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ETHNOBOTANY OF MEDICINAL PLANTS USED IN ANTAKYA: A MULTICULTURAL DISTRICT IN HATAY PROVINCE OF TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

Ethnopharmacological relevance: We have compiled information about the medicinal plants used in folk medicine in the district of Antakya. Since its establishment by King Seleucus I in 300 B.C., Antakya (old Antioch) has hosted nearly twenty civilizations. Antakya, neighboring Northwestern Syria, is located on the western end of the “Silk Road” and was one of the great centers of Graeco–Roman world. Today, Antakya is a cosmopolitan city in which Arabic and Turkish are widely spoken, and where distinct ethnic and religious communities, such as Arab Alawite, Arab Christian, Arab Sunni, Turk Sunni, Armenian, and Jewish, have been living together in harmony for centuries. In addition, the rich flora in the vicinity of Antakya also renders the area interesting in terms of ethnobotanical fieldwork.

Aim of the study: This study aimed to compile the information about plants used for medicinal purposes by local people in the district of Antakya. This city is a significant region in terms of ethnobotanical fieldwork, owing to its cosmopolitan structure, long history, relatively preserved traditional community structure, and rich flora. Furthermore, we sought to compare the ethnomedicinal data geographically, cross-culturally, and historically.

Materials and methods: The ethnobotany of medicinal plants used in the district of Antakya has been investigated through two separate studies; one was conducted in 1975, interviewing 29 people, and the other was conducted in 2011–2013, interviewing 182 people. The Use Value (UV) and Informant Consensus Factor (FIC) values of the plants were calculated. In order to interpret the authenticity and sources of the compiled ethnomedicinal information, previous publications that contain information about the similar medicinal uses of plants identified in our region were reviewed and evaluated meticulously. A comparison with the data obtained from other regions of Turkey and from other Mediterranean regions, as well as a cross-cultural analysis between the ethnic groups within the study area, was performed by implementation of the Jaccard index (JI)

Results: Throughout the study, information about 202 medicinal plant taxa was compiled. Among these plants, 39 have either not yet been mentioned in ethnobotanical or medicinal studies, or have been used for a medicinal purpose other than those encountered in the literature review. The ethnomedicinal information we gathered from the study area exhibits close similarities to the ethnomedicinal information of other Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries where Arabic is spoken, as well as to that of Northern and Western Mediterranean countries where Latin languages are spoken. In addition to these similarities, in most cases, this ethnomedicinal information shows hybrid features of ethnomedicinal knowledge from Eastern and Western Mediterranean countries.

Conclusion: Based on a literature survey, we found that the cited medicinal uses for 43 plants have also been corroborated by other various biological testings. This finding strongly suggests the importance of ethnobotanical studies in the development of new medicines. We believe that this study has compiled rich ethnomedicinal information that reflects the cosmopolitan structure of Antakya in a very good way.

Keywords: Ethnomedicine; Antakya; multicultural old city; diachronic analysis; cross-cultural comparison; Turkey

1. Introduction

Nature is the greatest source of inspiration for humankind today, as well as a remedy for many health problems. Virtually 71% of new drugs that have been approved since 1981 have directly or indirectly been derived from natural products (Newman and Cragg, 2012). Ethnobotanical studies are the most reliable guides for humans in utilizing the abundance of herbal resources that nature has to offer. Fabricant and Farnsworth (2001) reported that 122 compounds obtained from only 94 species of plants are being used worldwide in medicine. In addition, they mentioned that 80% of these have had an ethnomedicinal use identical or related to the

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