

**Reprint**

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**Introduction. *Etnoiatria* 1,1 (1967) 2-4.**

A strange and unjustifiable phenomenon is the delay in the admission of ethnomedicine or ethnoiatry\* to its rightful place, not only in the field of medicine but also in that of the anthropological sciences.

Usually, when we open a work on the history of medicine, we find there very few references not only to the medical practices of prehistoric times, owing to the scarcity, we are told, of fossil and archeological finds ..., but even more noticeably to contemporary ethnomedicine. It has apparently been forgotten that it is precisely in this latter field that we can often find concealed important documentation of the former.

A similar state of affairs prevails in works of ethnography, where we find a splendid parade of distinct and detailed chapters on all and sundry aspects of human thought and activity—with the exception of that aspect of medicine which is really fundamental in that it is concerned with the very preservation of an entire society, and which receives no more than a few lines ... Even in the most recent Anthropological Congresses we search in vain for a section dedicated to ethnoiatry; let alone full reports, the barest communications on the topic are rare enough indeed.

What are the reasons for such a deficiency? In the first place there is a certain ill-concealed indifference; not to say hostility, on the part of medical practitioners amongst peoples in an early stage of evolution, and even more on the part of the scientific medical world which tends to regard anything connected with traditional medicine as something laughable, concerning mere superstition, and to ignore the clamorous refutations which arise every so often to emphasize the scientific foundations of practices which have been rejected solely on the grounds of their origin without even having been first submitted to experimentation.

This state of affairs is perhaps in part the consequence of a lack of anthropological instruction amongst those who have studied medicine. On the other hand anthropologists and ethnologists have not always sought to fathom the mysteries of the medical practice of the peoples they study owing to their own lack of medical training and consequent scant interest in investigations which are somewhat

removed from the specific disciplines they have mastered.

The knowledge of medical plants forms an exception to this general picture, in that it is much more extensive, with ethnobotanical and pharmacognostic researches which are directed towards the discovery of the therapeutic value of drugs often deriving from the empirical pharmacopoeia.

In recent times, furthermore, we can see the polarization towards ethnomedicine of a whole group of scholars belonging to the so-called “cultural anthropology” school, but whose concern is sociological rather than medical and whose interpretations of observed phenomena, therefore, are psychological, philosophical, moral, and if you like, psychoanalytical—rather than biological. As a result we have matters which, even if they do concern primitive and uncivilized societies, are properly medical, being dealt with by specialists in another field. The unfortunate consequences which may follow on this contingency are obvious.

Ethnoiatry, on the other hand, a many-sided science, demands the participation of scholars belonging to the most diverse disciplines—anthropology, ethnology, botany, zoology, pharmacology, etc, not excluding the moral sciences—by reason of which, in practice, it does not always happen that the studies of one man come before the attention of his other colleagues; these possibilities of mutual usefulness are frequently neglected.

“To acquaint all those who concern themselves with traditional medicine, and especially those following different scientific disciplines, with research carried out and reports published in the various relevant fields is to be the first aim of the Review which has been born today, in accordance with the programme adopted by the Italian Institute of Ethnoiatry.

This Institute has been founded at Varese with the support of the local Circuit Hospital which, responding with broad vision to the proposal laid before it, has given its aid in full measure in answer to our appeal. We receive further heartening support from the Committee for Scientific Consultation, composed of eminent men of science of various Italian universities who, besides possessing a rare competence to deal with the problems with which we present them in their chosen fields, are firmly convinced of the utility of ethnoiatric studies.

The programme of the Institute which is being finalized, as described in other sections of our periodical, in proposing and encouraging experimental investigations of various treatments in traditional therapies; endeavouring to utilize ethnoiatriac knowledge in support of campaigns aiming to popular education in health and hygiene; studying the transformations, the adaptations and the syncretisms which take place in traditional medicine as a result of contact with the attempting to save from oblivion concepts, practices and instruments of thousands of years of civilization—is indeed vast. It would obviously be absurd to claim to be able to tackle it all, but it has been fully exposed in this way precisely in order to demonstrate just how extensive this field of enquiry really is, and to call all those scholars and students who are aware of its importance to join in the harvest.

