Herbs and the Evolution of Human Societies

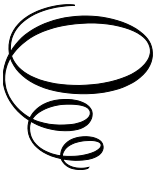
Under the direction of Yue Yue, Molly Chatalic
(HCTI E4249) University of Western Brittany (France)

Herbs and the Evolution of Human Societies

Edited by

Yue Yue and Molly Chatalic

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



Herbs and the Evolution of Human Societies

Edited by Yue Yue and Molly Chatalic

This book first published 2022

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-7970-0
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-7970-5

TABLE OF CONTENTS

General Introduction

Yue Yue, Molly Chatalic
(HCTI E4249) University of Western Brittany
(UBO) France

(Translated by Anne Hellegouarch-Bryce)

It was the placing under lockdown of populations all over the world at the start of the year 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic that initiated the train of thought that inspired this introduction. Irrespective of political systems, social structures or the cultural characteristics of states and populations, it was humanity as a whole that suddenly faced this unprecedented and exceptionally tragic ordeal. Medical staff everywhere rallied round, researchers and scientists set up new projects, and heads of state appealed to the public spirit of the population, first, to stem the spread of the disease and then, when it was 'under control', to plan the lifting of the lockdown measures, progressively and with great caution. All over the world, the anxiety induced by the situation led us to question our way of life and our habits, down to the most mundane aspects of our everyday life and the ways in which we coexist and socialise with our fellow human beings. Ultimately, the pandemic has acted as a catalyst, crystallising all the critical implications that climate change and rising sea levels are likely to have on the way we live, work, travel, and consume or produce goods. In this respect, the worldwide health crisis has led us to focus more keenly on these issues; it has made us more aware of the urgent need to address them and we are being told that, from now on, we must learn to live differently, taking into account the risk of a widespread health crisis. Asia has long had a greater awareness of this risk than the West, due to the series of epidemics that have recently affected Asia in close succession (Hong Kong flu, SARS, etc.) and also due to chronic industrial pollution. But more profoundly still, it is because of different cultural and philosophical conceptions of the relationship between humans and nature. It is on this relationship that we propose to shed some light here, by focusing on

plants, and more specifically on the place and role of medicinal and aromatic plants in Western and Eastern cultures.

In 1763, believing himself to be persecuted, an ageing and ailing Jean-Jacques Rousseau deliberately retreated into seclusion and devoted his time to collecting medicinal plants. It would be a mistake to see this activity as nothing more than a hobby consisting in creating herbaria or a mundane utilitarian means of collecting remedies to treat infections. Rather, it should be understood as a return to nature, implying a genuine discovery of the world around us and an attempt to fathom its links with humankind. Patiently gathering plants, experiencing the aesthetic emotion brought about by contemplating them and meticulously studying collected samples: these are all requisites for conducting thorough research and analysis into understanding the conditions in which vegetation appears and develops, and the properties of plants – that is, the constitution of a body of knowledge useful to humanity. Rousseau's *Letters on the Elements of Botany* undoubtedly illustrate his philosophical reasoning, but also – not without some poetry, it should be said – his enthusiasm, his love of nature and his admiration for laws which, according to him, are lessons for humanity.[1]

At the start of the 20th century, the writings of American author John William Harshberger (1869–1929) on plant ecology, the pathology of plants and fungi, and the morphology and physiology of plants[2] paved the way, according to Roland Portères (1906–1975),[3] for the newly-emerging discipline of ethnoscience, which is a branch of ethnology focussing on the study of the concepts and systems of classification devised by every society in an attempt to understand nature and the world. As a discipline based on association, ethnoscience is based on the study of the original relations that developed between human societies and plants, and on the ways in which these relations evolved in order to investigate the conditions of this evolution. The human use of plants, and more specifically the exploitation of resources, as an expression of the interrelationship between humans and the living world, fully reflects and underpins the development of human culture, ideas and technology throughout human history. The rise and fall of plant resources is closely linked to the survival and future of humanity,[4] and to civilisations emerging and developing.[5] To this end, many different disciplinary fields are called upon: ethnology and anthropology, first of all, to shed light on what French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss famously called the "*pensée sauvage*" (humanity's mythology, beliefs, practices, customs, folklore, and the way it resorts to magic or is expressed through the arts), but also archaeology, history

(including aspects such as religion or technology) and philosophy, in that it expresses ideas pertaining to nature and its relationship with humans, without forgetting the 'hard' sciences such as botany or biology.

After initially just being predators, humans gradually domesticated plants and animal species – or should this be seen as a more complex game, in which certain animals saw the benefits of commensalism? Humans, however, remained dependent on Nature and its seasonal cycles, and on the impact of weather changes that caused food shortage and famines. Humans spared no effort in trying to free themselves from the dangers that threatened them – by the invention and use of tools (hoes, ploughs), the harnessing of animal force to serve their needs, and the development of technology (irrigation techniques, for instance), as well as through feats of construction (such as terrace cultivation or the creation of polders in certain wetlands), or the use of soil enrichments and fertilisers.

Gradually, over the course of thousands of years of agrarian history, the landscape was transformed and shaped, and the quality and yield of soils and plant species were improved. This all changed when agricultural advances and revolutions provided seeds improved through selection, all sorts of new machinery, fertilisers, fungicides and herbicides, as well as different methods of cultivating the land which improved productivity and thereby reduced the cost of production. The relationship between humans, on the one hand, and the soil and the plants it produced, on the other, was all the more disrupted as the growing use of specialised crops reduced the variety of plants that were being cultivated in a given place: this often meant that some plant species formerly seen as useful in the traditional system were now considered as pests, since they vied for space with more valuable ones. These undesirable plants were treated with weed-killers that kept them in check without totally eradicating them, so the seed bank contained in the soil ensured they were able to survive and propagate.

