



Research report

The use of *teetaimed* in Estonia, 1880s–1990s[☆]Renata Sõukand^{a,*}, Raivo Kalle^{a,b}^a Estonian Literary Museum, Vanemuise 42, Tartu 51003, Estonia^b Estonian University of Life Science, Institute of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Sciences, Department of Food Science and Technology, Estonia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 28 December 2011

Received in revised form 22 June 2012

Accepted 25 June 2012

Available online 4 July 2012

Keywords:

Herbal tea

Historical ethnobotany

Archival sources

Medicinal plants

Food culture

Herbal landscape

Multifunctional plants

Food plants

ABSTRACT

This research contributes to a better understanding of the criteria used for the selection of plants for making beverages. Worldwide, not only the leaves of *Camellia sinensis*, but also various other plants are used for making tea. We argue that the selection of plants for making tea (in Estonian *teetaimed*) depends on specific features possessed by or attributed to the plants. 54 plant taxa and one lichen were identified as being used for making tea, based on the analysis of Estonian historical handwritten archival records on plant use for the period from 1887 to 1994. The influence of popular literature on the use of plants for making tea was also assessed. The suitability of a plant for making tea depends on a combination of factors like multifunctional use, mild taste and attributed medicinal properties. The variety of medicinal properties attributed to *teetaimed* in folk medicine allowed herbal tea drinking to be considered as mild disease prevention. Hence, the roots of the Estonian tea tradition lie in the medicinal use of the plants, not oriental ceremonial tea drinking.

© 2012 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

Tea is the most consumed drink in the world, second only to water. For the modern urbanized person “tea” means a product made from the processed leaves and leaf buds of the plant *Camellia sinensis* (L.) Kuntze, infused with boiling water. Types of tea include green, white and yellow (unfermented), oolong (partially fermented) and black (fermented). Also, many commercial herbal teas, which are usually individual- or polyherbal formulations made of (medicinal) plant(s), are available worldwide. Those formulations are considered as substitutes for exclusive drinks like tea and coffee. There is growing interest in the research on the chemical composition of specific herbal teas produced commercially in different regions of the world (for example see Albayrak, Aksoy, Sağdıç, & Albayrak, in press; Desideri, Meli, Roselli, & Feduzi, 2011; Joubert, Gelderblom, Louw, & Beer, 2008).

The use of herbal teas and local plants as a substitute for tea was also historically widespread. Already in 1765, Carl Linnaeus discussed in his dissertation “Potus theae” the use of several plant

species (for example *Origanum vulgare* L. and *Veronica* spp.) as substitutes for tea all over Europe (Linnaeus, 1765). In scientific research usually only a few plants for making tea are mentioned among the food plants of a specific region (for example see Khasbagan & Pei, 2000; Kindscher & Hurlburt, 1998; Kołodziejska-Degórska, 2008; Łuczaj & Szymanski, 2007; Milliken & Bridgewater, 2004; Tardío, Pascual, & Morales, 2005; Turner et al., 2011). The only exception known to the authors is the comprehensive overview dedicated to tea and coffee substitutes, covering 29 wild plants of Canada (Turner & Szczawinski, 1978).

Nevertheless, to the best knowledge of the authors, there is only one published research addressing the criteria for selection of or on the preferences for specific plants for social beverages in specific folk culture (Pardo de Santayana, Blanco, & Morales, 2005). In our ethnobotanical study we rely on historical hand-written archival records on plant use covering a period of over a century. Our working hypothesis is that there exist specific features of plants that make them suitable and desirable for making herbal teas. We also argue that drinking of herbal teas as a supplement to food intake was considered as mild disease prevention. Popular literature and different kinds of popularization of the use of surrogates in Northern Europe left minimal traces in folk botanical practices in the 19th century (Svanberg & Nelson, 1992). According to the analysed example of the introduction of Camomile into Estonian tradition, the same seems true for the almanacs and literature of the 19th century. However, in the 20th century the situation changed (Sõukand, 2007). Thus the influence of popular literature and

[☆] Acknowledgments: The authors acknowledge the Governmental Research and Development programme “Estonian Language and Cultural Memory” (EKKM09-84) for supporting the digitalization of Estonian herbal lore. The research has been supported by ESF Grants ETF9419 and SF0030181s08. The authors thank Ingvar Svanberg for substantial comments on the manuscript and suggested references, Ulrike Plath for suggested references and Ilmar Part for language editing.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: renata@folklore.ee, renata.herba@gmail.com (R. Sõukand).

newspaper articles on the use of local plants for making tea also needs to be researched.

This is our second step in a larger project analysing Estonian folkloristic data on plant use. With it, the authors seek to establish a framework for future research and collaboration in order to acknowledge the possible richness of similar as yet unused data collections.

Materials and methods

Research site

Estonia belongs to the boreo-nemoral vegetation zone, the vegetation period lasts for 185–190 days, and the frost-free period for 105–160 days. Most of the plants are collected within their very short flowering period, which leaves a relatively short time for collecting supplies. Nevertheless, the vegetation of Estonia is very diverse. The number of known indigenous plant taxa of Estonia was estimated at 1400 in the 1990s, with approximately an additional 700 species and subspecies that have migrated or escaped from cultivation (Kukk, 1999). Since the second half of the 20th century, the growth of intensive agriculture, as a result of collectivisation and urbanization, has resulted in the diminishing or even disappearance of many of local species (Kukk & Kull, 2006).

