

THE PROPHYLACTIC AND THERAPEUTIC ROLE OF PLANTS*

Loredana-Maria ILIN-GROZOIU**

ORCID: 0009-0005-0907-4289

Abstract: For thousands of years, the man has known how to use the natural riches in order to provide themselves with daily food, but also to temper pain and heal themselves. By consuming the roots, leaves and fruits of vegetables, realizing their effects on their own body, the man has progressively identified the healing effects of plants. The oldest, but also the most widespread form of traditional medicine in the world has been phytotherapy. Traditional remedies had become useful, especially when they were tried by many people and proved to be good. Thus, regarding health care and disease treatment, different traditions developed, based on empirical knowledge that was transmitted from generation to generation, inherited from generation to generation, and for many thousands of years, in their simple form, or included in the popular beliefs.

Our field research has highlighted the fact that, even today, the inhabitants of Oltenia frequently resort to popular treatment methods, phytotherapy still remaining an important means of treatment.

Keywords: ethnoiatry, rituals, plants, disease, health.

Our analysis is to be started with the statement: “Treated from the perspective of long duration, food has had a long history, marked by decisive moments in the transition from nature to culture, from raw to roasted, baked, boiled. The innovations made over the centuries and millennia, when considering the obtaining of raw materials, processing techniques, storage, preservation, as well as installations, utensils necessary for preparing food have been carried out slowly, but continuously, being preserved, developed, transmitted within the peasant civilization”¹. The

* The article is part of the research topic: *A research dedicated to the role of the plant kingdom in the popular culture of Oltenia (O cercetare dedicată rolului regnului vegetal în cultura populară din Oltenia)* included in the research project: *Material and intangible culture, cultural identity and heritage projects. Multidisciplinary approaches (Cultură materială și imaterială, identitate culturală și proiecte patrimoniale. Abordări pluridisciplinare)* of the research programme of C. S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor Institute for Studies in Social Sciences and Humanities: *The history of Oltenia: sources, social structures and elites (Istoria Olteniei: surse, structuri sociale și elite)* (2024-2027).

** 3rd Degree Scientific Researcher, PhD., “C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor” Institute for Research in Social Studies and Humanities from Craiova, of the Romanian Academy; E-mail: lorelay2007@yahoo.com

¹ Cornelia Belcin-Pleşca, *Din trecutul alimentației în ținutul ponto-danubian* in volume “Valori identitare în Dobrogea: hrana care unește și desparte”, Bucharest, Encyclopedic Press, 2010, p. 38.

everyday food, the food of the feast and that of the ceremonial meals, the norms of food preparation and consumption, the behaviour during the meal, all these hold identity valences of the Romanian civilization.

Most researchers have reached the conclusion that it is the culinary culture that contributes, to a very large extent, to the outlining of the identity profile of an individual or a community. In relation to the identity function of food, Claude Lévi-Strauss specified that cuisine, which has its origins in the use of fire, is the basis of any culture, being one of the unconscious and universal forms of culture, proper to each civilization: "Just as there is no human society without language, there is no society that, in one way or another, does not cook, nor does it prepare part of their food"². Food was perceived as a cultural system, taste being culturally constructed and socially controlled. The stages of acquisition, cultivation, preparation and consumption of food involve compliance with certain prescriptions and rules that contribute to the good organisation of a society, and the maintenance of links between its members.

The Belgian sociologist Léo Moulin shares the same idea, emphasizing: "We do not eat with our teeth and we do not digest with our stomach; We eat with the spirit, we taste according to some cultural norms that are related to the system of reciprocal exchanges that are the basis of all social life. Therefore, each people is defined by its eating practices and its eating habits, just as well as it is defined by its language, beliefs or social practices"³. Food and culinary practices become an indicator of national identity.

The cultural identity of each nation is often expressed in its dietary model, in the behavioural norms related to the process of cooking and food consumption, in the prohibitions on some foods or products. "Being culturally determined, food, cuisine and table manners include the one who eats in a social universe, in a cultural order. The act of eating is the founder of the collective identity"⁴, mentioned Poulain Jean-Pierre.

In Claude Fischler's opinion, for defining the sense of identity, the food imaginary has a special place. Moreover, food is central to our identity, values, beliefs and social practices influence what people eat and what they think about food, the author believes⁵.

In the Romanian socio-cultural space, food can be a tool for analysing cultural identity, "being the very core of the identity construction process. (...) The food of the ancestors is a foundation of the identity of a social group, regional cuisines constitute a

² Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Le triangle culinaire*, in "L'Arc", no. 26, 1965, p. 21.

³ Léo Moulin, *L'Europe à table, introduction à une psychologie des pratiques alimentaires*, Elsevier Séquoia, Brussels, 1975, p. 63.

⁴ Poulain Jean-Pierre, *Sociologies de l'alimentation: Les mangeurs et l'espace social*, édité par PUF, Paris, 2002, p. 177.

⁵ Claude Fischler, *Food, self and identity*, in "Social Science Information", no. 27(2) 1988, p. 119.

symbolic representation of the nation or national identity, in the desire to affirm historical continuity and a common belonging”⁶. Food is an important object for social knowledge, from culinary techniques and knowledge, producers and consumers, to the material and symbolic aspects of cultures, taking into account lifestyles.

The Romanian gastronomic identity results from the ethno-psychological characteristics and the cultural matrix of the people, and “the observance of the numerous days of fasting, taboos and food prohibitions, the use of foods with a ritual role”, shows “the Romanian creative potential” and contributes to “deciphering the Romanian identity profile”⁷.