Finally, we would emphasize that etnoiatria must have a medical and biological basis, not only for the obvious reason that it deals with medicine, but more particularly because this will facilitate the penetration of the subject by a cool, objective, laboratory study-technique which is better fitted than either sceptical or over-enthusiastic prejudice to make the final decision as to whether or not and to what extent there is still something worth saving from the empirical practices and procedures which has developed over thousands of years.

From the collaboration of all those who, even if they have not undergone a medical training, still are attracted by the cult of traditions and the fascination of cultures evolved by mentalities different from our own, and who possess the none-too-common gift of open mindedness, those for whom it is a sacred duty to discuss and try out something before either rejecting or accepting it—from the collaboration of such as these there will emerge factors by no means negligible for a better understanding and evaluation of the original cultures of the various peoples of the earth, the transformations of these over the course of millennia and the reactions brought about by the new experiences provided by life.

ANTONIO SCARPA

**Note:**

\* TOMMASO SARNELLI, taking the case of various other medical disciplines as a precedent, again had recourse to Greek so find a name for ethnomedicine. His suggestion was “etnoiatria” (ethnòs = people; iatrìchē = medicine), which became “ethnoiatriacs” in English; this was later transformed into “etnoiatria” (English “ethnoiatria”) as being more euphonistic if less exact etymologically.

**Reprint:**

*etnoiatria* 1,1(1967)18-21, here page 21

ANTONIO SCARPA. **Summary: Importancia de los estudios etnoiatriacos para la farmacologia: communication at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congreso Latinoamericano di Farmacologia, Mexico-City, oct 27-30 1965**

Ethnoiatria concerns the study of the whole traditional and therefore empiric patrimony of medical culture in the world under the different aspects: chiefly its consistence as appears by examining it from the point of view of the experimental scientific researches, its transformations and adaptations in connection with the social evolution and its employment for expanding the education of sanity and health amongst the nations.

Ethnoiatria, understood in this way and not just like a simple annotation of folkloristic ethnoiatriac and historic news, usually endures the participation of other scientific disciplines which on their part can take advantages of the contributions of the ethnomedicine, for their problems.

Under this aspect a particular importance is given to the pharmacology. A rich historical and pharmacological literature gives evidence of many drugs having entered with great triumph the scientific medicine, their use having been suggested by the traditional pharmacopoeia of different countries which for long had guessed about the therapeutical proprieties in those drugs.

We have to underline the circumstances that Latin America has the advantage of having great quantities of drugs which were discovered one after the other by the official science following this path. One of the most important one is the peniciline.

However it is a very recent branch of the pharmacology which can be considered a real legitimate part of the Ethnoiatria that is the Psychopharmacology.

In this case to Latin America offers the greatest number of the most characteristic psychodelic drugs of empirical origin.

Also zootherapy could give indications for discovering new drugs and very recent researches tell us how many therapeutical useful examples could be taken from animals. Numerous examples of active pharmacological substances taken from the animal reign, beginning at Fleming's lesozina, and of

pharmacologically justified use of animal drugs in ethnobotany are quoted.

If traditional medicine, specially among the primitive population, is a rich resource for the pharmacologist even as regards to drugs already known, if we should analyze the specific use of natives deeper and in each detail, most useful notions could be drawn for new researches. An example is given to us by researches made on tobacco which, besides the well known toxic activities, has stimulating effects on certain psychical faculties, effects which have already been taken advantage of by which doctors for black magic.

The above mentioned and the fact that only a small percentage of drugs used by the Indians of Latin America has been object of systematical pharmacological investigations put all the importance of ethnobotanic studies into evidence which might indicate new paths of researches for the pharmacologist.

#### Reprint:

*Ethnobotanica* 1,2(1967)63-65

#### Symposium of Ethnopharmacology in San Francisco, California 1967

From the 28<sup>th</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> of January 1967 in San Francisco, California, a Symposium of Ethnopharmacology was held dedicated to psychoactive drugs which, as is known, are widely used in many rituals and are customary to many ethnical groups of the earth.

