CONCLUSION

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INTRODUCTION

The traditional medicinal uses of orchids in Europe go back to antiquity and were described in old treaties of medicine. The doctors of antiquity deduced the pharmacological properties of plants, from observation of their shape « similia similibus curantur » in comparison to the human anatomy and this well before Paracelse (1493-1541) makes this theory famous.

We present some examples of European traditional uses of orchids as medicine, health food and even as skin care treatment.

HISTORY

For Dioscoride, Greek doctor of the first century, based on their testicle shape, the consumption of tubers of Orchis made more virile.

In Roman medicine, the orchids based aphrodisiac drinks were called Satyrion but it seems that their properties were more due to the aromatics they contained.

In Europe until the Middle Ages, the Orchis were used in potions like exciting according to various medicine books such as Dr Vicat medicine treaty on Swiss pharmacopea. They are also sometime described as having anti-pyretic, and anti-diarrhoeal effects.

In the XVIème century, a German doctor, Leonarth Fousch (or Fusch), had described a “male” species and a “female” species of orchis to fight inflammation, ulcers and some tumors. Later, in the north of Europe, some species of Dactylorhiza were described like disinfectant, healing or diuretic.

According to the French encyclopedia of Diderot and Alembert, the best preparation of the orchids is that of Mr. Geoffroy, described in a report of the French Academy of Science en1740. The dried bulbs of orchis, without skin, are thrown in cool water, are cooked then dried. There one finds the traditional mode of preparation of the salep, resulting from Arab medicine. Very hard they resemble the gum aragante. The purpose of the method of preparation is to extract a maximum of substance food containing starch, mucilage, polysaccharides of the glucomannane type. Reduced out of powder, one will use them as drink or against the chest complaints. It is a strengthening remedy for children and convalescents suitable “to repress the acridness of the lymph and useful in the biliary phthisis and dysenteries.

The salep originally invented in Persia was also used in jelly, in an analeptic medicinal chocolate or as a drink in England and Europe before the arrival of the tea and coffee.

As recalled by the French doctor Joseph Lieutaud, in his 1776 Materia Medica treaty “the salep is in Persia what the ginseng is in China “.

Orchis morio and also Orchis maculata, Orchis latifolia, Orchis mascula, are the main sources of orchids to produce the salep used in Europe at that time.

A rare manuscript dated 1589 of a French apothecary describes many uses of orchids. Especially it focuses on the nourishing use of dried gum extracted from Satyrion bulbs.

If Leonarth Fousch in 1549 first reports that “Satyrium regium”, is used “to remove the wrinkles of the face”, it was necessary to wait until the end of 20th century to see, based on phytochemical and pharmacological researches, the first uses of different orchids purified extracts in skincare products.

For example, using phytochemical analysis and cell culture models, scientists demonstrated anti-inflammatory and antisenescence properties of some phenanthrenes derivatives extracted from tropical epiphyte Vanda sp.

CONCLUSION

If the orchids were used in the past in the European pharmacopoeias, it is only recently that they are the subject of modern scientific investigations as source of new potential molecules with therapeutic and topical anti-aging applications.

F Bonté et al, Ann Pharm Fr. 2011;69:177-81, C Simmler et al.,

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