Although the productivist model of agriculture did not have the same impact on medicinal and aromatic plants, which are rarer with specific uses, the production and uses of such plants have been affected nonetheless. The decline in our consideration for medicinal plants is correlated to the production of medicine and drugs by a fast-developing and all-powerful pharmaceutical industry, and the herbalist shops that were still common in the 1970s have, for the most part, disappeared. Aromatic herbs have suffered from the development of the chemical industry, which has created many synthetic additives, while on a global scale, eating habits have become increasingly standardised. However, the

memory of the old agrarian and rural civilisation, and of the intimate bonds that linked humans to plants, has not totally disappeared, even in those regions that were most impacted by agricultural revolutions, and this is especially true where medicinal and aromatic plants are concerned. The surviving remnants of ancestral practices bring us knowledge and empirical know-how handed down by one generation to the next. Like any other form of material or immaterial cultural heritage threatened with oblivion or disappearance, this collective memory ought to be preserved, but even more importantly, it should be studied as a testimony of the relationship between humans and nature, as an insight into a way of life, a way of perceiving the world and finding one's place in it. More profoundly, it is a key to understanding how, at one particular point in time in the history of human societies, the relationship between humankind and the natural world was being seriously thought about. By putting into perspective all these collected testimonies, one can retrace a part of history and gain insight into entire episodes of the lives of our forebears – their everyday life, fears, joys and sorrows.[6]

Essential biographical references include several authors: Isaac Henry Burkill (1870–1965), Richard Evans Schultes (1915–2001), André-Georges Haudricourt (1911–1996) and more recently Pierre Lieutaghi. Herbs used in cooking or industry, and medicinal and aromatic plants have all been studied by botanists so that their biology holds no secrets for us and their history is documented, particularly in respect to their production mode, uses and trade. Yet human societies' conception and perception of 'herbs', as such, remains a field of research that has so far not been explored, even though herbs are a primary element in our environment – a form of skin that protects the earth, a fundamental element of all ecosystems and originally a source of fodder for livestock. As people today rediscover that wetlands serve an actual purpose and learn about the part they play in the environment, the benefits of 'natural meadows' (that is, meadows that are untilled and 'left to their own devices' so that the same species can grow back year after year) are quite rightly being appraised from a different point of view. More important still, as underlined by Michel Chauvet, their presence recalls the traditional agrarian systems:

> "domestication does not stop at the mere relationship Man formed over thousands of years with animals; it also encompasses the more complex and far more ancient one he has with plants. From the very start, Man had to contend with the plant world which he both feared and respected: to feed and clothe himself, and to cater to his medical and spiritual needs, Man organised his life around certain plants."[7]

It is this relationship between humans and medicinal plants that prompted the contributions in this volume: they analyse the link that humankind establishes with nature, and examine the way a dialogue was set up between these two worlds and how it has evolved. From a geographical point of view, the texts take us to Africa, America, Asia and Europe via Brazil, Canada, China, Ethiopia, France, Somalia, Switzerland, Tibet, Tunisia, Ukraine, and the United States. The 14 contributions are organised into three parts. The first deals with the pharmacopeia that plants constitute: their medicinal powers, the knowledge that emerged around them – empirical and also scientific knowledge, which formed the matter for theoretical teaching – their sphere of prescription (each plant being a 'remedy' prescribed to cure a particular affliction, but which also 'healed' the body in a more global way: 'humours' and soul included), the conditions of their therapeutic use, and since plant therapy expresses a way of existing in the world, the inherent relationship between nature and human beings.

The second part focuses on herbs as objects giving rise to cultural expression: literary descriptions, art and the making of botanic collections or herbaria; and plants as a pretext or subject for fairy tales but also, in some cases, for investigations to discover the mystery that surrounds them, as in the case of the famous Annedda of Jacques Cartier. Another article describes a mythical 'herb', the 'fern flower', and its symbolism, in the complex of rituals celebrated in the summer solstice festival of *Ivan Kupala*, on St. John's Night, in Slavic countries.

Human survival and reproduction depend on nature. In the long history of human development, understanding the characteristics and functions of plants in their natural environment has allowed people from all corners of the world to thrive. Beyond their intrinsic value, for many the economic benefits to be reaped from the natural world are equally essential for survival. In the third part of this book on scientific research exploring the relationship between plants and humans, we introduce the fact that in some areas of the world, plants are an important means of human survival. In Tibet, in order to survive financially and to escape eradication, mountain people take the risk of digging out "Cordyceps sinensis" which is sold to and by the Chinese for as high a price as gold; in some cases the money Tibetans earn is used to escape the tyranny of colonisation and reach democratic and free countries in the West. Yet, the excavation of this rare high mountain plant can also lead to the damage of natural ecology ecosystems. In Tunisia, people are protecting and picking rosemary on a larger scale in order to obtain greater economic profits and improve local

living standards. In poverty-stricken areas of China, lotus flowers have become a spiritual pursuit and a material guarantee for local people to become rich.

