CENTURIES OF THE TRADITIONAL MEDICINE IN HUNGARY*

Millenial exhibition organized by Peter Babulka**

* Places and dates of the exhibition
October 8 -31, 2000 - Hungarian Open Air Museum, Szentendre, Hungary
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I. Traditional Medicine in the period of the Hungarian conquest and the Árpád Dynasty (9th – 13th century)

The pre-Hungarian tribes of Finnish-Ugrian origin and language became contacted with Turkish peoples and states during their migration towards Southwest from the original homeland near the Ural Mountain. The heathen stockbreeder and tiller Hungarians probably occupied the Carpathian Basin in the series of several campaigns during the 9th century. The following periods resulted in some Kuman and Pecheneg effects. Christianisation began around the turn of the millennium, which coexisted with a permanent opposition indicated by so-called “paganic” revolts.

The reconstruction of the traditional medicine of the period of the Hungarian conquest and the Árpád Dynasty may come true only with the common consideration of the results of various branches of science: linguistics, archaeology, anthropology, lapeopathology, paleodemography and the early written sources.

The knowledge of the earliest period has been indicated by the Finno-Ugrian and the Bulgarian-Turkish loanwords in the Hungarian language. The death rate of the age groups of the given population can be established from the skeletons in several excavated tombs from the time of the early Árpád Dynasty. Analysis of the exhibited burial place from the 11th century of Képuszta indicated that the leading age group concerning death rate was that of the infants (181 per thousand), followed by the age group of twenty and fifty. There are two ways of magic protection against paediatric diseases exhibited: one of them is an amulet wore at the neck, while the other is the usage of protective names. (They attempted to mislead the evil spirit that brought diseases by calling children as “worthless”, “non-alive”, ‘insect”, etc.).

The higher death rate of the age group of twenty was mainly caused by TBC (certified mostly by tombs from the Avar period) and mothers died in giving birth or puerperal fever (indicated by the foetus in the pelvis or a baby buried together with the mother). We can only know about war injuries or wounds that occurred during work when it caused visible signs in the bones. The treatment of these wounds is exhibited based on a (non-Hungarian) analogy on a vase excavated at Kul-Oba (Crimean Peninsula) in a Scythian tomb from 4th century B.C. There is a significant difference between the occurrence of bone fractures at the tiller and nomadic populations (2.2 and 3.5% respectively). Healing of the fracture of the limbs was usually good, without any shortening and axial divergence.

A tool of the venesection in the 12th century that has been continuously applied both in human and animal medicines nearly up to the present age, is exhibited in a picture. The “compact sealed with blood” between prince Árpád and his tribesmen described in the Chronicle was a venesection, too.

The most serious surgery was trepanation. There were several findings excavated along the route of migration, however, the number of these findings greatly increased in the Carpathian Basin after the Hungarian conquest. This healing method completely disappeared by the 13th century. (It is not connected to the
trepanation performed by shepherds at giddy sheep.) The so-called symbolic and real trepanations began with resection. There were only the outermost or the first two layers of the cranial bone removed at a certain area in the first case, while in the latter case the cranial cavity was opened, as well, probably without the opening the meninx dura. If the patient died soon after the intervention, the edge of the bone remained sharp, otherwise they were made round by bone proliferation. In case of more extensive shortage of bone, the brain was protected by a thin metal plate that was sewn into the headgear. The excavation spots of the symbolic and real trepanation are indicated in the map. The intervention was probably performed in cases of cranial injuries (caused by mace or sword) and headache (!).

The occurrence of dental caries and their complications (e.g. maxillary abscess) greatly differs by burial places, which could be due to several reasons, such as the fluoride-ion content of the drinking water. There is a magic form against (according to one of its readings) paradentosis – that was more characteristic to women - written with Runic script on top of a needle case (see the photo on the right) that was found in a woman’s tomb of the Late Avar Period. The text contains the expression ‘íz’ (i.e. ‘paradentosis’) that has been used today.

