



Comenius Project

“Living Our Common Ancestry”

The Art School of Gerakas
School Year 2014 - 2015

Byzantine Medicine

**Herbs, Plants and Flowers used
in Byzantine Medicine (9th-13th centuries)**

- Medical ideas and practices in the Byzantine era were mainly based on work that had been done in the ancient times by doctors such as Hippocrates and Galen. The Byzantines also used ideas from Arab and Jewish Medicine and developed their own practices as well.
- The medicines that people used were in most cases herbal. Doctors of the time tried to use herbs, plants, flowers and vegetables as much as possible in order to treat or cure diseases. Modern Medicine is still using knowledge and information learnt at that time.
- The most important plants that were used by the Byzantines and their medicinal properties are presented below.

Mandrake

Ancient Greeks and Romans used mandrake for its soporific, analgesic and sedative properties and in the Middle Ages it was used as an anesthetic. Its hypnotic properties allowed amputation or cauterisation.

It was used until the 18th century against depression, convulsions, rheumatism pains and scrofulous tumors.

In large quantities it may cause manic behaviour and delirium to the patient as it contains opium and can lead to death in case of overdose.

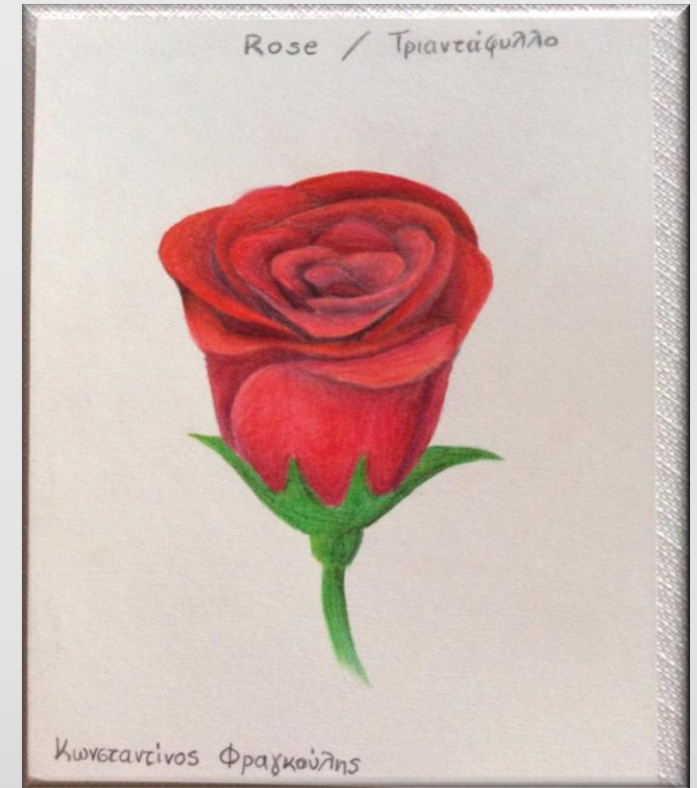


Rose

This beautiful flower has haemostatic and antiseptic properties. It is also diuretic and has healing effects in cases of suppurative tonsillitis and mouth ulcers.

It soothes and relieves headache and dizziness and acts as an antidepressant. It is considered one of the most important stress relievers, it is antispasmodic, and it helps treat stomach ache and problems of constipation.

It protects from problems of insomnia but it also has anti-inflammatory and antiparasitic properties.



Water lily

This plant offers protection against heart conditions thanks to a substance called *nymphaline*. The plant has constipating and antiseptic properties.

The flowers of the plant have slightly narcotic properties and its root has soothing properties. Its use is recommended in cases of kidney and/or cyst problems and dysentery.

The water lily beverage works against insomnia, delirium and pneumonic problems. Also, the beverage made from its flowers can be used against cough and it is anticonvulsant.

Effusion of its flowers in small doses is recommended as a painkiller, a sedative and a soporific. The pulp of its fresh leaves has healing properties.



Calamintha / Calamint



The plant was used as a pharmaceutical herb in the Middle Ages. It was usually cultivated for domestic use.

The whole plant is aromatic, diaphoretic, expectorant, and it helps lower the fever and soothe the stomach.





Myrtle

Besides being an ornamental plant, myrtle is also really valuable for its wood.

Its leaves have constipating, invigorating and antiseptic properties. It is effective against gingivitis, tooth aches, dermatological conditions, diarrhea and eczema.





Violet

Violets are associated with romance and love and their magical properties are used in aromatherapy.

