

Traditional Camel Veterinary Treatment Among the Bedouins of Sultanate of Oman: A Case of Recurrent Miscarriages

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العلاج البيطري التقليدي للإبل عند البدو في سلطنة عمان حالات عسر حمل متعددة

علي التجاني الماحي ويسرا علي التجاني الماحي

الخلاصة: عمل البدو في سلطنة عمان وغيرها من الدول، على تطوير وسائل تقليدية في معالجة الإبل. ولا بد أن هذه المعرفة المحلية، قد تطورت في فترات تلت تاريخ استئناس الإبل في الألف الثالث قبل الميلاد. يوثق هذا البحث حالة معالجة أنثى إبل تعاني من الإجهاض المتكرر في منطقة نفس بالمضيبي في وسط عمان.

كلمات مفتاحية: البدو في عمان، أجهزة اناث الإبل المتكرر، وسائل العلاج البيطري التقليدي.

ABSTRACT: In Oman, Bedouins have developed their own ways of providing medical care for their camels. This indigenous knowledge must have evolved sometime after the domestication of camels around 3000 BC. This paper documents a case of treating a female camel suffering from recurrent miscarriages in al Naffas at al Mudaibi area in the interior of Oman.

Keywords: Bedouins, Oman, camels, recurrent miscarriages, treatment.

Introduction

Bedouins in Oman belong to more than one group. There are coastal Bedouins, interior Bedouins, al Batinah Bedouins, al Najd and Musandam Bedouins (ElMahi, 2011). They are culturally and ethnically the same, but what distinguishes them is their ability to adjust to different regions. Adaptation is a fundamental feature in their empirical knowledge and experience in a harsh arid environment. Their ways and methods are shaped by that ability to estimate the incalculable in unpredictable environmental conditions.

For most Bedouins, whatever the location, the camel is essential for their survival. This gangly cud-chewer has proved beyond doubt to be competent and efficient in the harshest conditions where there are scarce natural resources. And the Bedouins have fashioned ways and methods to treat various maladies of their beloved animal.

This paper reports on how a camel that had a history of repeat abortions was treated. The treatment was photographed and the camel owners interviewed.

Case Report

The present case was documented in the interior of Oman, namely al Naffas at al Mudaibi area (Fig. 1). In this arid

area, a Bedouin family was encountered treating a female camel suffering from recurrent miscarriages in the following manner:

- The female camel was tied firmly in a sitting position and forced into a sternal recumbent position (Fig. 2).
- A charcoal fire was lit and nursed to glow.
- Three iron rods were plunged into the burning charcoal.
- A red-hot iron rod was inserted into the camel's vagina (Fig. 3) and kept in position until it cooled. Subsequently, the procedure was repeated two more times with the remaining iron rods.
- After the procedure was completed the camel immediately ran away upon its release.

The owners of the camel confirmed that she subsequently became pregnant and gave birth. The animal was sold, but we were unable to find the new owner.

Discussion

The Bedouins confirmed that this was the method passed down to them from previous generations. When asked what the relation was between recurrent miscarriages and burning the camel in this manner, they said that this was not known,



Figure 1. Naffas at Al Madiabi in the interior of Oman.

but that any female camel that continuously aborted was treated in a similar way.

The Bedouins burn the posterior part of the cervical opening that causes fibrous tissue to develop and hence results in tightening of the cervix. When successful, according to Bedouin belief, the procedure can help prevent miscarriages. However, if cervical stenosis is not sufficient in reducing the cervical prolapse, then abortions can still occur or in a worst case scenario uterine rupture is a potential complication.

Bedouins who were interviewed reported that they experienced no risks or injuries associated with this treatment. Indeed, an elderly informant stressed that if it was not good for the animal, no Bedouin would put his camel at risk.

In Dhofar, camel pastoralists were asked about their method of treating recurrent miscarriages. More than one informant stressed that the camel is usually burned on the skin with a hot iron (Fig. 4). The cauterization is made on both sides of the animal. The continuous use



Figure 2. The female camel tied in a sitting position by the owners.



Figure 3. A red-hot iron was inserted into the camel's vagina.

of this procedure by Bedouins speaks for its validity as a treatment method.

In Oman the camel is a crucial animal for the survival of Bedouins. Besides producing life- sustaining milk, they are utilized as a means of transport and as a faithful companion in the vast desolate landscape. From early times, this animal has constantly influenced the Bedouins' socio-economic and political existence. There is a culture

of names given to the animals, which are a symbol of wealth and pride and a stimulus for poetry. Therefore, a barren or unproductive camel is considered to be a liability with no future or place in their custody.

The indigenous application of ancient veterinary treatments evolved in response to necessity and the accumulation of empirical experience targeting camel health. During the passage of time, this knowledge has



Figure 4. In Dhofar, burning is undertaken on both sides of the camel.

gradually increased in quality, depth, and efficiency among pastoral groups. Accordingly, it would appear that there is something to learn from methodologies that have been passed down from generation to generation.

Throughout the world, pastoral societies have developed their own ways of treating their animals and camel pastoralists are no exception (cf. Antoine-Moussiaux *et al.*, 2005; Antoine-Moussiaux *et al.*, 2007; Doiuli, 2012). The domestication of the camel is believed to have taken place in central Arabia ca. 3000 BC (cf. Zarins, 1989) and therefore, these procedures must have evolved later.

Knowledge pertaining to the treatment of animal is of fundamental importance for the survival of Bedouins. It is also interesting to note that the same healing methods are almost identical among all camel pastoralists despite the vast geographical distances that separate them from each other. For example the treatment for “bad mothering” in Saudi Arabia, Somali and Oman involves almost the same procedure. Until this time, it is the only treatment for the camels’ inexplicable refusal to feed its newborn.

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