In the course of travels to distant lands, even today medicinal plants can be the object of spectacular discoveries that add to the knowledge and better understanding of our environment – thereby bringing new food for thought to the age-old questioning on the origins of the relationship between humans and nature. This volume displays the diversity of themes linked to the issue of the relationship between herbs and humanity, the complexity of the questions raised, the diversity of approaches by researchers of different origins and with different academic training, and the contribution of interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity to the debate. Although this work sheds new light on the topic, broadens the scope of our knowledge and reappraises certain assumptions to offer fresh conclusions, there remains yet more work to be done on the subject. The phenomenon of direct interaction between humans and plants is a dynamic process of change. The use of plants by humans is influenced by social changes, behavioural changes and changes in values. Both the material and spiritual significance can play a role in the development of regional plant resources, and local economic and cultural development.[8] We therefore hope that this volume will only be the starting point to other studies that will further the analysis and conclusions offered here, and that it will inspire the development of international and multidisciplinary research, and so may contribute to establishing a more harmonious relationship between humans and nature.

Notes

[1] Jean-Marc Drouin, "Rousseau, le philosophe botaniste," *Historia* 100, March/April 2006, p. 90-93.

[2] Pierre Le Roux, "Ethnoscience: une définition de l'ethnoscience. Approche historique et épistémologique," in Aurélie Choné, Isabelle Hajek, Philippe Hamman (dir.), *Guide des Humanités environnementales,* Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2016, p. 287.

[3] In 1935, Roland Portères created one of the world's first laboratories of ethnosociology at the Natural History Museum (Muséum national d'histoire naturelle) in Paris.

[4] David M. Bates, *Economic Botany*, 1985, 39 (3), 241-265.

[5] Roland Portères, "L'ethnobotanique: Place – Objet – Méthode – Philosophie," *Journal d'agriculture tropicale et de botanique appliquée,* vol. 8, no. 4-5, April/May 1961. p. 102-109.

[6] Pierre Lieutaghi, *La Plante compagne : pratique et imaginaire de la flore sauvage en Europe occidentale,* Arles, Actes Sud, 1998.
[7] Michel Chauvet, "Préface," in André-George Haudricourt and Louis Hédin: *L'Homme et les plantes cultivées*. Paris, Édition A-M. Métailié, 1987.
[8] Pei Shengji, 裴盛基, "Ethnobotany and the Development of Plant Resources," (民族植物学与植物资源的开发) in *Acta Botanica Yunnan,* Kunming, 1988, p. 135-144.

PART ONE:

HERBAL INTELLIGENCE ON THE HUMAN BEING

BODY CARE AND SOUL CARE: A TYPOLOGY OF THE HERBS IN THE MEDICINAL RECIPES OF THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WORK OF THE BRETON PEASANT JULIEN GODEST

NELLY BLANCHARD
PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN BRITTANY (FRANCE)

(TRANSLATED BY ELISE THEPAUT)

Knowledge in popular medicine is generally borne by oral tradition and access to written sources is rarely possible. The presence of a wide range of herbal remedies in the literary work of the self-taught Breton peasant Julien Godest, written in the Breton language around 1905 under the title *Envorennou ar barz Juluen Godest* (*Bard Julien Godest's Memoirs*[1]), is therefore all the more precious as it is unusual. The object of this article is to establish a typology of these medicinal remedies. The focus is on what types of plants are used, what the ratio is of wild to domestic plants, which parts of the plants are used (flower, leaf, bark, fruit, etc.), what methods of preparation (raw, decoction, blend, poultice, mixture, etc.) and administration are used, and what diseases are treated by these plants (short-term or chronic diseases, parasitical illnesses, wounds, etc.) Through this typology we will also try to understand what relationship this peasant had with nature and with his close environment, and what his conception was of body care in connection with soul care, within the framework of his Christian beliefs in the organisation of the world.

A small herbal book in the life story of a self-taught Breton peasant

Between 1905 and 1913, probably at an irregular pace, Julien Godest (b. 1849 in Plougonver – d. 1932 in Callac) wrote a text of about 350 pages in

Breton in a black account book.[2] The author was born to a poor farming family, all of whose members probably only spoke Breton and were illiterate, which should have made it impossible for him to have access to the world of writing. Julien Godest, like most other children of his social conditions at that time, did not attend school. This lack of schooling in his family, which he also evokes in his account,[3] had a profound impact on his culture, which is essentially oral. He also closes the first part of the 'first book' of his *Memoirs* with this signature in the form of an affirmation of the essential and fundamental place of orality in his culture: "*Juluen Godest, Gwelloc'h he gomjou evit he skritur*" [Julien Godest. His words are better than his writings].

However, Julien Godest made the decision to cut back on his sleeping time to learn to read and write. After meeting, around 1865–1870, people who gave him an alphabet book[4] and a few other small pamphlets or books,[5] he managed to learn to read in four months. While writing was not an essential part of his universe and during his period of learning to write it probably represented only a dazzling aspiration to get socially close to the educated classes, it gradually became the way to fix his oral way of thinking. The catalyst for this acculturation was Godest's meeting in 1903 with François Jaffrennou, alias Taldir ab Herninn (1879–1956), the central figure of the Breton regionalist movement of the time (later called *emzao*[6]). We shall return to this influence later.

Julien Godest organises his text in a very precise way. First of all, he distinguishes between two books (*levr*): the first book consists of three parts, the first of which concerns the life of his brother Jean-François Godest, the second relates Julien Godest's own vocation as a bard and the third consists of 14 songs mainly related to the consequences of the combist laws[7]; as for the second book, it is divided into 32 theme songs, and 88 herbal remedies and medicinal advice. This last part is precisely the one we are going to deal with.

