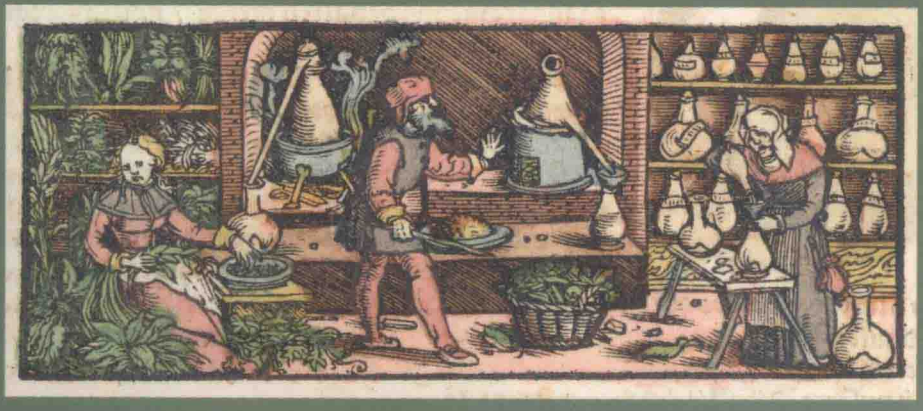
Critical Approaches to the History of Western Herbal Medicine

From Classical Antiquity to the Early Modern Period

Edited by
Susan Francia and Anne Stobart



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Notice to Readers

This book is not intended to offer treatment with herbal medicine. No herbs, recipes or other advice that may be described or considered in this book should be used without professional guidance from a medical or herbal practitioner. The publishers, editors and contributors assume no liability for any injury or damage to persons or property resulting from any use of the remedies or methods contained in this book.

Acknowledgements

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Alison Denham has practised as a medical herbalist since 1984. She is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Central Lancashire in Preston, and has a special interest in the quality, safety, cultivation and conservation of medicinal plants. In 2006 she was appointed to the Herbal Medicines Advisory Committee of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency. As a past President of the National Institute of Medical Herbalists she took an active role in the preparation of the recommendations on the regulation of herbal practitioners. Alison has contributed to *The Western Herbal Tradition* (Elsevier, 2010) and is currently researching John Skelton who was a prominent herbal practitioner in the nineteenth century.

Susan Francia has Masters degrees from both Oxford and Harvard universities, and has taught and carried out research at Harvard. Her background is in the history of medicine and in comparisons between European and Islamic medical history. She is a qualified medical herbalist and was in practice for 12 years. She has extensive experience in teaching herbal medicine, and has taught the history of herbal medicine at Middlesex University. She now works as an independent researcher. Susan has published on Islamic history and on social and medical history in England. She is currently working on the history of medicine in medieval Devon.

Jill Francis completed her PhD, working under the supervision of Professor Richard Cust, at the University of Birmingham. Her area of research was an investigation into the gardening practices of Elizabethan and early Stuart England, exploring how the inherently ephemeral activity of gardening can offer a new perspective on defining status and identity within early-modern gentry society. Her research has included a detailed examination of early-modern gardening manuals, as well as trawling through seventeenth-century gentry manuscript collections archived as far afield as the Huntington Library in California. She has had two articles published in *Garden History*, the journal of the Garden History Society, and one in the *Midland History* journal.

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Vicki Pitman is a practising medical herbalist and a member of the Unified Register of Herbal Practitioners and International Federation of Aromatherapists. She also holds an MPhil in Complementary Health Studies from the University of Exeter. She has published four books – on herbal medicine, reflexology, aromatherapy and on holism in ancient Greek and Indian medicine; and an article in *HerbalGram*. She is an editor of, and contributor to, *The Herbalist*, the journal of the Association of Master Herbalists and the Unified Register of Herbal Practitioners. She now works as an independent scholar.

Anne Stobart is trained as a medical herbalist and completed her PhD at Middlesex University in 2009. Her thesis focused on seventeenth-century domestic medicine in south-west England. Based at Middlesex University in London from 2000, Anne held the post of Director of Programmes for Complementary Health Sciences until 2010. She has research interests in the historical and present-day supply of herbal medicines, and has published a chapter on domestic medicine and the King's Evil in *Reading and Writing Recipe Books, 1600–1800* (edited by Michelle DiMeo and Sara Pennell, Manchester University Press, 2013). Anne is a member of the Advisory Board of the *Journal of Herbal Medicine* (Elsevier/Churchill Livingstone).

Graeme Tobyn is a Senior Lecturer in Herbal Medicine at the University of Central Lancashire. He is a fellow of the National Institute of Medical Herbalists, author of *Culpeper's Medicine* (Element, 1997/Singing Dragon, 2013) and, in collaboration with Alison Denham and Midge Whitelegg at UCLAN, *The Western Herbal Tradition* (Elsevier, 2010). He is currently undertaking a PhD at Lancaster University on 'English herbs for English bodies' in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Anne Van Arsdall's academic home is the University of New Mexico, in a region of the United States where herbalism and folk medicine are both very much alive and have influenced her work with early medieval medicine. She has published on medieval medicine, including the Anglo-Saxon period, on the mandrake plant and legends about it, and on the transmission of knowledge through texts and unrecorded deeds. She is currently working on a biography of Oswald Cockayne, a nineteenth-century scholar who was the first person to translate the Anglo-Saxon medical texts into modern English. One of her long-range projects is to publish a translation and study of an Anglo-Saxon physicians' manual called the *Leechbook of Bald.*