The frequently emphasised statement that the stockbreeder and tiller Hungarians learnt the usage of herbs from missionaries is a non-sense, as their own and their animals’ physical existence was dependent on their extensive knowledge on the vegetation. It has been certified by the names of herbs of early Finno-Ugrian and Turkish origin, the conscious application of certain plants (e.g. bow, arrow and coffin making), the knowledge on dyeing and poisonous plants and starvation nutriments, and the several hundreds of names of plants from the early literary remains of the Hungarian language from back in the time before the first herbals appeared. (There has been an extensive herbal knowledge indicated by recent ethnobotany examinations performed in Hungary and among the related peoples.)

Tamás Grynaeus
II. The Herbals (16\textsuperscript{th} -19\textsuperscript{th} C.)

The first European herbals were published in the periods of the Renaissance and the Reformation. The first publications were the works of the Greek and Roman classics (e.g. Plinius: \textit{Historia naturalis} 1469, Dioskorides: \textit{De Materia Medica} 1478), followed by the work of Benedictine abbot Valahfrid Strabo titled \textit{Hortulus} that was written 700 years later. From this period on there were several illustrated herbals published, which served as a sources for the authors of the Hungarian herbals and healing books, including the various editions of the herbals by Otto Brunfels (1530), Hieronymus Bock (1539), Leonhart Fuchs (1543), Adam Lonicerus (1551), Petrus Andreas Matthiolus (1554) and Tabernaemontanus (Jakob Theodor von Bergzabern, died in 1590).

In addition to the European publications, Hungary also published its own herbals in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century that were inspired by the active scientific life of the country (especially in places like Sárvár, Németújvár, Kolozsvár) with the participation of physicians, medico-botanists that received their degrees in German and Italian universities, and the noble support of progressive aristocrats with European education (Tamás Nádasdy, Boldizsár Battyhány and others). The scientific work was also promoted by the participation of the medico-botanist of Belgium Carolus Clusius with European reputation. The strengthening of the Herbal literature was also promoted by the creation of the botanic gardens of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, and also the level of horticulture.

Author of the first Hungarian herbal was bishop of Debrecen, Péter Melius Juhász whose work \textit{Herbarium} was first published six years after his death (1578) in Kolozsvár at the printinghouse of Mrs. Gáspár Heltai. The work contained the description of 275 herbal species and 1236 Hungarian names of plants. The main source that Melius used in writing his work was \textit{Historiae naturalis opus novum} by Lonicerus from 1551, but he had some other works, too (e.g. Works by Dioscorides, Matthiolus and Fuchs). The sources of the Hungarian names that were used in the \textit{Herbarium} were probably the word lists (e.g. of Beszterce, Schägli, and Sopron), which contained the elements of the colloquial language of the period in question.

The famous medico-botanist Carolus Clusius visited Boldizsár Battyhány in Németújvár (today Güssing, Austria) in the year 1582, who was well trained in
botany, as well. Clusius, who wandered all over the fields of Western Transdanubia and the Németújvár district together with István Beythe, published the first individual work of the universal botany on ethnobotany in Németújvár in the year 1583, under the title *Stirpium Nomenclatur Pannonicus*, which was the list of the knowledge of the Hungarian population on plants. The Hungarian herbal names of the *Nomenclator* entered the European herbal literature and Clusius worked a considerable part of these names into the „World Flora” (*Rariorum plantarum historia*) of the 17th century.

András Beythe – son of István Beythe – was only 31, when his ‘*Fiveskönyv*’ (‘Herbal’) was published in Németújvár (1595). The history of botany considers his book is the shortened or enlarged version of the version of the Kolozsvár edetion of the *Herbarium* of Melius. At the analysis of the electronic publication for the 400th anniversary of the work it turned out that from the botanical point of view it was a more elaborated work than the *Herbarium* by Melius.

One of the most important works from the point of view of the presentation of the herbs among the medical books in the 17th century was the work *Pax Corporis* by Ferenc Pápai Páriz. Its first edition that reported on the usage of at least 300 medicinal herbs was published in 1687.

