The use of herbs in Yemeni healing practices:
An interdisciplinary workshop on traditional knowledge and cultural concepts in scientific perspective

Centre for Interdisciplinary Area Studies – Middle East, Africa, Asia
Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, Germany

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Rationale

Traditional medicine in Islamic countries is based mainly on three sources: 1) classical Arabic medicine, derived from the ancient Greek heritage, 2) Islamic (“the Prophet’s”) medicine, and 3) local pre-Islamic traditions. The range of drugs (vegetable, mineral, and animal) and their uses may differ in each country or region, in spite of the unification of these regions by Islam, because local pre-Islamic elements survive until today.

The workshop “The use of herbs in Yemeni healing practices” has as its primary objective an “applied study” of the special case of herbal medicine in Yemen. Due to the rich local vegetation, the main body of traditional medicines is plant-based. Herbal medicine is used by practitioners whose knowledge is derived from study of classical Arabic sources, as well as from oral transmission. Approximately 60% of Yemeni medicinal plants are mentioned in the Materia Medica written by the famous Andalusian pharmacologist and botanist Ibn al-Baytar (1197–1248). But a large part has not been described by any classical author – a fact which underlines the originality of Yemeni herbal medicine.

In Yemen, traditional medical lore along with its practitioners – namely druggists and healers – survives in our time. Modern biomedicine is beginning to dominate, a process that started several decades ago. However, as in the industrialized countries, traditional practices enjoy great popularity as complementary or alternative medicine. Yet, at the same time, plant resources are threatened in Yemen (and in other countries). The World Health Organization (WHO) adopted a strategy in 2002 to “ensure availability and affordability of traditional medicine, including essential herbal medicines” (who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs134/en).

The workshop will provide a forum for discussion across boundaries of disciplines such as history, social anthropology, oriental studies, biology, pharmacology and pharmacy. The individual contributions are based on textual analysis, as well as on empirical and experimental research, and will cover both historical and contemporary aspects.
Programme

Friday, 25 September 2009

09.00  Registration
09.40  Opening remarks: HANNE SCHÖNIG
09.50  Welcome address: PROF. DR. SHEIKH BAWAZIR, Cultural Attaché, Embassy of the Republic of Yemen, Berlin

10.00  Section 1: INTRODUCTION
Chair: HANNE SCHÖNIG

INGRID HEHMEYER (Toronto, Canada)
The validity of traditional medicine as an effective tool in issues of human health

10.40  EFRAIM LEV (Haifa, Israel)
Medieval medicine and pharmacology: Evidence from the Cairo Genizah

11.20  Tea and coffee break

11.40  Section 2: THE YEMEN-WIDE PERSPECTIVE
Chair: ANNE REGOURD

DAN M. VARISCO (Hempstead, NY, USA)
Qât, sex and traditional healing

12.20  DINAH JUNG (Heidelberg, Germany)
The use of agarwood in Yemen

13.00  Lunch at the institute

13.40  Visit to the Museum for Prehistory: “Himmelsscheibe von Nebra” ("sky disk", guided tour of exhibit)
http://www.lda-lsa.de/landesmuseum_fuer_vorgeschichte/

15.15  Section 3: THE REGIONAL FOCUS (1)
Chair: DAN M. VARISCO

ABDUL WALI AHMED AL KHULAYDI (Taizz, Yemen)
The main vegetation types and the important values of plants in the Jabal Bura’ protected area

15.55  MIKHAIL RODIONOV (St. Petersburg, Russia)
Honey, coffee and tea in the ritual and healing practices of Hadramawt

16.35  Tea and coffee break
16.55 **AMIN AL HAKIMI** (Sana’a, Yemen)
*Traditional farmers’ knowledge of plant uses as the key point for preservation of biodiversity in the high mountain areas of Yemen*

17.35 **MIRANDA MORRIS** (St. Andrews, United Kingdom)
*Aloes and frankincense: Changing attitudes and uses in Southern Arabia (mainland Yemen, Soqotra and Dhufar)*

19.30 Dinner

**Saturday, 26 September 2009**

09.00 Section 3: **THE REGIONAL FOCUS** (2)
Chair: **ANNE REGOURD**

**ESTER MUCHAWSKY-SCHNAPPER** (Jerusalem, Israel)
*Healing through medicinal plants: Old Yemenite therapeutic traditions applied in Jerusalem of today*

09.40 Section 4: **THE LITERARY AND TEXTUAL APPROACH**
Chair: **HANNE SCHÖNIG**

**MOHAMMED MARAQTNEN** (Mainz, Germany)
*Healthcare and healing methods in pre-Islamic Yemen*

10.20 **PETRA G. SCHMIDL** (Bonn, Germany)
*Magic and medicine in a 13th-century treatise on the science of the stars: The Kitab al-Tabsira of the Rasulid Sultan al-Ashraf `Umar*

11.00 Tea and coffee break

11.20 Section 5: **IN THE FOCUS OF SCIENCE**
Chair: **INGRID HEHMEYER**

**ULRIKE LINDEQUIST** (Greifswald, Germany)
*The potential of Yemeni medicinal plants from a pharmaceutical point of view*

12.00 **MOHAMMED AL-DUAIS** (Jena, Germany)
*The miraculous plant “Halka” (Cyphostemma digitatum) – from grandmother’s kitchen in Yemen’s southwestern highlands to modern medicinal and culinary applications*

12.30 **JACQUES FLEURENTIN** (Metz, France)
*From traditional medicinal plants of Yemen to therapeutic herbal drugs: The valorisation of natural resources, an applied ethnopharmacological programme*
13.10  Lunch at the institute
13.40  Section 6: CONCLUSION AND GENERAL DISCUSSION
       Chair: INGRID HEHMEYER

       WADE E. PICKREN (Toronto, Canada)
       Crossing borders: Knowledge and practice in transitional spaces

       General discussion

15.10  Botanical Gardens of the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg (guided tour)
       http://www2.biologie.uni-halle.de/bot/boga/english/english.html

16.30  Moritzburg (guided tour)
       http://www.stiftung-moritzburg.de/
       City of Halle, walking tour

19.00  Dinner
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