The research carried out so far on Romanian gastronomy, as a component part of the intangible heritage in Romania, has less surprised the use of food in therapeutics, so a more careful analysis of their prophylactic and curative properties is required. Both hypostases, dietary and therapeutic, are interesting for research, but we will turn our attention to the issue of maintaining a healthy body with the help of food and diet.

MEDICINAL PLANTS AND THE CURE OF DISEASES

Illness appeared with humanity, and the fear of illness, of the sufferings caused by it, has been a constant that has preoccupied man since ancient times. Bodily and mental health, which cannot be thought of separately, has always been considered the most precious thing of the man. Knowing the suffering, fighting the disease, people tried to soothe them, to alleviate the pain through everything that nature put at their disposal, most of the time plants and healing springs. The art of healing with the help of empirical medical practices has been different from one people to another, the particularities being mainly related to geographical aspects.

Since nature is an inexhaustible source of bioactive substances, the traditional medical practice has been a source of health maintenance since ancient times. The healing and thaumaturgical role of various plants has been observed since the dawn of humanity. The life of the primitive man in the middle of nature, in damp and dark caves, led him to turn to everything that was a natural support in the fight for survival. The collection of plants from nature and their valorisation offered the people of primitive culture and, later, of popular cultures, the opportunity to become aware of the healing qualities of the flora and the chance offered to the sufferer to realize a new potential for healing and for improving health at all levels. Using plants in his

⁶ Angelica Helena Marinescu, *Sociologia alimentației. Teorii, perspective și tendințe*, Tritonic Press, 2016, p. 120.

⁷ Ofelia Văduva, *Pași spre sacru. Din etnologia alimentației românești*, Bucharest, Editura Etnologică Press, 2011, p. 5.

daily diet, man noticed that each of them has a certain influence on the body, thus, if necessary, they remembered those qualities and used them for healing. To relieve rheumatic pain and to heal wounds, both herbal boils, administered internally, and compresses with plant products that acted through the skin were used. In the treatment of rheumatic diseases, especially arthritis and arthrosis, thermal water springs were also used.

At the beginning of the Primitive Commune, man instinctively fought the disease, and the care for the recovery of the sick was greater than in later stages of this prehistoric period. The medicine of the primitive commune was a magical-empirical one based on the observation of the sick, on mystical practices and on the intervention of the supernatural. At the basis of the treatment of diseases and wounds was the spirit of observation of pathological or accidental manifestations. Initially, the remedies were prepared and administered by the wizard-healer of the tribe, later by the priest-doctor⁸. The healer sought to find out the causal agent of the disease, the reason for the patient's suffering: non-observance of an ordinance or non-fulfilment of an obligatory ritual aimed at maintaining health; making a mistake in sleep or dreaming; punishment for a sin of a relative or a member of the community. The sick man was a sinner, and the sickness was a punishment of the gods. After identifying the cause of the disease, the treatment was prescribed: rites of atonement and purification.

The man of the past knew the nutritional value and therapeutic qualities of vegetables, fruits and cereals, animal products, as well as plant products obtained from medicinal plants. Moreover, since ancient times, mud, salt, mineral and thermal waters, potassium have had a thaumaturgical role. Apotropaic valences were attributed to amulets and talismans, called to counteract possible actions of the evil and to promote the health of the wearer.

Although the archaic man was convinced that, in order to have their effect, herbs and weeds had to be accompanied by certain rituals and magical formulas, gradually, he came to the conviction that the medical virtues of plants, their effectiveness, are based on the relationship that exists between the chemical structure of the active ingredients in plants and the pharmacodynamic action exerted on the body. Phytotherapy, the oldest method of improving health at all levels, involves the use of plants, plant extracts or plant active ingredients. Thus, in the prevention and

⁸ Regarding medicine in the primitive Commune see: Gabriel Barbu, Gheorghe Brătescu, Vasile Manoliu, *Aspects du passé de la médecine dans la République Populaire Roumaine*, Bucharest, 1957; Dumitru Berciu, *Contribuții la problemele neoliticului în România în lumina noilor cercetări*, Bucharest, Romanian Academy Press, 1961; Valeriu Bologa, *Din istoria medicinei românești și universale*, Bucharest, Romanian Academy Press, 1962; Nicolae Vătămanu, *Originile medicinei românești*, Bucharest, Editura Medicală Press, 1979; Mircea Eliade, *Istoria credințelor și ideilor religioase*, vol. I. *De la epoca de piatră la misterele din Eleusis*, Bucharest, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică Press, 1981; *Tratat de antropologie medicală, morfo-funcțională, motrică, culturală și metapsihologică* (under the editorial office of: Mircea Ifrim), Bucharest, ASM Press, Vremea Press, 2015; Dan Monah, *Religie și artă în paleolitic*, Piatra Neamț, Constantin Matasa Press, 2015.

treatment of various diseases, the root, bark, fruits, seeds, leaves or flowers of one or more plants are used to increase efficacy or reduce toxicity.

In the healing or prophylactic approaches of primitive man, magic also played an important role. For the purpose of healing, incantations were practiced, sacrifices were offered, and amulets and talismans were used for prophylactic purposes. Medicinal herbs were used, which they accompanied with incantations and incantations and were attributed protective powers (in the form of infusion, tincture, maceration, poultices, medicinal wine, aromatic vinegar, etc.), organo-therapeutic remedies (preserving or restoring health with extracts, powders and animal organs) and oppotherapeutic remedies (treating various ailments by using remedies of mineral or chemical origin).