Estonia is one of the three Baltic States, situated in Northern Europe. In the past the now independent country was a part of or divided between different Empires. After the initial occupation by Germans in the 13th century, the local population was turned into serfs. In the Middle Ages the population of present-day Estonia was relatively polarized and two separate worlds existed: the one shared by the German upper class and urban culture, and the other composed of the rural, Estonian speaking, peasant population (Valk, 1999). Later on, the borderline became vaguer and the exchange of knowledge brought new plants and foods into use by the rural population of Estonia. Although serfdom was formally abandoned in 1820s, the peasants still could not move freely and only at the end of 19th century moderate migration started. Hence, traces of the separation between urban and rural population were still recognizable even at the beginning of the 20th century and resulted in two different approaches to foods and drinks.

From the middle of the 19th to the middle of the 20th century the rural population of Estonia greatly relied on the traditional management of farmland, which included also wild or semi-wild pastures where medicinal and food plants were collected. Wild plants have been popular in Estonian culture throughout all traceable history. Estonian peasants took advantage of plant diversity, utilizing approximately 500 different plants for medicinal purposes between 1888 and 1994 (Sõukand & Kalle, 2008). The plants used more often were those requiring human attention to a greater or lesser extent, securing the availability of the supplies when they were needed (Sõukand & Kalle, 2011). Along with the healing purposes, Estonians were using plants as a source for making beverages. Nowadays, many young and middle-aged people, who have not acquired their plant knowledge in the traditional way, still try to rebuild it relying on popular literature.

Definition. What are *teetaimed*

Although tea and coffee were known on the territory of present-day Estonia already for several centuries, for modern Estonians the term tea often means a drink made of local plants infused in boiled water. During the last century, in Estonian folk taxonomy the plants used for making tea are an independent category in the domain of (selfgathered) local plants and are called *teetaimed*. In general, *teetaimed* refers to the plants that are used for making a drink

called *tee* (tea) or *rohutee* (herbal tea). The tea is usually prepared by infusing the chopped dried (or fresh, if the season allows) plants in the boiled water for some time (average 10 min). The category *teetaimed* is greatly overlapping with the category for medicinal plants (*ravimtaimed*), but the time for the preparation of medicinal drink (called *ravimtee*, but also simply *tee*) is usually longer and concentration of plant higher. The tea is used as a drink to slake ones thirst aside a meal, or in the course of social activities (feasts, parties, meetings). Additionally, the drink made of the jam of fruits and berries in hot water is also called *tee*.

Estonian *tee* is a direct loan from German *Tee* (or *Thee*), a noun referring to the beverage made from an exotic source. Drinking of tea was well established among Baltic Germans already in the 18th century, also specific tea substitutes (like strawberry, blackcurrant and cherry leaves) were well-known (Kleines..., 1803), and were probably collected with the help of manor serfs.

Handwritten Russian herbals from the 17th–18th centuries do not contain such a category corresponding to Estonian *teetaimed*, only medicinal, magical, household, etc. recipes (Ippolitova, 2008), indicating that such a category did not exist until the oriental tea became well-known on the territory of Russia. In the Russian Empire generally, oriental tea was mainly an urban and upper-class drink in manors and major cities, a very expensive and exclusive drink. Written records acknowledge its consumption by tsars already in the 17th century (Yoder, 2009). The list of market prices of foodstuffs, compiled in 1764 indicates that two types of tea were available in St Petersburg: Ceylonese (by price 1,462 rubles per pound) and regular tea (0,749 rubles); for comparison: one pound of butter was 0,067 rubles, 10 lb of wheat flour was 0,088 rubles (Munro, 1997). The ritual of drinking tea (in Russian *chaepitie*) was “invented” thanks in part to four famous Russian writers Pushkin, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy and Chekhov in the 19th century (Yoder, 2009). Oriental tea became widespread in Russia only after the Trans-Siberian Railway was constructed, which allowed a greater import of tea at the beginning of the 19th century (Smith & Christian, 1984). The peasants throughout the Russian Empire could not afford the expensive tea, no matter how much it was prized, and were drinking teas made of local species. Alternatively, some segments of the market were also selling falsifications: either re-generated oriental tea, treated with chemicals, or specific local plants (*Epilobium* spp. and in Siberia *Bergenia* spp.) that give a similar color to the infusion (Pohlebkina, 2001).

Origin and composition of the data

The authors have been working on digitalizing the Estonian folk herbal heritage since 1999, creating the Historical Estonian Herbal Medicinal Database (HERBA) (Sõukand & Kalle, 2008). As of November 2011, HERBA contained 16255 reports that were found to reflect the use of medicinal plants, including *teetaimed*. The reports were selected from folklore collections of the Estonian Folklore Archives of the Estonia Literary Museum (EFA). The data was collected between 1886 and 1994, first as responses to public calls to record folk heritage and later collected during the expeditions of folklorists to different locations in the territory of present-day Estonia (for more details on the collecting of Estonian folklore see Kalle & Sõukand, 2011a). Although EFA predominantly keeps records on folk songs, myths and beliefs, among other data some collectors also asked about the use of plants and specifically about the use of plants for making herbal tea.

For this research we extracted from HERBA all the texts indicating the use of plants for making herbal tea without medicinal indication. The selection was based on the specifications of the respondents. Such data originates mostly from two collections: 286 texts from the folklore collection of the first Estonian ethnobotanist Gustav Vilbaste (collected from 1907 to 1967) and 49

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/939976>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/939976>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)