The translation of the work by György Felvinczy (*'Az Anglia országban lévő Salernitata Scolanak Jó Egésségről való Meg-tartásának módgyáról írott könyve. Melly most magyarra fordított és Rhytmusokban alkalmaztattott.' ['The Hungarian Translation in Verse of the Book on the Preservation of Good Health by Salernitat Scola of England']*) was a curiosity, in which the advice on health and nutrition were written in verse. At the description of the herbs there were references to the ancient classical authors concerning the herb question.

The *Herbarium* manuscript (1718) by the wife of Hungarian General Ádám Vay, Anna Zay pulled the attraction of the experts only a few decades ago. The work was written in 1712 and there were 140 pages survived that contained 470 prescriptions. They contained 278 kinds of medicinal plants, some of them are used in modern medicine, too. As we can read it on the front page, this book was written based upon the Czech translation of the Herbal by Matthiolus from 1562.

We have to mention also the works by István Mátyus (*Diaetetica – 1766, New and Old Diaetetica 1787-1793*). Mátyus placed a great emphasis on the prevention of diseases and emphasised the important role of the proper nutrition. We can read about the favourable effect of several herbs in this book.

The first book on pediatry was written by one of the famous physicians of Debrecen town of the 18th century József Csapó (*'Kis Gyermek Ispotálja’*) [‘The Hospital of Little Children’] – 1771). He was also the author of the herbal called ‘Új Füves és Virágos Magyar Kert’ (‘New Hungarian Garden of Flowers and Plants’-1775), in
which he collected the Hungarian, German and Latin etc. names of at least 1000 plants with the indication of their advantageous effects.

The work of the Swedish botanist Carl von Linné titled „The System of Nature” (1735) promoted botany to become a branch of science that resulted in the turning of herbals into works on botany. This process was reflected by the 'Orvosi Füvészkönyv' ['Medicinal Herbal'] (1807) worked up the data that were contained by Hungarian works, which were published earlier.

The „era of the Herbals” was over in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, and the work of one of the greatest Hungarian medical historian Gyula Magyary-Kossa on the effect of our medicinal herbs ('A hazai gyógynövények hatása és orvosi használata' ['Effect and Medicinal Usage of the Domestic Medicinal Herbs'], was published in the first decades of the twentieth century without the indication of the year of publishing. It was already a work towards the modern therapeutic application of the medicinal herbs.

Peter Babulka

III. Ethnomedicine and ethnopharmacognosy (19\textsuperscript{th} -20\textsuperscript{th} C.)

The practice of the Hungarian ethnomedicine involved the knowledge on the origin of the diseases (pathogenesis), symptoms (diagnostics) and therapy. This knowledge constituted a vast part of the knowledge of Nature; and it was strictly connected to folk beliefs. This knowledge was preserved and handed down by the ethnic healers of the village communities (bush doctors, bone setters, ‘nadályos’ healers, etc.) that employed several “rational” and “irrational” methods in human and animal medicine. Healing of the sick members of the family or the community was the task of the mothers and the elderly females of the family, while animals were mostly treated by men.

Treatment with medicinal herbs was probably the most important among the rational healing methods. According to the data collected during the last 150 years, Hungarians and other populations of the Carpathian Basin used 600 kinds of plants in the prevention and treatment of diseases. Healers working in human ethnomedicine had the most work in the treatment of injuries and dermatological complaints, while in animal medicine they had to treat mostly digestive problems and injuries. Besides herbal treatment, they performed bone setting, reduction of dislocation, massage, medicinal bath, clay pack, apitherapy, hirudinisation and cupping that could be considered as “scientifically certified methods”.

Magic procedures (e.g. smoking, incantation, crossing himself/herself, lead casting, carbon water making, analogous treatments, etc.) and magic elements attached to rational healing methods (e.g. celebrated places, times and days, and various
methods of “sending the disease away”, etc.) also played an important role in prevention and treatment, as well. Observation and collecting of these elements are as interesting and important task as that of any rational healing method.