The antiquity of domestic magic (incantations, spells and absolution) is underlined by N. Cartoian: "Incantations are survivals of the ancient formulas and rituals of the magic of ancient peoples"⁹. The archaic language of incantations, magic-based cultural forms made for the purpose of restoring health and banishing disease, is particularly expressive. In the practice of enchantment¹⁰, complex therapeutic form, there are three treatment methods: phyto-therapeutic, psychohypnotic and bioenergetic.

Archaic traditional medicine did not only involve belief in demons and popular incantation, the traditional reader being convinced that the healing of suffering depended on the combination of natural elements with those of magic, but also with rituals of religious essence.

In the Romanian cultural space, the prophylactic and curative properties of plants have been observed since the time of the Geto-Dacians, their healing knowledge, based on practical experiences, reaching, in some cases, even a level comparable to that of developed societies. The writings of ancient authors prove this. The ancient authors in their writings referred to the medicinal plants used in therapeutics by the Geto-Dacians and considered that they had quite advanced knowledge regarding the healing of diseases.

⁹ N. Cartoian, *Cărțile populare în literatura românească*, vol. I *Epoca influenței sud-slave*, Bucharest, 1929, p. 233.

¹⁰ Regarding folk magic, incantations and descriptions of magical practices see: Simeon Fl. Marian, *Vrăji, farmece și desfaceri*, Bucharest, 1893; Daniil Ionescu, Daniil I. Alexandru, *Culegere de descântece din județul Romanați*, I–II, Bucharest, 1907; A. Gorovei, *Descântecele românilor*, Bucharest, Romanian Academy Press, 1931; Andrei Oișteanu, *Motive și semnificații mito-simbolice în cultura tradițională românească*, Bucharest, Minerva Press, 1989; N. Coatu, *Structuri magice tradiționale*, Bucharest, BIC ALL, 1998; Radu Răutu, *Antologia descântecelor populare românești*, Bucharest, "Grai și Suflet" Press, 1998; Antoaneta Olteanu, *Ipostaze ale maleficului în medicina magică*, Bucharest, Paideia Press, 1998; V. Bălțeanu, *Terminologia magică populară românească*, Bucharest, Paideia Press, 2000; Camelia Burghel, *În numele magiei terapeutice*, Zalău, Limes Press, 2000; Sanda Golopenția, *Limba descântecelor românești*, Bucharest, Romanian Academy Press, 2007; Loredana-Maria Ilin-Grozoiu, *Ritualul magic al descântatului*, in "Memoria Ethnologică", no. 88–89/2023, Baia Mare, pp. 20–33.

Our ancestors knew the healing characteristics of plants and used them, based on tradition, as teas, poultices, tinctures, syrups, local baths, general baths, ointments and other preparations with therapeutic value. The reason why they resorted to natural practices and therapies was, as today, the belief that they would promote a healthy life.

Perceived as sacred, the calendar of harvesting medicinal plants was rigorously respected in the ancient cultures. The harvesting of food plants varied depending on the date of the beginning of the growing season, weather conditions and other factors of tradition. At the level of the collective mind, the time and ritual of harvesting medicinal plants give them healing qualities, magical, apotropaic and divinatory virtues. The medicinal plants were harvested according to a precise calendar, the days and times of the day being observed exactly according to tradition. These days were the ones close to the spring and autumn equinoxes and the summer solstice, when the vegetation cycle reaches its threshold of maximum potential. These astronomical phenomena were indispensable for the preparation of the calendar. At the same time, the popular calendar also specified the favourable places for harvesting. The people who harvested had to be clean in body and soul, to say certain words and magic formulas at the time of harvesting, to have a certain outfit etc.

The days when the medicinal plants were harvested were grouped around the holidays that determine collective living in sacred time. M. Pop spoke about the role of the holiday, that of re-establishing a permanent link between all temporal and spatial levels: "Time is uninterrupted and in order to understand it, people cut it into slices and created the Year; on these slices, there is a cut: this cut is the feast"¹¹.

ARCHAIC AND CURRENT THERAPIES RELATED TO THE USE OF PLANTS. AN EXPRESS RESEARCH FROM THE OLTENIA ETHNOGRAPHIC SPACE

In this material, it is intended the bringing to the fore of some ethnographic data collected from Oltenia, where the inhabitants follow, in moments of existential balance, when their health is endangered, the traditional treatment practices. The information that will be presented in the text is provided by the performers from Oltenia, resulting from our field research.

The specialized literature (historical, archaeological, ethnological works) has shown, on numerous occasions, that, in the Romanian cultural space, traditional treatment methods have had a special importance in preserving or maintaining the health of the individual, their prophylactic effect and therapeutic qualities being well known since ancient times. In the world of the traditional village, therapeutic remedies of folk origin have been passed down from generation to generation. If we

¹¹ M. Pop, *Folclor românesc*, vol. I, Bucharest, Grai și Suflet Press, 1998, p. 259.

refer to the use of ethnoiatric remedies associated with incantations, we find that there are practical and symbolic uses, so that symbolic actions have also been incorporated into traditional treatment methods.