A peasant pharmacopoeia

Julien Godest methodically classifies 87 remedies, followed by a final part on general health advice. He mainly proposes an entry for each disease concerned (56 remedies out of 87) and sometimes an entry for the herb mainly concerned (31 remedies): the knowledge of herbs is therefore not valid in itself but as a tool of care. In this peasant world where survival depends on animal husbandry and agriculture, the remedies mainly concern human beings (64 remedies) but also animals (20) and cereals

(1).[8] Moreover, six other remedies are valid for both humans and animals. The animals to be tended, which are therefore the most important in his eyes, are above all horses (14 remedies), followed by cows (5).[9] In order to avoid the loss of an animal – and thus to avoid driving a family into poverty – the author advises to treat horses when they suffer from stomach aches, colic, gas and constipation, sore throat and strangles (angina), choking (nasal), hoof diseases, and parasites.[10] As for cattle, particular attention must be paid to weak calf syndrome, frostbite of cows, dairy cows being suckled by weasels or snakes, and especially to cow bloating (meteorisation). Concerning cereals (especially wheat, but also oats and rye), the disease that can destroy a crop is wheat smut.

The plants recommended by Godest to look after humans and animals are all those present in the immediate surroundings of the peasants, directly usable in rural areas (except for eucalyptus which he mentions for its effectiveness and which can be found in pharmacies, but he specifies that it is not found in Brittany; and tobacco which is easily bought). The plants that Godest mentions most often are burdock (8), mauve (6), walnut (5), greater celandine (4), flax (4), ash (3) and strawberry (3). Plants mentioned twice are tuber oat-grass, oak, watercress, leek and elderberry. Finally, the other plants mentioned only once are: wild wormwood, garlic, eucalyptus, broom, houseleek, ivy, silver mint, honeycombed plantain, potato, bramble, reed, fir, santolina and tobacco. It should be noted that only potatoes and strawberries are cultivated plants and that all the others are wild.

These remedies show precise knowledge of the different parts of the plants that go into the preparations. Mallow is used for its roots, leaves and flowers; oak for its bark, acorns and wood (plank); burdock for its roots and leaves; strawberry for its roots and fruit; elderberry for its second bark and flowers; and broom for its flowers and pods. Other plants are used for only one of their parts: boxwood for its tips; fir for its young thorns; ash for its bark; ivy, bramble and walnut for their leaves; santolina and flax for their seeds; and reed for its sap. The remedies sometimes also specify what leaves of the plant should be picked, as in the case of bramble: “The bramble forms its leaves into single shoots or in groups of three. At sunrise, pick the leaves that grow in threes but are perfectly healthy. Harvest the third leaf from each shoot as needed. Pass this leaf through the flame. Place two of them in the shape of a cross on the wound.”[11]

Most of the ingredients added to these main plants are common, easily accessible and inexpensive products. Water is used in the vast majority of cases, for herbal tea preparations (34 times), followed by milk, mentioned only 8 times. Other ingredients include butter (4 times), coffee (2), salt (2), beer (1), pepper (1), meat or bacon (1), chimney soot (1), and alum (1). Adjuvants are sometimes suggested, merely to improve the taste of the medicine: sugar (9 times), honey or jam (2), cognac (1), liquorice (1), and spearmint (1). Also, for the purpose of having free remedies at hand, the conservation of plants is important to Godest because it makes remedies available all year round, outside of the flowering periods. Thus, he does not hesitate to remind the reader several times of the possibilities offered by drying (ash and oak bark, elderflower, broom flower and pods, acorn, flax seed in flour, worms expelled, dried and crushed) or bottling preparations (pressed tobacco juice, strawberry jam). Ivy and bramble leaves are to be collected at sunrise (remedies Nos. 62 and 63), and broom and strawberries in summer.

The modes of administration are varied, but ingestion is recommended in more than half of the cases (47 times including 7 recommendations for fasting ingestion). Application (25) and enema (8) are quite often indicated. The other methods mentioned are inhalation (2), injection (2), cutting and piercing (2), chewing (1), and spraying (1). Godest mentions three child-specific remedies to combat painful teething, measles and dermatitis; and three female-specific remedies to combat leucorrhoea, and to improve skin texture and complexion. All of the human ailments addressed and their respective herbal remedies are compiled in the chart below:

Chart of correspondences between human ailments and the use of herbal remedies, according to Julien Godest

Ailment	Remedy
Abscess, dermatitis abscess, boil, etc. Cut Inflammation Wound Burn	Walnut (leaf), silver mint Burdock (leaf), houseleek, silver mint Flax (flour), mallow (leaf), flax (seed) Bramble (leaf) Boxwood (spikes), ivy (leaf), potato
Scabies, eczema, skin problems Ringworm, strangles Rash Complexion	Tobacco, burdock (leaf, root), elderberry (bark) Strawberry plant (root) Mallow (root) Leek
Bloating Dyspepsia Stomach aches Constipation Diarrhoea, colic Intestinal inflammation	Ash (bark) Watercress Mallow (root) Linseed Oak (bark, acorn, wood) Linseed
Cough	Burdock (leaf), oats, eucalyptus, fir (thorns), mallow (flower), watercress, celandine, elderberry (flower)
Coughing up blood (haemoptysis)	Mallow
Fever	Tuber oat-grass
Weakness, blood cleansing Loss of appetite	Watercress, strawberry, celandine Strawberry (root)
Nerves	Walnut (leaf)
Rheumatism Gout	Strawberry, burdock (root, leaf), ash (bark) Burdock (root)
Difficulty urinating	Burdock (root), broom (flower and pod), leek
Jaundice	Celandine
Measles	Burdock (root, leaf)
Worms	Wild wormwood, garlic, santolina (seed)
Leucorrhoea	Walnut (leaf)
Frostbite	Ribwort plantain
Teething pains	Mallow (root)
Hair loss	Reed (sap) and burdock (leaf)

Julien Godest also mentions ingredients other than herbs in the remedies he wrote down. Among them are: products from the vegetable kingdom and transformed by man (camphor, charcoal, edible oil, resin, chimney soot (mentioned twice), white wine, vinegar); others from the animal kingdom (honey, butter, cod oil, lard (4 times), egg (3 times), liquid manure); others derived from minerals (alum, tar (4 times)); and finally some common chemical compounds (ammonia, bleach, salt spirit or hydrochloric acid, turpentine, sulphur ether).