Recording the healing methods of the ethnomedicine performed by ethnographers, linguists and physicians and pharmacists interested in medical history began in the end of last century. Their reports and analyses before the World War II were published mainly in journals of ethnography and medical history (e.g. “Ethnográfia”) and volumes dealing with a given issue (see. Temesvári Dezső: Előítéletek és babonák a szülészet körében Magyarországon ['Preconceptions and superstitions concerning childbirth in Hungary'] (1899), Magyary-Kossa Gyula: Magyar állatorvosi könyvészet ['Hungarian Bibliography of Veterinary Medicine'] (1904) és Magyar orvosi emlékek ['Hungarian Medical Monuments'] (1925), Berde Károly: A magyar nép dermatológiája ['Dermatology of the Hungarian Nation'] (1940). It was Aurél Vajkai, who published a summarising study on the research of ethnomedicine up to 1945 (A magyar népi orvosláis kutatása, [Research on the Hungarian Ethnomedicine] 1948). (Some forty years later Andor Oláh published the “biography” of the Hungarian ethnomedicine called „Új hold, új király“ ['New Moon, New King'].

There was an intensive work that started after World War II in Hungary and among the Hungarians living beyond the boundaries of the country, with the participation of ethnographers, linguists, physicians, pharmacists, biologists, agronomists and other experts in order to assess comprehensive information on ethnomedicine and ethnobotany. Their works resulted in monographs, articles and analyses on the ethnomedicine and ethnobotany of some geographical or ethnographical units of the country. Most of these works were published in publications Orvostörténeti Közlemények ['Proceedings on Medical History'], Gyógyszerészet ['Pharmacetics'], Ethnographia, Folklór Archívum, Collecta Clusiana, and as a result of the work, collections of museums and libraries were supplied with several manuscripts, photographs and audio recordings.

Collection and research of ethnomedicine was greatly promoted by the following opportunities: journal Ethnographia continually ensured place for the articles on these assessed data, right from the very first appearance of the journal in 1890; the voluntary collecting work started in the beginning of the 1950s; the first issue of the Orvostörténeti Közlemények ['Proceedings on Medical History'] was published back in 1955; and the fact that the Department of Ethnomedicine of the Hungarian Association for Medical History was formed in 1974. There are rich material on ethnomedicine and ethnobotany kept at the Archive of the Department of Ethnography at Hungarian Academy of Science (Archive of Ethnomedicine), at the Museum of Ethnography (Archive of Ethnology), at the collection of Semmelweis Museum, Library and Archive of Medical History, in the national questionnaire material of the Topography of the Hungarian Ethnomedicine and databases that contain data on medical history and ethnobotany (e.g. MTA SZTAKI – Budapest, Dániel Berzsenyi Training-school, Szombathegy). Besides, there are interesting data in Pallas Nagy Lexikona ['Great Lexicon of Pallas'] and Magyar Néprajzi Lexikon ['Hungarian Lexicon of Ethnography'] under the titles connected to ethnomedicine.

There was an exhibition opened at Bakony Museum, Veszprém, which presented the monuments in connection with Hungarian ethnomedicine, kept in Hungarian museums. The material was supplemented with a text explanation written by Mihály Hoppál and László Törő, and was published as a supplement to Orvostörténeti Közlemények ['Proceedings on Medical History'] (1975) in Hungarian and English languages. This publication was followed by another volume on Hungarian ethnomedicine (1979) edited by József Antall and Géza Buzinkay.

_Peter Babulka_
IV. “... Add some nettle, bath and comfrey on rheumatism ...”  
(Treatment of rheumatism in Hungarian ethnomedicine)

Hungarian folk tradition considered cold, constraint and bad blood to be the cause of the rheumatism. Local words meaning complaints of the organs of locomotion are ‘reoma’, ‘rehoma’, ‘csúz’[‘rheumatism’], ‘köszvény’ [‘gout’], ‘fájás’ [‘pain’], ‘kihülés’ [‘cooling’].

Due to the richness of the Hungarian language description of the symptoms and diseases are of graphic character, especially that concerns location, character, degree, “moving” of the pain and the limitation of the motion and the deformations.