The interesting scientific conference took place by the initiative of the Pharmacological Section of the National Institute of Mental Hygiene of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the head of the Organizing Committee was Dr. D. F. Efron, director of the above mentioned section that has its seat at Chevy Chase, in Maryland.

The symposium was carried out through the work of six sections. The first (President C. D. Leake—University of San Francisco, California) was dedicated to “An overview of Ethnopharmacology”. In this there were interventions from: Bo Holmstedt (Karolinski Institute of Stockholm) on the history of ethnopharmacology concerning psychoactive drugs; R. E. Schultes (Botanical Museum of Harvard University of Cambridge, Massachusetts) on the place that ethnobotany deserves in the

pharmacological research of psychomimetic drugs; and C. del Pozo (University of Mexico City) on empirism and magic in Aztec pharmacopoeia and, lastly, D. X. Freedman (University of Chicago) on prospects of the use and abuse of psychodelic drugs.

The second section (Pres. G. E. Cronheim of Riker Laboratory of Northridge, California) dealt with Kava, the famous drink of the peoples of the Pacific, obtained from *Piper Methysticum*, a drink which was and still is in use in religious cults and several other ceremonies. In this re-union the anthropologist L. D. Holmes (University of Wichita, Kansas) made an interesting report on the functions of Kava in the modern Samoa culture, which were followed by those of D. C. Gajdusek (National Institute of Neurology of Bethesda, Maryland) on recent observations on the use of Kava in the New Hebrides; of M. W. Klohs (Riker Lab. of Northridge, California) on the chemical structure of Kava; of H. J. Mayer (University of Freiburg) on the pharmacology of the drug; J. P. Buckley, A. R. Furgiuele and M. J. O'Hara (University of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania) still on the pharmacology of the Piper Methysticum. In this section there were the works of A. S. Marrazzi (University of Minnesota) on the electropharmacological action and the action concerning the behaviour of Kava; of C. C. Pfeiffer, H. B. Murphree and L. Goldstein (New Jersey Institute, Princeton) on the effects of Kava on normal and pathological subjects; of C. S. Ford (Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut) on the ethnographical aspects of Kava.

The third section reserved to another important drug from the ethnobotanical point of view and that is nutmeg (*Myristica fragrans*) was equally interesting. This plant originating from India and which played a very important part in Arabian and Indian traditional medicine, where it had a particular use as aphrodisiac and sedative, is now widely used as a hallucinative drug.

In this section (Pres. E. B. Truitt, Jr.—Battell Memorial Institute, Columbus, Ohio) the following themes were followed: A. T. Weil (Harvard Medical School, Boston) “Nutmeg is a psychoactive drug”; A. T. Shulgin (University of San Francisco) and T. Sargent and C. Naranjo (University of Santiago, Chile) “The chemistry and psychopharmacology of nutmeg and of several related phenylisopropylamines”.

Snuff used in South America was the theme of the fourth section, Bo Holmstedt acting as chairman. S. H. Wassen (Ethnographical Museum of Gothenburg, Sweden) made a detailed report on the use of snuff in South America from the anthropological point of view, while R. E. Schultes (Botanical Museum—University of Harvard, Cambridge, Mass.) dwelt upon the vegetable origin of these powders. Successively Siri von Reis Altschul (same Botanical Museum) spoke on the use of Vilca (*Piptadenia*); G. J. Seitz (Köln-Lindenthal, Germany) on Epéna (*Virola callophyloidea*) snuff used by the Waika Indians, a report accompanied by a documentary film; Bo Holmstedt and J. E. Lingren (Karolinska Institute—Stockholm) on the chemical constituents and pharmacology of the snuff of South America.