Further on, there are to be presented some ethnographic examples related to the elements of empirical medicine, but without drawing up a complete repertoire of practices and treatments made in order to regain health and banish disease, known from ancient times. We will consider the role of the plant in the prevention and treatment of diseases, revealing the ritual-mythical-symbolic valences of the plant kingdom. We considered it necessary to insist only on some less approached problems that concern the identification and elucidation of the specific particularities of the traditional communities in Oltenia.

The use of medicinal plants in herbal medicine dates back to ancient times. The man of all times has known the healing properties of plants and used them on the basis of tradition in the form of teas, poultices, tinctures, syrups, local baths, general baths, ointments and other preparations with therapeutic value.

Here are some examples of natural products from plant sources that contain active components with a wide range of biological activities, have antispasmodic and anti-inflammatory properties and are used by the locals of Oltenia in preserving health, preventing illness and treating various diseases. Currently, in the researched area, phyto-therapeutic products have gained considerable popularity, being frequently used in health preservation.

Traditional herbal medicine, the oldest method of improving health at all levels, involves the use of plants, plant extracts or plant active ingredients. Thus, in the prevention and treatment of various diseases, the root, bark, fruits, seeds, leaves or flowers of one or more plants are used to increase efficacy or reduce toxicity.

In Oltenia ethnographic space, one of the oldest traditional remedies, used to exert a curative effect, is the ointment from medicinal plants. To ensure the quality, safety and efficiency of the preparation, the following are important: the area from which the medicinal plants were collected; observance of the harvesting period, their drying and storage conditions; compliance with ointment storage recommendations. Otherwise, the ointment has an unpleasant, often pungent strong aroma, the colour is changed, even changes in consistency are observed. In addition to organoleptic changes and changes in the viscosity of the ointment, skin irritation or sensitization may occur. According to a report from Stoicești, County Dolj: "We also buy herbal ointment from the counter, but the homemade one is better. I know the recipes from my mother. This is how I do it: 200 g of clean, unsalted pork lard from the pig you had in your household, heat it on the fire in a bowl and put the green or dried plant when the lard sizzles. A bit of a plant. Let it boil for a few minutes over low heat. Cover the bowl until the next day when it heats up again, strain through few layers of gauze, and add a tablespoon of honey, a few drops of propolis tincture (if you have some) and 50 g of crushed beeswax. When it cools down, put it in small, tightly

closed jars. It must be kept cold, otherwise it may go rancid. Now, instead of lard, grease or paraffin is added. With pork lard it spoils quickly and smells bad¹².

In the empirical phytotherapy of Oltenia ethnographic space, the comfrey ointment is frequently used as a healing agent. It has the ability to accelerate the healing process after burns and surgery, treats skin wounds, soothes rheumatic pain, adjuvant in case of skin cancer¹³.

The ointment from bloomed the aerial part of the yarrow has an anti-varicose and healing action and is used to treat wounds, cuts and hemorrhoids¹⁴.

Arnica ointment has analgesic, anti-inflammatory and prophylactic action in infectious diseases; empirically it is recommended in muscle spasms and pains, to treat arthritis, rheumatism, burns, bruises, dislocations and contusions¹⁵.

Due to its anti-inflammatory and healing effects, the ointment made from lady's bedstraw is indicated against rheumatism, boils, breast lumps, skin diseases, thyroid gland disorders, cancerous ulcers, skin diseases¹⁶.

Burdock ointment is used in the treatment of furunculosis and dermatoses¹⁷.

Nettle, viola tricolor, thyme and coltsfoot ointment is used in the treatment of eczema.

With its strong antibacterial and antifungal action, sage ointment is among the most important herbal preparations, being frequently indicated in preventing skin infections and treating wounds that are difficult to heal¹⁸.

For its healing and anti-inflammatory action, elderberry leaf ointment is recommended in the treatment of various dermatopathies and rheumatism¹⁹.

Plantain ointment has astringent and antipruritic properties and is recommended in eczema, wounds, irritations, hemorrhoids, insect bites²⁰.

For its anti-inflammatory and healing action, nettle ointment is especially recommended in the treatment of eczema²¹.

In the traditional medicine of Oltenia, the leaves of the edible chestnut are recommended as a bacteriostatic in respiratory tract diseases, especially in laryngitis, pharyngitis, bronchitis or as a symptomatic treatment in cough and throat²².

¹² Inf. Maria Luță, 93 years old, locality of Stoicești, Dolj County, 2024.

¹³ Inf. Victorița Iordănoaia, 62 years old, locality of Osica de Sus, Olt County, 2024.

¹⁴ Inf. Daniela Negrilă, 50 years old, locality of Tomeni, Olt County, 2024.

¹⁵ Inf. Emilia Pătrână, 66 years old, locality of Gângiova, Dolj County, 2024.

¹⁶ Inf. Elena Nițu, 68 years old, locality of Prundeni, Vâlcea County, 2020.

¹⁷ Inf. Hermina Sârbu, 73 years old, locality of Izimșa, Mehedinți County, 2020.

¹⁸ Inf. Viorica Sârbu, 82 years old, locality of Lunca, Gorj County, 2020.

¹⁹ Inf. Polina Grădinaru, 80 years old, locality of Argetoaia, Dolj County, 2020.

²⁰ Inf. Victor Micu, 59 years old, locality of Greci, Olt County, 2024.

²¹ Inf. Elena Nițu, locality of Prundeni, Vâlcea County, 2020.

²² Inf. Daniela Negrilă, locality of Tomeni, Olt County, 2024.