People suffering from rheumatism were recommended medicinal teas or medicinal bath; their painful limbs were massaged by “kenő” [‘kneader’] women, while fractures and dislocations were treated by bone setters. Rheumatism was often treated with apitherapy, which meant the bite of the painful parts (knee, hips, shoulders) by bees. A similar method was beating the painful areas with nettle.

The ones, who had “much blood”, were treated by “leech men” [‘nadályos’] that placed leech on the patient’s body, in order to thin and clean his blood. Cupping was also practised for cleaning blood.

Bush doctors and women specialised on herbs used at least 80 kinds of herbs, alcoholic drinks (wine, beer, spirits), vinegar, and material of herbal and animal origin (animal fat and herbal oils) for the preparation of creams and extracts for massaging them into the body, and making medicinal teas and medicinal baths. The names of some plants refer to the indication they were used. For example, linaria (Linaria sp.) was called as ínnyújtófű [‘tendon elongating grass’] or ínnyújtógaz [‘tendon elongating weed’] and used in the form of compress, in the treatment of
“tendon shortening” or sprain.

They often recommended medicinal teas made of herbs of diuretic, antipyretic or analgesic effects. Such medicinal teas were often made of nettle leaves, shave-grass shoots, juniper fruits, birch and willow leaves and the blooming shoots of the golden-rod. At some places they recommended the consumption of beer with horse-radish.

They placed compress on the painful and injured (sometimes even broken) parts of the body made of freshly collected and pulped herbal parts (e.g. nettle leaves, althaea leaves, comfrey root, linaria, willow bark) or a fabric compress soaked in the decoction of the above plants.

For massage and embrocation, they used alcoholic and vinegary extracts that they could store and use for a longer period of time. The raw or dried herbal parts were chopped, placed in a bottle and poured alcohol (usually fruit brandy) or vinegar on them. Such extracts were used after 2-14 days of soaking. They made extracts like this from the root of the horse-raddish, hot pepper, wild chestnut or the green fruit of tomato.

They released the pain of the limbs by massaging them with anointment made of some medicinal herbs (e.g. common comfrey root, verbascum, agrimony root). The creams were made of dried and powdered roots mixed with animal fat (lard or goose fat). Having them mixed, the cream had to stand for some days, before usage.

Rheumatic patients were often treated with steam baths, for which they used many kinds of herbal parts (e.g. tomato creeper, paprika stem, nettle leaves and shoots, pine shoots, mint leaves and shoots, thyme and sage leaves and shoots, willow leaves and bark). They especially liked the bath made of hay bract, which was prepared with the chipping collected under the hay that contained flowers and herbal parts.

Decoction made of various herbs was poured in the bath water, and when the water reached the desirable temperature, the patient either sat inside or placed the painful limb in the bath for a certain period of time. Patients sometimes steamed the painful limbs with the steam of the herbal bath and took a bath later, when the temperature became bearable. There were some healers, which specialised on the preparation of medicinal and steam baths. At some of them, which had a bigger house, patients could stay for a couple of more days after the treatment.

Peter Babulka
V. Obstetrics in the Folk Practice

Most obvious meaning of life for the traditional village society was the child born in marriage. They attempted to perform various magic practices in order to influence the normal birth of healthy children in desired number, sex and outlook already in the day of the wedding (e.g. the bride helped herself with soup as many times, as many children she desired to give birth; the bride broke and empty jug in order to give an easy birth; a little boy was seated in the bride’s lap, in order to give birth a boy first; they served a cake in the wedding celebrations that shaped a stork, etc.).

They wanted to facilitate the life of the pregnant women - and as the housekeeping also required it - they suggested physical activity in order to make delivery easier. Indisposition, vomiting and dizziness that appeared during the first months of the pregnancy were considered a normal condition. They deduced the sex of the foetus from these symptoms and in more serious cases they even treated the mother with various nutriments and medicinal herbs (e.g. salt, alum, white clay, apple, lemon, cabbage, peppermint, ginger, wormwood, etc.).

