. D. Moi, Dr P. L. Marafon and Dr A. A. Agostini.

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**TABLE**

Comparison of dimensions (mm) between *Angiostrongylus costaricensis* (Morera, 1973) from Costa Rica and south Brazil (sBR)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurement</th>
<th>Female worms</th>
<th>Male worms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sBR</td>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body length</td>
<td>21.3-29.3</td>
<td>28.4-42.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum width</td>
<td>0.16-0.32</td>
<td>0.32-0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Width base esophageous</td>
<td>0.09-0.13</td>
<td>0.13-0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esophageous length</td>
<td>0.20-0.25</td>
<td>0.23-0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tip-anus distance</td>
<td>0.03-0.07</td>
<td>0.06-0.065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tip-vulva distance</td>
<td>0.14-0.28</td>
<td>0.24-0.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Damaged anterior end of males (n = 4) were inadequate to study.
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