The extracts based on chamomile flowers also has bacteriostatic action. Moreover, chamomile has anti-inflammatory, antispasmodic, epithelializing, and, last but not least, carminative action²³.

Bacteriostatic effect on a large number of pathogenic germs also has the aqueous and hydroalcoholic extracts of the greater celandine. They are recommended in gastrointestinal disorders, act favourably in gallstones and in the treatment of cancers²⁴.

The infusion and essential oil of basil flowers and leaves have bacteriostatic, analgesic, carminative, tonic, and expectorant properties, are recommended in gastrointestinal diseases and in the treatment of inflammation of the respiratory tract and play an important role in the metabolism of the nervous system²⁵.

Plantain-based concoctions have bacteriostatic, anti-infective, diuretic and healing effects²⁶.

To detoxify the liver, “a tea is made from equal parts of: corn silk, buckwheat, yarrow flowers, mint leaves, dandelion root, common agrimony, greater celandine, field bindweed and St. John's wort. Pour a cup of boiling water over a teaspoon of this mixture. Let it infuse for ten minutes, strain it and drink three cups a day before a meal”²⁷.

Greater celandine tincture improves liver function, is hepatoprotective and maintains the normal concentration of cholesterol and fats in the liver and blood: “You treat fatty liver with greater celandine tincture. The greater celandine, picked and dried until it becomes dark green, ground until a powder is obtained and put 20 tablespoons of it in a jar. Add half a litre of alcohol. Close the jar and leave it to macerate for two weeks. Shake daily. Strain through folded gauze cloth and pour the tincture into small bottles with lids. Three times a day, 50 drops are drunk, with a little water, before meals. It is consumed for a week and a break is taken for five days. Strict diet is also kept. No fried foods, fatty dishes, no alcohol. Once a day, you can also make an infusion of greater celandine: pour half a litre of boiling water over a teaspoon of fresh greater celandine and leave it for a quarter of an hour. Strain and drink half a glass every two hours”²⁸. Furthermore, serious liver diseases are also treated with this herbal tincture: “In liver cirrhosis, one teaspoon of tincture of ground pines, greater celandine and milk thistle is taken, without eating, three times a day. After two weeks, there is a month break. Diet is also required, all food is eaten only cooked. Drink carrot and spinach juice”²⁹; “If the bile of the liver is lazy, mix, in half a litre of water, a teaspoon of greater celandine tincture, a teaspoon of oregano

²³ Inf. Viorica Sârbu, locality of Lunca, Gorj, County, 2020.

²⁴ Inf. Victorița Iordănoaia, locality of Osica de Sus, Olt County, 2024.

²⁵ Inf. Elena Ionescu, 70 years old, locality of Corlate, Dolj County, 2020.

²⁶ Inf. Emilia Pătrână, locality of Gângiova, Dolj County, 2024.

²⁷ Inf. Maria Luță, locality of Stoicești, Dolj County, 2024.

²⁸ Inf. Maria Rădulescu, 71 years old, locality of Bălcești, Vâlcea County, 2020.

²⁹ Inf. Polina Grădinaru, locality of Argetoaia, Dolj County, 2020.

tincture, one of artichokes tincture. Drink half a glass before a meal. You take this remedy for a week, and then have a five-day break³⁰; “If the bile is lazy, use the field bindweed tincture: macerate 30 g of dry and ground field bindweed in 100 ml of alcohol. Leave it for a week and shake a few times a day. Filter and consume three tablespoons a day. A three-week cure is done with a five-day break³¹.”

In liver diseases, for choleric-cholagogue effects, herbal powder is recommended: “Against bile stones or hepatitis, take, four times a day, half a teaspoon of great celandine powder and hold it under the tongue for a few minutes. A seven-day cure is done. After a ten-day break, it is repeated³²”; In liver cirrhosis, ground pines powder is recommended: “Put a teaspoon of ground pines powder in a cup of water in the evening. In the morning, strain it and pour a cup of boiling water over the remaining plant and let it infuse. After cooling, mix the two liquids. It is drunk in the morning and in the evening, with small sips, on an empty stomach”; Recommended in liver cirrhosis, hepatitis and liver failure is milk thistle: “In the evening, soak four teaspoons of milk thistle seed powder in a cup of water. In the morning it is strained. Over the remaining powder, pour half a cup of boiling water and leave for a quarter of an hour. Combine the two extracts. Drink, before meals, one cup at a time³³.”

In empirical phytotherapy, in the researched area, horsetail decoction is used in pulmonary tuberculosis: “In pulmonary tuberculosis, filed horsetail decoction is drunk. Boil for ten minutes a tablespoon of dried horsetail plant, strain it and drink two cups a day, after the meal. Do a three-week cure and, after a break, start drinking it again. This tea is also good if you have kidney problems or stomach ulcers”; also, the decoction of horsetail, elderflower and juniper fruits has multiple uses: “We take equal parts of dried horsetail stems, elderflower and juniper fruits and make a decoction of which three cups a day are drunk, before meals, against pneumonia and kidney sand. Every two weeks we take a break³⁴.”