As they could treat neither foetal, nor other more serious disorders, they tried to avoid the occurrence of these dangers by ritual deeds and prohibitions of certain activities. Pregnant women had to avoid looking at dead bodies in order to avoid giving birth a dead child; prohibition of walking through under a rope in order to avoid enwinding the umbilical cord on the baby’s neck; avoidance of eating double fruit in order to prevent giving birth to twins; avoidance of looking at ugly-looking things in order to give birth a similar baby, etc.).

Delivery was conducted by a midwife, although most poor women gave birth alone. Midwives were assisted by female members of the family, and the husband was allowed to be present only in very difficult deliveries. They attempted to promote delivery by magic actions (e.g. all the locks and strings were loosened on the mother’s cloth, in order to ensure secure delivery; the string of the husband’s underpants was placed under the bed or the mother had to sit in her husband’s lap). The delivery position varied from area to area. At some places they gave birth in standing or kneeling position, while some other places on the floor, in obstetric chair, lying in the bed or in two chairs leaned to each other in “V” shape. Parturient women had to walk until the expulsive stage, while their pains were released or the delivery was accelerated by herbal steaming, massage, consumption of alcohol and some
medicinal herbs (e.g. dill, chamomile, thyme, juniper, saffron, ergot, rue or achillea). After the delivery, the midwife looked after the mother, then bathed and dressed the baby in swaddling clothes and in the end she placed the baby by the mother’s side.

Circumstances of the delivery (e.g. delivery at midnight, seventh delivery, delivery of a baby in amnion, umbilical cord twisted on the neck of the foetus, delivery of a baby with teeth, etc.) were considered as omens. The most well known omen was that the baby, who was born with teeth, having a sixth finger or born in the amnion would have supernatural abilities. The first bath of the baby had a great importance, too. They placed money, an apple or betony in the baby’s bath water, in order to ensure him or her wealth, beauty and health and to protect him or her from sortilege.

Among the post delivery complaints of women they could treat after-pains, dysuria and various injuries with medicinal herbs. After-pains were treated with dill, chamomile, saffron, elecampane; and dysuria with juniper, parsley, celery, oat, elder; injuries were healed with Turkey oak, linden and garlic.

The puerperal period usually lasted 2-3 weeks. During this period the mother had to stay in bed with her baby and was not allowed to leave the house. There were some objects placed in the bed (garlic, needle, prayer book, rosary, etc.) in order to prevent sortilege. According to the belief, the main danger was represented by the changing of the not yet baptised baby, which meant taking away the healthy child and leave another one in his place with physical or mental disorder. In order to prevent this danger, the mother was not allowed to turn back to her baby and the baby was not left alone in the room. In order to protect the mother’s milk – as it was in the danger of balefulness or taking away – nobody way allowed to sit on the mother’s bed, she had to avoid dripping her milk on the floor, and she was not allowed to lend anything to another nursing mother, as she could took milk away together with the lent objects.

Babies were usually suckled for a year, although it could last for 2-3 years, as well, partly as a means of contraception. The abundance of the mother’s milk was ensured by the above-mentioned magic practices, certain nutriments or medicinal herbs (e.g. walnut, poppy, squash, lentil, beans, carrots, onions, dill, caraway, anis, etc.). The baby was suckled any time when he indicated hunger, and was mostly kept by the side of the parents for the night, thus ensuring him the food any time. Meanwhile, they began to feed him with pulpy food that was chewed by the mother or the grandmother as early as 2-5 months, since women had to return the usual housekeeping and agriculture, during which they had to stay away from the child. (When it was possible, they took the child out in the fields and prepared an ad hoc cradle from sheet. Some other times the baby was fed by another nursing mother in the family, with her own milk.).

Frequent complaints during the nursing period were the inflammation of the breast and the nipple fissure. Both complaints were effectively treated with various medicinal herbs (e.g. mallow, plantain, flax-seed, quince seeds, carrots, chamomile, achillea).