The fifth section (Pres. D. E. Efron) was reserved to the psychoactive drugs known by the native names of Ayahuasca, Caapi and Yagé. The psychotropic properties of the alkaloids contained in the *Peganum harmala* were illustrated (C. Naranja—University of Chile, Santiago) alkaloids which have been noticed recently also in animal organs, and which form the active principles of the various species of *Banisteriopsis caapi*, plants used for ritual reasons by the natives who inhabit the region which extends from the Amazon forest to the Andes. The ceremonies and practices which accompany the preparation of the hallucinative drink, obtained from the *Banisteriopsis*, were shown in a film taken in North Peru by D. Taylor (University of Los Angeles). Lastly, V. Deulofeu (Faculty of Natural and Exact Sciences of Buenos Aires) spoke on the chemical compounds isolated by the B. and similar species.

In the sixth section (Pres. D. F. Efron) the mushroom in England called fly agaric (*Amanita muscaria*) which played a very important part in Euro-Asian cultures for its intoxication properties was spoken of and discussed. Here are the titles of the reports presented: R. G. Wasson (Botanical Museum of the University of Harvard, Cambridge, Mass.) "Fly Agaric and Man"; I. I. Brekhman and Y. A. Sam (Siberian Institute of the Academy of Sciences, U.S.S.R.) "Etnopharmacological Investigation of some Psychoactive Drugs used by Siberian and Far Eastern Minor Nationalities of U.S.S.R."; C. H. Eugster (University of Zurich) "Isolation, Structure and Synthesis of Central-Active Compounds from

*Amanita Muscaria* (L. ex Fr.) Hooker"; P. G. Waser (University of Zurich) "The Pharmacology of *Amanita Muscaria*".

The Symposium, as can be understood from the arguments dealt with and the presence of specialists belonging to various scientific disciplines, appears as a true etnoiatrial congress, the first although limited only to psychoactive drugs used in magic rituals and traditional pharmacopoeia. The authoritative part-taking of chemists and pharmacologists has opened a way which in the future will doubtlessly be followed for the study and deeper knowledge of infinite other drugs which form the extremely rich pharmacopoeia of the traditional medicines.



Antonio Scarpa,  
Genua 1986  
(Photo: E. Schröder)

**ANTONIO SCARPA**, Prof. Dr. med., Chirurg und Kinderarzt, (1903-2000). Scarpa erforschte und dokumentierte in zahlreichen Studienreisen zwischen 1938 und 1992 in vielen Ländern auf allen Erdteilen verschiedenste *Materia Medica* und Heilkunden und legte eine umfassende ethnomedicinische Sammlung an. Sein publizistisches Werk umfasst ca. 200 Artikel sowie einige Bücher. Er gehört zu den wenigen Ärzten, die schon früh die Ethnologie mit einbezogen, um seine Sammlungen interpretieren zu können. Dabei warb er um eine vertiefte Erforschung ethnomedicinischer Befunde auf interdisziplinärer Basis und war mit seinem Arbeitskreis anfangs in Varese und Padua und zuletzt in Genua seiner Zeit voraus. Bei der Gründung der AGEM wurde er 1970 zum Ehrenmitglied ernannt. Seine ethnomedicinische Sammlung wird heute im „Museo di Etnomedicina“ von ANTONIO GUERCI in Genua weiter verwaltet und ist öffentlich zugänglich. (Info: Prof. ANTONIO GUERCI, Dip. di Scienze Antropologiche, Università degli Studi di Genova, Via Balbi, 4, 16126 GENOVA ITALY, Tel.: +39 10-209 97 45, Fax: +39 10-209 59 87, E-Mail: aguerci@nous.unige.it) Zu seinem Werk findet sich eine umfassende vorläufige Dokumentation nach „Memoria di Antonio Scarpa“ in *Antropologia Medica. Rivista della società italiana di antropologia medica* 9 - 10/ ottobre 2000:441-442, hier auf S. 443 - 57 von Guerici A. *Antonio Scarpa: etnomedico, medico periodeute, ecologo delle malattie*. Siehe auch: „Nachruf auf ANTONIO SCARPA (25.03.1903 - 18.02.2000)“ *curare* 24.1+2: 213 - 216 (SCHRÖDER E. 2001). Hauptwerk: A.S. 1980. *Etnomedicina. Verità scientifiche, strane credenze e singolari terapie, meritevoli di verifica, delle medicine tradizionali dei popoli*. Milano: Franco Lucisano.