

Ethnoecology of “folk” medicine of mountain Dagestan

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Abstract. The article discusses the traditional medicine of the peoples of Mountain Dagestan. Healing (rational, irrational and mixed) are presented not as a recipe guide, but as a cultural phenomenon, as a demonstration of how local medics succeeded, thanks to centuries of experience, translated medical treatises of the peoples of the world, and the adaptation of human society to living conditions, the use using for medicinal purposes all the fauna, flora, minerals - everything that is in the surrounding kind of successfully treating people.

Keywords: Dagestan, ethno-ecology, folk medicine, healers, phytotherapy, Rational medicine, irrational treatment

Introduction

The most important conditions for finding the right life path are mental balance and harmony, reasonable ways of working, relaxing, eating, and knowing how to improve the body. From the point of view of ethno-ecology, Dagestan healers used to successfully treat a wide variety of diseases with only local ingredients, some of which seem most improbable to modern readers. Ethno-ecology is “a special area of ethnography that studies the relationship between ethnic

communities and the environment, related to the development of their material and spiritual environment and the use of its resources”, and culture is the mechanism by which adaptation was transformed into reality. [1] Adaptation to the environment was achieved by the sociocultural restructuring of their external and internal surroundings [2]. If man is a product of nature and his environment, the structural elements of ecology, his habitat, traditional management of nature and his worldview are clearly interconnected [3].

The medicine of Dagestan was influenced by the experience and knowledge of all the peoples of Dagestan and externally from the rich heritage of oriental medicine, which arrived with Islam and Arab-Muslim culture. “... Almost all treatises of medieval medicine were known in Dagestan,” often brought back from the hajj, the most popular being the world-famous work of Abu Ali ibn Sina (Avicenna), "The Canon of Medicine," which incorporated the medical knowledge of ancient Rome, Greece, Iran, India, and Central Asia. The earliest Canon found in Dagestan dates from 1400. [4]

The healers both translated medieval medicinal texts using Arabic letters “*Ajam*” into local languages and “created works themselves in various fields of medicine.” [5] The *Hannal Murad (Damadan)* medical guide known throughout Dagestan is a translation from Persian to Lak of the medical guide of Muhammad al-Dailami al-Mazandarani, under the name *Tukhfatal-Muminin*. [6; 7] Lukman al-Hakim’s book of medicines was also widespread among the doctors of Dagestan because it presented formulation methods for medical drugs from minerals, plant and animal products, with their methods of use and dosage. [8]

The fame of doctors was passed down from generation to generation, building medical dynasties known throughout Dagestan. Healers (some women) came from almost every village. [9]

The lifestyle of the mountaineers, with their ethnic foods, work, leisure and relationships between people, contributed to a healthy, hardworking old age. Specialized work, reasonable nutrition, fasting and treatment with natural remedies prevented most serious illnesses.

Evil spirits

A serious illness arose either as punishment for sins; or as a test of perseverance and faith in predetermined destiny of the Almighty. When a disease penetrated a person, it mystically “resided” in his body for as long as the patient allowed. Diseases were transmitted by magic to the earth, plants, animals, people and even to sacred domestic objects (the home, grain store and clothing such as a headdress or sheepskin coats and a cradle).

The common irrational treatment for diseases 'caused' by the "evil eye" was with talismans and prayers. The healers' magic words and ritual actions punished the objectionable and banished the disease to distant mountains, forests, rivers or steppes, it could even change the weather and inspire love. [9]

Infectious diseases

The transmission of a disease by air and wind caused obesity, denoting a "sticky" contagious disease. Hundreds died from smallpox in the mountains of Dagestan in 1890. In 1892 cholera infected some 23,000 and almost 10,500 died. [10;11] Other infectious imports were typhoid, tuberculosis, plague and dysentery.

Fire and water

Fire and water were purifiers, so during epidemics, both healthy and sick walked or jumped over a small bonfire, carrying their babies. Ritual fire was manipulated by jumping, circling or fumigating. Widespread magic healing properties were associated with spring-water, rainwater and dew. Water that washed away dirt and impurities, could (rationally) cleanse diseases.