The influence of the press and pharmaceutical advertising

Having noticed that Julien Godest's work mentioned a few drug names that had been developed in pharmacies and a few names of specific pharmacists working some distance from his region of origin, I conducted research to find the source of Godest's knowledge in this field, beyond and in addition to his oral culture. I finally discovered the main printed source of these remedies: the bilingual Breton-French weekly *Ar Bobl* (1904–1914, Carhaix) directed by François Jaffrennou, a central figure in the Breton regionalist movement which was defining itself and which became institutionalised from 1898 onwards.[12]

Jaffrennou was the son of a notary from Carnoët. He studied in Guingamp at the college of Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours and then in Saint-Brieuc at the college of Saint-Charles, where he was taught by two men who also left their marks on the Breton movement: Abbé Le Clerc (1861–1937) and François Vallée (1860–1949). Jaffrennou first devoted himself to journalism, then began publishing newspapers: *Ar Vro* (*Le Pays*, 1904–1914, all in Breton) and *Ar Bobl* (*Le Peuple*, 1904–1914, which was bilingual). Between the two world wars, he edited two bilingual periodicals: *Le Consortium breton* (1927–1928) and *An Oaled/Foyer breton* (1928–1939). At a very young age he became involved in the movement to defend Brittany and played a role as an initiator, organiser and stimulator: he co-founded the Breton Regionalist Union in 1898, took the name of Bard Taldir at the Eisteddfod[13] in Cardiff in 1899, forged links between his movement in Brittany and other Celtic countries, and created the Association of Breton Students in Rennes and the Ti Kaniri Breiz in 1900. He joined the Bard and Druid Gorsedd of Brittany and became High Druid in 1933.

Jaffrennou played a role as a catalyst in the writing of Julien Godest's literary text and he was also a role model in the struggle against the anti-congregationist laws of Minister Émile Combes in 1903, even if Godest

retained a form of class pride that made him think that the lower-class Breton people were the staunch champions of the Breton language, unlike the rich and the intellectuals. The influence of regionalist ideology can thus be felt in Godest's text, even if it seems mainly to be related to the context of that period: it is indeed the defence of the Catholic religion and the fight against the rural exodus that brought the two men together. They both saw the Breton language as a means of resistance, in the circumstance of the separation of the Church and State. Godest seems to have found a small place in this community of bards, which brought together only a few noblemen and middle-class members, so to speak, and he managed to adopt certain arguments of the Breton movement that reinforced his native culture.

Julien Godest seems to have had access to issues of *Ar Bobl* published between the end of December 1912 and the end of March 1913, as nearly 60% of the remedies come from, or are inspired by, the paper's "*Al louzeier mad*" [the good remedies] columns published during this period.[14] He wrote down some remedies following the original word for word and adapted others into his local language – for example, this is the case for tuber oat-grass which the column in Breton called *treuz ieot* and which Godest called *ieot onk*. He adapted other columns even more freely, as in the very last recipe (No. 88) in which he summarised a certain number of recommendations only half of which came from the column.

The mentions of pharmacy drugs all come from the paper and include:

- the "Celtic Syrup", a cough syrup for bronchitis and the flu prepared by pharmacist Théophile Moreul (1867–1952) who practiced in Landerneau until 1948;
- the "*Ulminicine Moreul*", a drug used to purge the blood and the body, from the same Landerneau pharmacy, and which was also advertised at the time in other newspapers such as *Le Courrier du Finistère* and *Feiz-ha-Breiz*;
- an unnamed medicine from the pharmacist Férçoq in Plabennec, which was effective in cases of weakness, goitres and strangles in children, and to cleanse the blood;
- the "Luciline", lamp oil marketed by the Rouen-based company La Luciline since 1868, a medicine that Godest mentions twice and which he considered as a miracle remedy to fight against rheumatism, contusions, cold sores, toothache, headache, earache, sore throat, neuralgia, side stitches and chest fluxions;

- the "*asa foetida*" quoted in Latin by Godest (which he spells *asa fetida*) and used in a mixture to treat stomach ache in horses;
- the "Aloe tincture" or "Commander's Balm" to treat foot infections in horses damaged while shoeing;
- the "vesicatory ointment" in case of crushed horse hooves.

It is noticeable, however, that the remedies inspired by the "*Al louzeier mad*" column are overwhelmingly centred on the use of plants: mainly walnut on 4 January 1913, flax and mallow on 15 February, and burdock and strawberry on 8 March, for example. These headings signed "*Ta'koz*" [grandfather] are derived, or try to look as though they are derived, from orally transmitted popular knowledge, and they echo Godest's previous knowledge or he simply makes them his own.

