

Poster presentation

Estonian medicinal plants from the 19th century: the insight into the collection of Jakob Hurt

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Introduction. At the end of the 19th century Estonia (one of the independent Baltic States) was a little part of the Russian Empire. Folklorist and linguist Jakob Hurt launched his famous appeal in 1888 to collect local folklore. Among other questions, he named 54 folk plant names (supplied with Latin equivalent for some) and asked to be sent the descriptions of their use.

Objectives. To find the ways of analyzing the material representing Estonian herbal medicine of 19th century.

Methods. All possible texts (833) describing plant use were selected from among more than 70 000 texts on Estonian folklore, digitalized and analyzed applying several methods.

Results. The texts, in which the Latin name of the plant is given, as well as ones that have proper plant description, are analyzed according to the pharmacological properties of the species involved. With others (which are the majority of the texts) it is particularly observable that while trying to correlate folk plant names with the particular species, there appear several, often tens of possible botanical “representatives” of some given popular name. This data is organized according to possible relations between the plant and the disease. Also, the authors take into account, that by the end of the 19th century, ca 30 popular medicinal books and almanacs were available that described the usage of plants for healing and they had influenced the ethnobotany of that time.

Conclusion. For analyzing ethnobotanical data represented in Estonian folkloristic texts from the 19th century more is needed than ethnopharmacological methods. Some of the data indeed shows us exact plant usage, but most of it has more cultural value, including the possibility of analyzing the transformation of written knowledge into real plant usage.

Keywords: influence of written sources

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