Natural remedies in the treatment of lung diseases are also preparations based on fir-tree buds: “In two litres of water, boil 1 kg of fresh fir buds for a quarter of an hour. When it cools, add 1 kg of honey. Boil for another ten minutes, strain and store the syrup in closed bottles, in a cool place. Before each meal, three tablespoons of syrup are taken. It can be added in water or tea. A two-week cure is done. This syrup is also good if you have stomach pains”; “In lung diseases, fir bud tincture is good: in a glass jar, 20 tablespoons of finely chopped fir buds, three tablespoons of fir resin and 200 ml of alcohol are soaked for ten days. After 10 days, strain and drink a teaspoon, in a little

³⁰ Inf. Emilia Pătrână, locality of Gângiova, Dolj County, 2024.

³¹ Inf. Daniela Negrilă, locality of Tomeni, Olt County, 2024.

³² Inf. Viorica Sârbu, locality of Lunca, Gorj County, 2020.

³³ Inf. Elena Ionescu, locality of Corlate, Dolj County, 2020.

³⁴ Inf. Elena Toma, 87 years old, locality of Silea, Vâlcea County, 2020.

water before each meal. Take it for three weeks, and then take a break. With this tincture you can also gargle, especially in the morning and evening³⁵.

In the investigated area, in chronic lung diseases, in chronic pulmonary emphysema, coltsfoot is used: "A juice is made from fresh coltsfoot leaves. It is taken, without interruption, for a month one tablespoon three times a day. Three cups of coltsfoot tea are also drunk from coltsfoot leaves a day. A three-month cure is made"³⁶, "A coltsfoot syrup is made for those who suffer with lungs: fresh coltsfoot leaves are put in a jar, alternating with honey. The jar is closed tightly and left to macerate for a week. Take one tablespoon three times a day"³⁷, "The dried leaves of the coltsfoot are twisted, lit and put off. The smoke should be inhaled. It is done four times a day. This smoke is also good against toothaches; "Three coltsfoot leaves are boiled in half a litre of milk. A little goose lard is also added. Drink it lukewarm, 50 ml each in the morning and evening"³⁸; "Mix two tablespoons of coltsfoot leaves, two of chamomile, one tablespoon of birch and one tablespoon of oregano. Leave it to macerate in the cold for six hours. Strain and drink a lukewarm glass after a meal"³⁹; "Mix 50 g of coltsfoot leaves, pine buds and plantain. Leave to macerate for a few hours in a cup of cold water three tablespoons of this mixture. Boil for a few more minutes, strain and drink after meals"⁴⁰.

Sage is used in the treatment of respiratory diseases: "Sage powder is good for the lungs. Take one teaspoon, three times a day, on an empty stomach. The cure lasts for a month. Sage tincture is also good: take a teaspoon of it, diluted in water, three times a day, after meals"⁴¹; "In a liter of white wine, twenty tablespoons of sage powder are added and macerated for three weeks. Take three tablespoons after a meal. It is also good against asthma"⁴²; "For the lungs, make a tea from chamomile, yarrow and plantain and drink three cups a day, after meals. A four-month cure is done"⁴³.

Mint has important therapeutic qualities since ancient times: "Infusion, tincture and peppermint oil treat lung diseases. Inhalations with peppermint oil can be done. Sometimes we mix mint with garden thyme. Peppermint is also good for stomach and urinary infections"⁴⁴; "Mix mint, viola tricolour and basil and drink two cups a day. A tea cure lasts for three months"⁴⁵.

³⁵ Inf. Maria Luță, locality of Stoicești, Dolj County, 2024.

³⁶ Inf. Victorița Iordănoaia, locality of Osica de Sus, Olt County, 2024.

³⁷ Inf. Viorica Sârbu, locality of Lunca, Gorj, County, 2020.

³⁸ Inf. Emilia Pătrână, locality of Gângiova, Dolj County, 2024.

³⁹ Inf. Victor Micu, locality of Greci, Olt County, 2024.

⁴⁰ Inf. Elena Nițu, locality of Prundeni, Vâlcea County, 2020.

⁴¹ Inf. Eugenia Ban, 74 de ani, years old, locality of Ruda, Vâlcea County, 2021.

⁴² Inf. Maria Rădulescu, locality of Bălcești, Vâlcea County, 2020.

⁴³ Inf. Polina Grădinaru, locality of Argetoaia, Dolj County, 2020.

⁴⁴ Inf. Elena Ionescu, locality of Corlate, Dolj County, 2020.

⁴⁵ Inf. Daniela Negrilă, locality of Tomeni, Olt County, 2024.

The recipe of ethnoiatry also includes elecampane that is used in lung diseases: “Four tablespoons of dried elecampane root are left in a cup of water from evening to morning. Strain and take three tablespoons a day”⁴⁶; “Mix equal parts of seagrass root and marshmallow root. Leave for a few hours, strain and take three tablespoons, three times a day”⁴⁷.

One of the foods consumed for prophylactic purposes and as a cure for the relief and healing of many internal and external diseases was garlic. It is mentioned in the **Holy Scripture** as food and spice in the diversified dishes of the Jews. Although they had received enough food from God, the Israelites asked for the foods they ate in Egypt, including garlic: “... and the children of Israel wept, saying: Who will feed us with meat? For we remember the fish that we ate in Egypt as a gift, cucumbers and melons, onions, leeks and garlic”⁴⁸.

In Oltenia, among the most well-known therapeutic properties of garlic are: expectorant, antiseptic, antiasthmatic, hypotensive, antispasmodic, vermifuge. “In cases of colds and flu, put a quarter of crushed garlic in a one-litre bottle and top it up with brandy. Leave the bottle for 15 days. Garlic macerate is strained and, in the morning, two teaspoons are mixed with warm water and drunk on an empty stomach. Also, if we have a cold, crush a few cloves of garlic and mix them with oil. Rub the soles”⁴⁹.