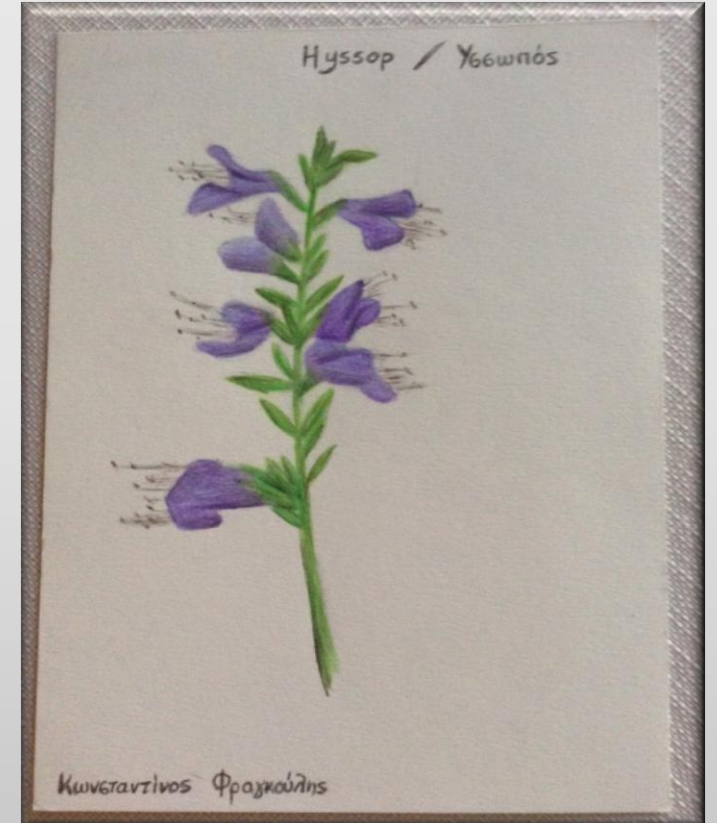
Among other uses, violet oil is used as a sedative of the nervous system. It also helps against insomnia.

It can be burnt in a pot, specially made for the burning of oils, sprinkled on the body or on candles, or used for the preparation of potions or mixtures. It is always added to another oil that serves as the basic substance (e.g. almond oil, olive oil, etc) or it is dissolved in water but it cannot be used directly on the body. Then it is bottled and accompanied by instructions for use.

Hyssop

It is known for its antiseptic and its blood purging properties.

Traditionally, it was used for detoxification, but also as a treatment against asthma and bronchitis, because it works well as a decongestant of the respiratory system.



Oregano



Oregano is a powerful aromatic herb, which provides relief from spasms and hiccups.

It facilitates digestion and works up an appetite. It is effective against diarrhea, inflammations, bleeding and it has antibacterial, expectorant and germicide action. It increases sweating and urination.



Mint

Mint is a mossy aromatic herb and one of the easiest aromatic herbs to grow.

Mint has a long history. It has been known since the ancient times when it was used in the preparation of myrrh and for medicinal purposes. Dioskouridis and Hippocrates mentioned mint as a plant of significant pharmaceutical value and really nice scent.

A mint drink is invigorating, facilitates food digestion and soothes the stomach.



Leek

Its main therapeutic property is its action as emollient and expectorant of the pituitary glands of the respiratory system, thanks to the sulfur-nitrogen essential oil that it contains. This is why it is recommended to treat pharyngitis, laryngitis, bronchitis and generally all kinds of pneumonic diseases.

It is slightly cathartic and helps against constipation and towards bowel purging from parasites. It has overall detoxifying action and can also be used for the detoxification of smokers.

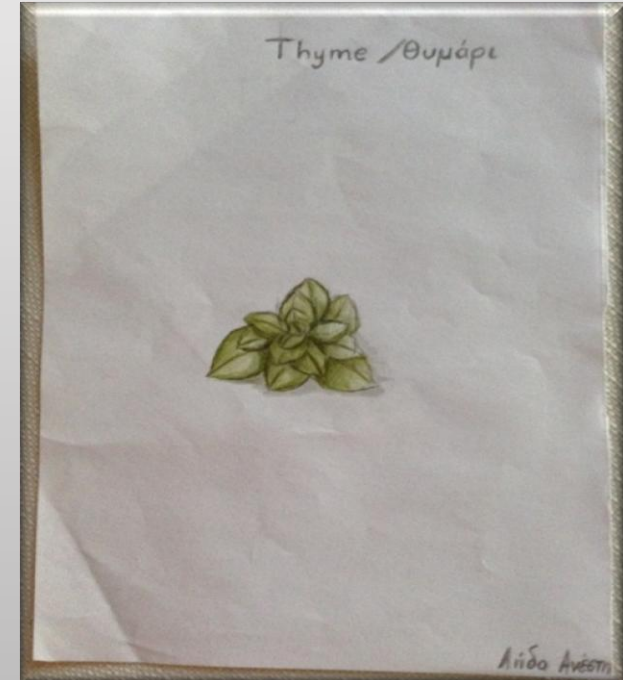
It contains phosphorus, potassium, magnesium, zinc (in small quantities) as well as vitamins A, B, C and folic acid.



Thyme

Thyme was used as an antidote in case of poisoning, to prevent plague, as a symbol of bravery, and as one's last companion in the grave.

The reputation of thyme as a healing herb goes back thousands of years ago. In the Roman era it was widely known that consumption of thyme before or during a meal, would protect from possible poisoning. For obvious reasons, this belief made the herb a favourite among emperors.



Sources of information

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- <http://www.anneperry.co.uk/miscellany/ephemera/medicine-in-the-byzantine-era/>
- Google pictures

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