Care of the body and care of the soul, according to a Christian peasant

Julien Godest set about writing this long manuscript of more than 350 pages, considering it to be the mirror book of a literary missionary, with a view to defending the Catholic faith in a troubled period of de-Christianisation of the Breton and French populations, and of the separation of the Church and State. His belief in a natural order emanating from God and in the idea that this order should in no way be undermined made him express an axiomatic conception of life: access to paradise or hell depends on each person's merits. A life regulated by the divine commandments opens the gates of paradise and a life contrary to these commandments opens the gates of hell; the fear of hell must incite man to always tend towards the virtuous circle of irreproachable Christian behaviour – in other words, to love God, to love one's neighbour as God's creation and to remain in one's condition since it is God who has chosen it for each person. For Julien Godest, man must speak the language God has chosen for him, and he must live in the country God has placed him in and in the social condition God has given him. In the same way, birds honour God every morning by their song and plants do likewise by their daily blooming.

Finally, God has provided plants for mankind to use for healing. A kind of pantheism in Godest's worldview can thus be traced back to ancient cultural sources that his encounter with the regionalist ideology of the turn of the century reactivated, helped to shape and legitimise.

Symbiosis with the immediate environment, and the purity of body and soul (of the one who presents himself before God), are the two requirements that offer the possibility of a good Christian life. Godest uses the metaphors of cleanliness and pure water for this purpose. He resorts, for example, to the parable of badly washed plates: "All the bowls should be washed with boiling water and scrubbed and scrubbed again with boiling water until they are clean, as when they were new, so that the food that is put in them will smell and taste good again."[15] Dirty water, for him, is the explicit equivalent of sins: "Those who are burdened with sins are this cold, dirty water."[16] He uses hygienic arguments against the rural exodus, which encourages the circulation of diseases: "In our beautiful country of Lower Brittany, most of those who have contagious diseases are people who have fallen ill while travelling abroad or while living with people who have been abroad, and as they are no longer good for anything abroad, they come back home to sow their dirty contagious diseases all over Lower Brittany."[17] Other images are his brother's zealous maintenance of his weapons and military dress at the barracks ("He was a most clean, neat and stylish man. His gloved hands were as white as snow"),[18] and the pure fountain water that purified the blood and allowed for growth ("Everywhere in your bosom there are fountains of clear, drinkable, healthy water. By drinking it and eating food made from it and the grain grown on your land, you keep your blood clean and pure")[19] Finally, there are the rules of personal hygiene and cleanliness of the house present at the very end of the work, concluding the series of remedies: "Let us always keep our body, our clothes, our house and everything around us clean. I do not say pretty, but clean and proper, according to our condition."[20]

One of the motivations of Julien Godest's writing is the fight against the ignorance of his contemporaries of the same social condition. In the field of health, he states that "in the countryside, it is only ignorance, indolence, imprudence and lack of protection that make people sick,"[21] and he goes on to say that one must "know what to eat and what to drink, know what to do to keep diseases away from us. In a word, know the rules of health. This is important science to cure ourselves of diseases before they really affect us."[22] For this poor farmer, animal health is also very important because the family's survival depends on it: "In the countryside, 90% of the animals that die do so because people are careless when they should be giving their animals remedies. There is no point in treating them too late, it's a waste of energy and money."[23] In support of his argument, he quotes the proverbial words of a scientist whom he does not name: "Ignorance kills more people than wars."[24]

The presence of medicinal remedies in Julien Godest's biographical and autobiographical text can be explained by the common thread running through all of his writing: how to lead an exemplary Christian life. The aim for him is to provide his potential readership[25] with models of exemplarity: he finds them in his brother and in himself, he expresses them in prose and song, and, in this exemplary way of life, health and medicine play a complementary role for the purity of the soul. Although a large number of the remedies on display have their source in a bilingual newspaper of the very end of the 20th century – which testifies to the non-hermetic character of Breton oral culture, and the attempts of the local elites to spread methods of improving agriculture and hygiene at the end of the 19th century – the whole is nevertheless characterised by a peasant pharmacopoeia. The things that matter are: the use of the immediate environment to care for humans and animals free, or almost free, of charge; the method of conservation for administration all year round; the control of ailments and herbs to prevent rather than cure; etc. Julien Godest's text is, in its entirety, a rare testimony to a vision of the world that had long since disappeared elsewhere. The thinking set out in the text can be seen as an extraordinary witness of a past era, since access to the culture of the lower classes very often comes up against the scarcity of sources. Godest's text offers an unfiltered access to this unique expression, unmediated by the dominant culture.

Notes

[1] Julien Godest, *Envorennou ar barz Juluen Godest / Les souvenirs du bardes Julien Godest*, text established, translated and introduced by Nelly Blanchard, Brest, CRBC, coll. Tal-ha-Tal, 2020.

[2] The notebook (21 cm x 29.7 cm) is stored under the number "44 J 37" in Quimper at the Archives Départementales du Finistère.

[3] In the song '*Gwers war jujet ar bars poblus Godest ha pesort bue a rene he dadou*' [Song about the popular bard Godest and the way of life of his ancestors].

[4] It could have been the *An ABK, pe kenteliou bêrr hak eas eoit deski lenn brezonek en nebeudik amzer* by Pastor John Jenkins (Morlaix, Ledan, 1835), the *An ABC pe Qenta Leur dre ar Cn T[anguy] ar Yaouanc [Lejeune]* (Brest, Gauchlet, then Lefournier, Year 9) or the *Faeçoun neves evit desqui lenn e ber amzer gant ma vezo heuliet ar brononciation naturel eus al lizerennou* [New method for learning to read in a short time, as long as one follows the natural pronunciation of the letters], inspired by the Jacotot method and written by Yves Poullaouëc.