Weaning was not gradual; it took place from one day to the other. As it could cause difficulties for both the mother and child, they were attentive concerning the circumstances of weaning and tried to perform magic practices (e.g. weaning took place at waning moon, in order to stop milk secretion; the mother milked three drops of milk on glowing embers in order to make her milk evaporated, etc.). Besides, they tried to frighten the child of sucking by anointing their breasts with bad tasting or bad smelling plants (hemlock, peppers, garlic, etc.) or placing fearful objects in their clothes (pricking brush or black broad-cloth, etc.).
According to the above data both magic practices and rational knowledge (e.g. usage of medicinal herbs) played important roles in Hungarian ethno-obstetrics – like in ethnomedicine generally. Recovery was promoted by prayers and fasting, too. All these methods were applied together and they considered them equally effective.

Ágnes Pataki

VI. Collection and processing of herbs, preparation of herbal medicines

There have been at least 600 species of wild and cultivated plants that were used in Hungarian ethnomedicine during the last 150 years. Many of them were consumed as fruits, vegetables or spices, but there were also the most important cereals (wheat, barley, rye, oat, millet, corn, etc.) and oily seeds (e.g. sunflower, flax) among them. Many nutrition plants (e.g. garlic, onions, potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, corn, etc.) have been still used in ethnomedicine, and their usage was certified by scientific examinations (many Hungarian herbal products contain the extracts and active agents of garlic, onions, hot peppers and corn pistil).

Although they used to collect medicinal herbs in every family, there were some healers that specialised on herbal therapies and the profession was often inherited by their family lineage from one generation to the other.

Beside using the most various herbal parts in preparation of medicines, they also used at least 50 kinds of supplements of herbal or animal origin that either were not or just partly were responsible for the healing.

The gathered and processed parts involved almost everything from mushroom spores to pinecone, or from the roots to the flower petals, depending on the usage of higher or lower plant species (moss, lichen, mushrooms).

The way of using herbal parts had a great variety, as well. Various parts of the plants were used chopped or squeezed, raw, boiled, steamed or fried, or in the form of medicinal teas or other herbal medicines, which were made from the dried herbal parts.

In making herbal medicines or gaining herbal extracts they used mostly water or alcoholic drinks: beer, fruit wines (made of grapes, raspberry, red-curants, rosehips, mulberry) and brandy (distilled from plums) as solvent. They also used herbal oils and animal fats (lard, goose or duck fat, milk) in order to gain active agents. These fats promoted the smooth application of the powdered or pulped herbs on the skin surface.

The most popular ways of gaining extracts were maceration (cold soaking), scalding and preparation of decoctions, for which both fresh and dried herbal parts were used.

The various medicinal forms were made of the proper parts of only one or two kind of
herbs. We can often find a magic element of the ethnomedicine, the magic numerals at the medicines made of 3, 7 or 9 herbal ingredients. Most of these preparations contained non-herbal elements, too. The most widely used medicinal forms were scaldings (majority of medicinal teas), decoctions (watery extracts used in medicinal baths and for washing injuries), alcoholic extracts made with alcohol of various concentration, creams (‘ír’), plasters, syrups and powdered medicines.

Herbal medicines were used both externally and internally. A part of them was freshly made on spot, but others were found in every household (mainly alcoholic extracts and creams made of them). One of these types was the caraway seed brandy used in the treatment of intestinal spasm, or the alcoholic extracts made of horseradish, hot pepper or wild chestnut, which were used in the treatment of rheumatic pains.

Medicines for internal usage were medicinal teas, alcoholic extracts of certain plants, however, several kinds of plants of curative effect were consumed in raw form (e.g. horseradish, garlic, onion) in the treatment of various complaints.

Medicinal forms for external application contained plasters made of the leaves, bulbs or petals of certain herbs, decoctions used for poultice, bathing or enema, and embrocations. A well-known form of application was medicinal bath, steaming in the vapour of medicinal decoctions, or inhalation.

Sometimes they applied special methods in veterinary medicine, such as stimulus therapy, in which they provoked inflammation by placing an herbal part under the skin, thus stimulating the immune reaction of the animal.

Healers were conscious of the advantageous and harmful effects (hot or poisonous) of herbs and herbal medicines and informed their patients on the proper quantities. In veterinary medicine, however, they more often applied herbs of strong effect than in human medicine.

Peter Babulka