Anna Waldstein is a Lecturer in Medical Anthropology and Ethnobotany in the School of Anthropology and Conservation at the University of Kent. She holds a PhD in Ecological and Environmental Anthropology from the University of Georgia, and a BA in Medical Anthropology from Hampshire College. She has done fieldwork on the popular use of herbal medicines in Zimbabwe, Mexico and the United States and has published work on the role of traditional medical beliefs and practices in maintaining health among Mexican migrants. Anna's current research interests include self-medication and patient empowerment, the use of traditional medical knowledge as an adaptive strategy among migrants, biological citizenship and sovereignty and the Rastafari Way of Life.

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John Wilkins is Professor of Greek Culture at the University of Exeter. He has been working on food and medicine in the ancient world for the past 20 years, with various jointly edited publications including *Food in Antiquity* (University of Exeter Press, 1995), *Food in the Ancient World* (Blackwell Publishing, 2006), *Athenaeus and his World* (University of Exeter Press, 2000) and *Galen and the World of Knowledge* (Cambridge University Press, 2009). He finished an edition of Galen's treatise on nutrition in January 2010 and is currently working on a translation of Galen's *Simple Medicines*, books 1–5, and a monograph on Galen's *Maintaining Good Health*.

Foreword

The history of herbal medicine is, up until the eighteenth century, largely the history of medicine itself. Even though herbs would be mixed with animal parts and minerals, most *materia medica* came from the plant kingdom, and herbs were for everyday use.

The use of metals and minerals in medicine was made widely popular by Paracelsus (1493–1541), who burned the books of Avicenna (c. 980–1037 CE), Galen (c. 130–c. 200 CE) and Hippocrates (c. 460–c. 357 BCE) in the early sixteenth century. Many metals were toxic, but these were more likely to be used by physicians, and it was often said jokingly that well-off patients – who were able to afford a doctor – were more likely to die than poor people who could not. In many cases, the treatment was more dangerous than the disease and, since treatments included arsenic, lead and mercury salts, this is not surprising. Some were so harsh that it led Samuel Hahnemann (1755–1843) to create homoeopathy in 1790, but herbal medicine remained widespread in both lay and professional practice, and was probably much safer. Many consider this still to be the case.

Although there are very many 'herbals', there are few scholarly books dealing specifically with the history of herbal medicine and many books on the history of medicine soon divert their efforts into the branch of study which leads to modern medicine, that is, the isolation of naturally occurring highly potent chemicals and the development of synthetic drugs. Aspirin, based on the active principle of meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) and willow bark (*Salix* spp.), was first synthesized in 1897, and Erlich's manufacture of the first totally synthetic chemotherapeutic drug, arsphenamine (Salvarsan), occurred in 1907. After this time, most texts neglect advances made in the study of herbal medicine, which rather implies that herbal medicine has remained static, despite the evidence that it is evolving and has even experienced a renaissance in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

New forms of traditional herbal medicine from China, India and other parts of Asia have been introduced into the West, and herbs from foreign lands have always formed part of the pharmacopoeia and become integrated into each country's medicine system, both conventional and otherwise. Clinical studies have been carried out on some herbal medicines and found them to be effective, and herbal medicine is as relevant today as it ever has been, occupying a special place in the treatment, and particularly the prevention, of certain types of disease. Nutritional therapies, always a part of medical herbalism, are also now very popular with consumers, and form part of the modern array of supplements available to patients to select for themselves. The European Union is now supporting and funding scientific studies into the efficacy and mechanisms of action of long-standing herbal drugs, and since many of our current drugs were originally derived from plant medicines used in a traditional manner, we can hope – or even assume – that more may follow, which makes the study of the

history of herbal medicine highly relevant today, and this book shows how herbal medicine has been viewed and studied over the years.

The history of herbal medicine has been described many times, but rarely in a critical or scholarly way, and even more rarely using new and revised primary sources which are discussed by social, medical and other historians, medical scientists, herbal practitioners, language experts, anthropologists, ethnobotanists and even an archaeo-ethnopharmacologist. Their scholarly contribution and analysis of the sources has produced a fascinating and reliable account of this long-neglected subject, which is unique in my experience. As the editors explain, herbal history is fragmented, and they provide a way forward for the unification and regeneration of this branch of social and medical history which has been enthusiastically welcomed. The story starts with early Greek medicine and progresses to medieval herbals, with an emphasis on early-modern midwifery manuals, since midwives were likely experts on herbs and 'women's troubles' and their treatment. New archival sources are also described, including trade and probate accounts. Some of the most important herbal sources are described, including texts relating to Dioscorides (c. 40–90 CE), William Turner (c. 1508–68) and John Parkinson (c. 1567–1650), as well as other significant figures and their works. Finally, to the future: how ethnobotany can inform the study of the history of herbal medicine, which may then inform the future too.

Anne Stobart and Susan Francia have brought contributors together who possess a wide spectrum of expertise, and in many cases were previously unknown to each other. They are certainly to be congratulated, but may find they have started something...

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