Plants

Edible vitamin-rich wild plants provided proteins, fats, carbohydrates, vitamins, and potassium, iron, and phosphorus salts. The healers recipes were secret. For unusual diseases a larger number of plants were combined, in the hope that one would work. Respiratory diseases were treated with an infusion of coltsfoot, plantain, sage, oregano and mint. Narcotic and poisonous plants - poppy, rabbit cabbage", milkweed, and celandine - were applied externally on humans and animals, as well as small doses for infusions, tinctures or juices Monk's Hood bulbs with horseradish infused with vodka were a popular rheumatic embrocation. Highlanders traditionally picked raspberries for colds, blueberries for intestinal disorders and rose hips as a restorative and against flu and colds, as well as diseases of the liver, bladder, gastric catarrh, low acidity, stomach ulcers, anemia and atherosclerosis. At home compotes, marshmallows and teas were prepared from dried rose hips. Regular consumption of wild plants as medicine and tonics, combined with low-calorie food, plausibly helped villagers to adapt to extreme weather. [12]

In folk medicine, cauterization by medicinal plants, now known as reflexology, was used. Wormwood was heated with hot charcoal in ancient cast-iron cullenders and set alight to make

“wormwood cigarettes”, with which the patient massaged himself to improve arthritis, myositis, bronchial asthma, hypertension and gastric ulcers.

Honey

Beekeeping was important in the Highlanders economy. Honey had a universal therapeutic effect, prescribed orally for diarrhea and cold and externally for purulent wounds, ulcers, dental treatment, to treat skin burns, wounds, and sore eyes. Flower honey was mixed with oil, salt, baked onions, and decoctions of medicinal herbs. Honey-derived wax, royal jelly and propolis were widely used for medical purposes and bee stings for rheumatism. Modern science confirmed that honey is bactericidal.

Animal products

A Russian physician about 1850 wrote that “There are curious methods of treatment [of consumption] that were randomly applied by mountain doctors. They gave the patient plant rot with an admixture of minerals and mold from under large stones. Alternatively, they forced him to swallow powdered stone with and finally treated him with a patch, smeared with ointment. They even resorted to vodka, obviously to the detriment of the patient and to donkey milk, which acted as a cleanser.” [13]

Minerals

In folk medicine, many volcanic soda, salt, ash, chalk, and mercuric chloride were cures for a diseased digestive system. Skin diseases were cured with earth, copper sulfate, iron, ash, soot, gunpowder, salt, clay, tar, sulfur, oil, and amber. In folk surgery, lime, soda, salt, clay, copper, kerosene, dust, grease, earth, ash, yellow arsenic, and lapis. copper, salt, sand, clay, kerosene, and amber were used for the treatment of internal organs. Kerosene, stone, pebble, salt, sulfur, and camphor were used against infectious diseases. Iron, salt, ash, tin, lead, and copper were used to “cure the evil eye and fright,” as were red corals, porcelain, ultramarine and natural silk.

Summary

Rational methods of healing were mixed with talismans, prayers, fasting, charity and repentance. In the past wellbeing and the prevention of diseases was the result of an established lifestyle and a traditional nutrition, harmonized with ethno-environmental factors.

Successful healing combined plant, animal and mineral medicines with ritual actions. In sacred medicine, supernatural forces and faith in their ability to cause diseases and healing were necessary. Belief in the universal animation of matter served as the basis for diagnosis. The ethno-ecological power of traditional medicine was that the mountaineers realized that their health entirely depended on the impact of the environment, sanitary conditions and the health of their neighbors, implying that healing and nutrition act both at individual and social levels, satisfying material and spiritual needs.

Acknowledgment. The publication was prepared within the framework of a research project № 190-9-00490 “The use of ethnocultural traditions in the strategy of socio-economic and environmental development of the mountain areas of Dagestan” supported by the Russian Foundation for Basic Research

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