It has beneficial effects in malignant tumours: “Three cloves of garlic are eaten every day”⁵⁰; “To treat lung cancer, drink 30 ml of garlic juice twice a day, before a meal”⁵¹.

To maintain health, “put seven crushed garlic seeds, 1 litre of boiling water and the juice of a lemon in a jar. Leave the jar closed for three days and take one tablespoon in the morning, before meals. A cure is done for a few months”⁵²; “Crush ten cloves of garlic and put them in a bottle with a glass of oil. Leave it in the cold and drink it for three months before a meal, three times a day. Take a month break and drink again for three months”; “To be healthy, three cloves of garlic are consumed for three weeks, before meals”; “For a healthy liver, put 1 kg of peeled beetroot in a jar and chop three garlic cloves, and herbs that we have (parsley, dill). Fill the jar with water and let it soak until it becomes sour. Strain and drink 2 cups a day of this beetroot bran”⁵³.

People who have hearing impairments “put a clove of garlic in each ear”; “Mix 30 ml of onion juice with 30 ml of brandy. Heat the mixture on the steam. Put three drops in the ear, three times a day”⁵⁴.

⁴⁶ Inf. Maria Luță, locality of Stoicești, Dolj County, 2024.

⁴⁷ Inf. Hermina Sârbu, locality of Izimșa, Mehedinți County, 2020.

⁴⁸ Numerii, cap. 11, vers. 4-5, p. 162.

⁴⁹ Inf. Polina Grădinaru, locality of Argetoaia, Dolj County, 2020.

⁵⁰ Inf. Maria Rădulescu, locality of Bălcești, Vâlcea County, 2020.

⁵¹ Inf. Victorița Iordănoaia, locality of Osica de Sus, Olt County, 2024.

⁵² Inf. Emilia Pătrână, locality of Gângiova, Dolj County, 2024.

⁵³ Inf. Daniela Negrilă, locality of Tomeni, Olt County, 2024.

⁵⁴ Inf. Elena Nițu, 68 years old, locality of Prundeni, Vâlcea County, 2020.

Crushed raw, baked or boiled garlic is applied to warts, corns: “Boil five cloves of garlic in a cup of water. Let it cool a little, soak a towel, squeeze it out and put it on the wound. Over the towel, apply a nylon foil and a bottle of boiling water”; “Crushed or finely chopped garlic is put on the calluses. It is left all night”⁵⁵.

Along with garlic, ancient civilizations used *onions* as food, but also for therapeutic purposes. Onions have anti-inflammatory, antiseptic, antithrombosis, antimicrobial properties, being a natural remedy in the treatment of respiratory diseases, dental neuralgia, diabetes, osteoporosis, cardiovascular diseases, anemia, kidney failure, gallstones, rickets, rheumatic pain.

Cough can be fought if “you drink, three times a day, before eating, a cup of onion and walnut shell tea. It is drunk lukewarm in small sips. In a litre of water, boil two large onions with leaves, two walnuts with shells until the liquid becomes half of what it was. It can also be sweetened”⁵⁶; “Put three chopped onions in half a litre of water in cold water for a few hours. Strain and drink. If you have a stuffy nose, cut the onion and put it in the room”⁵⁷; “Boil ten onions in a litre of milk. When it cools, add a tablespoon of honey or sugar. Drink one tablespoon before a meal”⁵⁸; “In a litre of water, boil an apple, a potato and an onion. Take one teaspoon before a meal”⁵⁹. Tonsillitis and cough can be treated with “grated onions, grated apples and honey, mixed in equal quantities. Consume three teaspoons, three times a day”⁶⁰.

Green onions are a natural remedy in the treatment of rheumatism of the joints: “Green onions are good for bone health”⁶¹.

Against boils: “Chop an onion and mix it with flour and cream. It is placed on top of the boil”⁶².

The information we find above regarding empirical and folk medicine provides us with data for a knowledge of concerns about diseases and cures and is relevant for an understanding of the spiritual culture, of the medical habits of the most distant times. It is certain that, in the Carpathian-Danube-Pontic area, medicinal plants have had a wide use since ancient times. Medicinal herbs, along with other folk medical remedies, were, for centuries, the only accessible medicine, gifts of nature, that people turned to, in order to heal their sufferings.

Our field research in the Oltenia ethnographic space confirms the fact that phytotherapy, the basis of folk medicine, continues to remain an important means of treatment. The properties of some plants used in traditional practice are known by

⁵⁵ Inf. Elena Ionescu, 70 years old, locality of Corlate, Dolj County, 2020.

⁵⁶ Inf. Polina Grădinaru, 80 years old, locality of Argetoaia, Dolj County, 2020.

⁵⁷ Inf. Emilia Pătrână, locality of Gângiova, Dolj County, 2024.

⁵⁸ Inf. Maria Luță, locality of Stoicești, Dolj County, 2024.

⁵⁹ Inf. Hermina Sârbu, locality of Izimșa, Mehedinți County, 2020.

⁶⁰ Inf. Elena Nițu, locality of Prundeni, Vâlcea County, 2020.

⁶¹ Inf. Viorica Sârbu, locality of Lunca, Gorj County, 2020.