[5] Notably, devotional books and surprisingly an astronomy book: Paul Le Breton, *Studi var an astrou*, Brest, Lefournier, 1848 (on this almost unknown work, see Nelly Blanchard, "*Studi var an astrou* (1848): first scientific text in the Breton

language. A Breton Enlightenment?" *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium (PHCC)*, volume 39, 2019, Harvard University, Boston (USA), 2021, p. 53-71.
[6] This term was only used from 1912 onwards (François Jaffrennou, *Ganedigez eun emzao. La genèse d'un mouvement*, Carhaix, Imprimerie du Peuple, 1912).
[7] Combism refers to the secularism embodied by Émile Combes, at the origin of the French law of separation of Church and State in 1905.
[8] Two paragraphs are devoted to general considerations on health.
[9] One of the remedies concerns animals in general.
[10] In particular, he mentions the Spanish parasite, of which he gives such a horrid description and for which I have not found an equivalent. There are two possible interpretations of this disease. Firstly, since the spread of deworming for horses after the Second World War, certain diseases, such as this one, have disappeared. Secondly, it could be a legend invented to justify the practice of tail-docking.
[11] Remedy No. 63.
[12] On the history of the movement to defend Brittany, see, for example, Michel Nicolas, *Histoire du mouvement breton*, Paris, Syros, 1982.
[13] The Welsh neo-bardic gathering.
[14] Remedy No. 419 (28 December 1912), No. 420 (4 January 1913), No. 421 (11 January 1913), No. 423 (25 January 1913), No. 429 (8 March 1913) and No. 431 (22 March 1913).
[15] Julien Godest's *Memoirs*, p. 376-377
[16] Julien Godest's *Memoirs*, p. 378-379.
[17] Julien Godest's *Memoirs*, p. 142-143.
[18] Julien Godest's *Memoirs*, p. 226-227.
[19] Julien Godest's *Memoirs*, p. 136-137.
[20] Point No. 88, p. 746-747.
[21] Remedy No. 24, p. 714-715.
[22] Julien Godest's *Memoirs*, p. 744-745.
[23] Remedy No. 30, p. 716-717.
[24] Julien Godest's *Memoirs*, p. 746-747.
[25] This text remained unpublished until 2021. Only 10% of the manuscript had previously been published, after being edited by Jaffrennou in his journal *An Oaled* in 1929 (the remedies were not included).

HAPPY IN SPIRIT WHEN THEY SMOKE: TOBACCO AS AN EXPRESSION OF NATIVE AMERICAN MEDIANCES

FABRICE LE CORGUILLÉ
PH.D. AMERICAN STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN BRITTANY (FRANCE)

The relationship developed by Native American peoples with tobacco is old and complex, multifaceted and evolving, as it has taken place over a huge spatiotemporal scale, which became even broader after 1492. The discovery of America in 1492 can be considered as the discovery of a new world, from both the European and indigenous perspectives. It also meant the discovery of a new 'herb': tobacco. This plant can be included among the numerous endemic staples that have been massively consumed throughout time and space. In less than one century after its discovery, tobacco began to be grown and/or consumed all over the world. It can therefore be assessed as a product – even *the* product – that made the whole new world, insofar as the world became globalised once and for all. Tobacco subsequently appears as the fulcrum that triggered and hastened the definitive unification of the world, which gave humans a new sense of 'mediance'. The latter concept must be understood as 'the sense of a milieu' permeated by human subjectivity, a 'dynamic coupling' and a 'mutual adequacy' of a society with its environment, and a way of being and living ecologically, technologically and symbolically in a particular milieu with other beings, to summarise the idea developed by the French geographer and philosopher Augustin Berque who coined this neologism.[1] This new sense of mediance informed by tobacco is explored here in a three-dimensional approach. First, the geographical and commercial unification generated by the spread of tobacco from America to the rest of the world by Europeans is investigated. We will then see how tobacco is not only a commodity exploited to make money, but also how its exchange has the power to create links and bind humans together, either between Native Americans and Europeans, or among Native Americans themselves.

This interpersonal dimension is further expanded by many Native cultures to interrelationships between humans with supernatural powers and deities, endowing the sense of mediance with a deep spiritual and religious dimension; in this context, it stands as a timeless mediance as it was established from time immemorial during the early days of creation. On the contrary, the unification of the world through tobacco is just 500 years old.

A new *yerva* for a new mediance

The myth of the discovery of the Americas by the Genoese sailor is still perpetuated by the celebration of "Columbus Day", albeit this special day has been more overtly criticised in recent years and has become an increasingly divisive issue all over the continent. Nevertheless, it is in Columbus's travel log (as transcribed by Bartolome de las Casas in the 1530s) that the first mention of tobacco and its use by Native Americans can be found. As early as 15 October 1492, he mentions "a single man in a raft" who had "some dried leaves which must be in high value among them, for they had already offered me some at San Salvador."[2] Three weeks later, there is the first allusion to tobacco as a "herb" that is burned and whose smoke is used: "The two Christians [Rodrigo de Xerez and Luis de Torres, who had been sent as scouts to present-day Cuba] came across a lot of people who went to their villages, men and women, with a firebrand in their hand and herbs [*yervas*] to take their aromatic smokes they were accustomed to."[3] In his commentary, Las Casas further details how the Natives of Cuba (Arawaks or Tainos) smoked *tabaco*; he also offers different perspectives on the potential effects of this newfound herb:

> always the men with a brand in their hands and certain herbs to take their aromatic smoke, which are dry herbs placed in a certain leaf, dry as well […] and having lighted one end of it, they suck or absorb or inhale that smoke with which they soothe their bodies and as if drunk, and they say that in that way they don't feel tiredness. They call these muskets tabacos. The Spaniards I knew in this island of Española who were accustomed to take them, who were told off and told that it was a vice, replied that it was not in their power to give it up; I do not know which taste or benefit they found in it.[4]

In the middle of the 16th century, two French travellers gave similar accounts of the widespread use and effects of tobacco among two different indigenous peoples: Jacques Cartier for the Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) of Hochelaga (Montréal) in *Bref récit et succincte narration de la navigation faite en 1535 et 1536*, and André Thévet for the Tupinambas of Brazil in

Les singularités de la France antarctique (1558). Both admit that they "experimented" smoking tobacco. Cartier reports the taste ("as if some pepper powder had been put into" the mouth, "so hot it is"), whereas Thévet testifies to its psychic effects: to unaccustomed people such as him, smoking is likely to cause such "sweats and weaknesses" that it can make them pass out.

From the outset, tobacco was definitely identified as a "herb"; Cartier and Thévet used that term themselves, as did many other early travellers, witnesses or writers from different European countries in the 16th and 17th centuries, such as Jean Nicot de Villemain. The scientific name of tobacco, *nicotiana*, which was used as early as the 1560s in botanical studies all over Europe, is derived from Nicot's name. Carl von Linné gave it a universal consecration in his classifications, *Critica Botanica* (1737) and *Species Plantarum* (1753).

The Swedish scientist distinguishes two main species: *Nicotiana Rustica* and *Nicotiana Tabacum*. This classification confirmed what Jean de Léry guessed in 1578 in his *Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil*: that the species introduced in Europe by Thévet and Nicot were two different plants though belonging to the same family (*Solanaceae*, alongside tomato, potato and eggplant) and genus (*Nicotiana*), and being two forms of domesticated tobacco grown for centuries by the Native Americans. Indeed, Nicot spread the subgenus *Rustica* (with a high level of nicotine and quite harsh to smoke, used as traditional tobacco by lots of Native peoples of North America) from seeds from Florida, whereas Thévet carried back the subgenus *Tabacum* (containing less nicotine and with a milder taste, mainly used in South America). According to Léry, only the latter can answer to the name 'real *Petum*', not the 'Necocienne.' The distinction is important as *Tabacum* became, and still is, the commercial species used in international trade.

The English explorer Walter Raleigh promoted tobacco (possibly *Rustica* from Virginia) to Queen Elizabeth I and her court in the late 16th century, but *Tabacum* was particularly popularised in the British Empire by an English settler who married the famous Powhatan woman Pocahontas in 1614: John Rolfe. He was aware that the tobacco produced by the British settlers of Virginia from the local *Rustica* species was too harsh to compete with the tobacco produced by the Portuguese and the Spanish, which was massively smoked in England and highly taxed by the Crown. In 1612, he decided to plant seeds of the *Tabacum* species coming from the Orinoco region of Venezuela. It was an instant success. The amount

sent to England soared from 2,300 pounds in 1617 to 3 million pounds in 1638. In 1680, 25 million pounds of *Tabacum* from Virginia were sold in Europe.[5] Tobacco thus became the major cash crop in Virginia, and one of the major cultigens in other colonies such as Maryland and the Carolinas.

These figures hint at how people, at all levels of society, quickly became infatuated with the consumption of a herb, either by chewing, sniffing or smoking it. Not only Europe but the whole world, including Asia and Africa, started consuming and/or producing tobacco in less than two centuries. No country was spared the loss of its "pulmonary independence"[6] by the *Tabacum* juggernaut. At the beginning of the 19th century, Louis-Alexandre Arvers wrote in his medical Ph.D. dissertation that tobacco "seduced all the nations, and spread from America as far as Japan. […] It is now fashionable among almost all the civilized peoples on earth."[7] Arvers also wondered how this plant had acquired such worldwide fame and universal consumption in spite of its toxicity.

Even the earliest actions, such as violent measures taken by some states (for example, those taken by Tsar Mikhaïl I in Russia or by Amurath IV in Turkey, or even by the Catholic Church), that targeted smokers and/or prohibited tobacco sales, and the many caveats that denounced tobacco as a moral vice or a danger for health as early as the beginning of the 17th century, proved to be ineffective at curbing the diffusion and explosion of tobacco consumption. Just one year after he became king of Great Britain, James I published a scathing indictment of tobacco, *A Counter-blast to Tobacco*. In this 19-page booklet, he anathematised the "foolish, […] inconsiderate and childish affection" for "a Noveltie" which was no more than a "vile", "loathsome", "filthie", "venomous", "stinking", "savage", "sinneful and shamefull" "custome" originally perpetrated by "barbarous, […] wilde, godlesse, and slavish *Indians*." Denouncing how harmful taking tobacco could be to health, James Stuart condemned the deceitful belief in the medicinal virtue of what had become a "common herbe". He goes so far as recognising that tobacco may have been used by "the pockie" Indians to find relief from smallpox symptoms, but that the staple had lost any curative power because it had been so much "refined […] here in *England*." James's pamphlet sounds like a response to a previous book first published in 1583 in Latin (*De herba panacea*, translated into English in 1659), which eulogised the medicinal power of tobacco as early as its telling title: Giles Everard's *Panacea, or, The universal medicine being a discovery of the wonderfull vertues of tobacco taken in a pipe: with its operation and use both in physick and chyrurgery*. In his introductory *Epistle*, the Dutch physician asserts that "there is no one kind of forreign