⁶² Inf. Eugenia Ban, locality of Ruda, Vâlcea County, 2021.

the inhabitants of Oltenia. Treatment with medicinal plants is based on an empirical tradition and belief in the act of healing.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barbu, Gabriel; Brătescu, Gheorghe; Manoliu, Vasile, *Aspects du passé de la médecine dans la République Populaire Roumaine*, Bucharest, 1957.
- Bălțeanu, V., *Terminologia magică populară românească*, Bucharest, Paideia Press, 2000.
- Belcin-Pleşca, Cornelia, *Din trecutul alimentației în ținutul ponto-danubian*, in volume “Valori identitare în Dobrogea: hrana care unește și desparte”, Bucharest, Editura Enciclopedică Press, 2010.
- Berciu, Dumitru, *Contribuții la problemele neoliticului în România în lumina noilor cercetări*, Bucharest, Romanian Academy Press, 1961.
- Biblia sau Sfânta Scriptură, *Numerii*, cap. 11, vers. 4–5, Bucharest, 2008.
- Bologa, Valeriu, *Din istoria medicinei românești și universale*, Bucharest, Romanian Academy Press, 1962.
- Burghele, Camelia, *În numele magiei terapeutice*, Zalău, Limes Press, 2000.
- Cartoian, N., *Cărțile populare în literatura românească*, vol. I, *Epoca influenței sud-slave*, Bucharest, 1929.
- Coatu, N., *Structuri magice tradiționale*, Bucharest, BIC ALL, 1998.
- Daniil, Ionescu; Daniil, I. Alexandru, *Culegere de descântece din județul Romanați*, I–II, Bucharest, 1907.
- Eliade, Mircea, *Istoria credințelor și ideilor religioase*, vol. I, *De la epoca de piatră la misterele din Eleusis*, Bucharest, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică Press, 1981.
- Fischler, Claude, *Food, self and identity*, in “Social Science Information”, 27, (2) 1988.
- Golopenția, Sanda, *Limba descântecelor românești*, Bucharest, Romanian Academy Press, 2007.
- Gorovei, A., *Descântecele românilor*, Bucharest, Romanian Academy Press, 1931.
- Ilin-Grozoiu, Loredana-Maria, *Ritualul magic al descântatului*, in “Memoria Ethnologică”, no. 88–89/2023, Baia Mare, pp. 20–33.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude, *Le triangle culinaire*, in “L'Arc”, no. 26, 1 1965.
- Marian Simeon Fl., *Vrăji, farmece și desfaceri*, Bucharest, 1893.
- Marinescu, Angelica Helena, *Sociologia alimentației. Teorii, perspective și tendințe*, Tritonic Press, 2016.
- Monah, Dan, *Religie și artă în paleolitic*, Piatra Neamț, Constantin Matasa Press, 2015.
- Moulin, Léo, *L'Europe à table, introduction à une psychologie des pratiques alimentaires*, Elsevier Séquoia, Brusels, 1975.
- Oișteanu, Andrei, *Motive și semnificații mito-simbolice în cultura tradițională românească*, Bucharest, Minerva Press, 1989.
- Olteanu, Antoaneta, *Ipostaze ale maleficului în medicina magică*, Bucharest, Paideia Press, 1998.
- Pop, M., *Folclor românesc*, vol. I, Bucharest, Grai și Suflet Press, 1998.
- Poulain, Jean-Pierre, *Sociologies de l'alimentation: Les mangeurs et l'espace social*, edité par PUF, Paris, 2002.
- Răutu, Radu, *Antologia descântecelor populare românești*, Bucharest, “Grai și Suflet” Press, 1998.
- Tratat de antropologie medicală, morfo-funcțională, motrică, culturală și metapsihologică* (under the editorial office of: Mircea Ifrim), Bucharest, ASM Press, Vremea Press, 2015.
- Văduva, Ofelia, *Pași spre sacru. Din etnologia alimentației românești*, Bucharest, Editura Etnologică Press, 2011.
- Vătămanu, Nicolae, *Originile medicinei românești*, Bucharest, Editura Medicală Press, 1979.

INFORMERS

Informer Maria Luță, 93 years old, locality of Stoicești, Dolj County, 2024.

Informer Victorița Iordănoaia, 62 years old, locality of Osica de Sus, Olt County, 2024.

Informer Daniela Negrilă, 50 years old, locality of Tomeni, Olt County, 2024.
Informer Emilia Pătrână, 66 years old, locality of Gângiova, Dolj County, 2024.
Informer Elena Nițu, 68 years old, locality of Prundeni, Vâlcea County, 2020.
Informer Hermina Sârbu, 73 years old, locality of Izimșa, Mehedinți County, 2020.
Informer Viorica Sârbu, 82 years old, locality of Lunca, Gorj County, 2020.
Informer Polina Grădinaru, 80 years old, locality of Argetoaia, Dolj County, 2020.
Informer Victor Micu, 59 years old, locality of Greci, Olt County, 2024.
Informer Elena Ionescu, 70 years old, locality of Corlate, Dolj County, 2020.
Informer Maria Rădulescu, 71 years old, locality of Bălcești, Vâlcea County, 2020.
Informer Elena Toma, 87 years old, locality of Silea, Vâlcea County, 2020.
Informer Elena Nițu, 68 years old, locality of Prundeni, Vâlcea County, 2020.
Informer Elena Ionescu, 70 years old, locality of Corlate, Dolj County, 2020.
Informer Polina Grădinaru, 80 years old, locality of Argetoaia, Dolj County, 2020.