

by chemically defined medicines. Thus, it is a socio-cultural history of these medicines, their producers, distributors and users.

The author paints vivid pictures of how plant based specialities were slowly replaced by patent medicines (medicina de patente) and overall the book is a fascinatingly rich source of primary historical information on this topic. Small entrepreneurs developed specific products during the period of the Porfiriato (late 19th century), many of these companies were founded by European immigrants and especially after the invention of the antibiotics these were replaced by larger and generally multinational companies. While Mexican institutions attempted to counteract these developments, overall this proved to be a failure. Central to the book is a critique of the positivism in Mexican medicine and science and of Mexico's dependency on European and North American pharmaceutical companies. Lastly, the book provides interesting examples of how Mexican local and traditional knowledge has been used to develop novel drug leads and potential products for use in Europe and the USA (e.g. the famous case of Mexican *Dioscorea* species used for producing steroid hormones). In several parts the book is somewhat lengthy and especially in the introduction it seems that the author attempts to cover 'everything' vaguely related to the topic. Overall, a somewhat more rigorous editing would have been desirable. Additionally, more attention should have been paid to correct botanical nomenclature (e.g. *Psidium*, p. 576, also 162, 167) and to the editing of the index.

These few minor points aside, the book provides compelling examples of social and cultural science driven research in the field of medicinal plants and is of considerable interest to anyone interested in understanding these complex historical developments. The book is of particular relevance to anyone interested in medicinal plants and their trade and to historians of science focusing on the history of pharmaceuticals.

Reference

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Amit Krishna De (Ed.), Capsicum. The genus Capsicum, Taylor and Francis Group, London/NY, UK/USA–Canada, 2003, 16 Chapters, 275 pp., 54 figures and 59 tables, Price £74, Hard cover, ISBN 0-415-29991-8.

Capsicum is a widely used spice. Members of the genus are appreciated for their taste, essential oils and active principles. Since it is one of the most widely consumed spices in the world, it has a large amount of trade. This compilation covers several aspects of the genus including their history, chemistry and industrial processing.

The book is organized into 16 chapters; the first 6 deal with the history and active principles, specially the main compounds, capsaicinoids, the inclusion of quality control on Chapter 3 is very useful for people interested in the main active principles' analysis. The rest of the book deals with the cultivation, harvesting and industrial processing, focusing on the food industry, no doubt the main economic aspect of the species. At the end a chapter on perspectives for future research is included.

However, while the book covers many aspects, some important ones are missing. Firstly, even though the origin of capsicum is in Mexico, nothing about this country is included; like a more detailed history of the use, and varieties known in this country. Secondly, the last chapter named "future research" is the only one that analyses pharmacological aspects of capsicum (capsicin) as an analgesic-anti-inflammatory drug. Finally no ethnobotanical uses are included.

The books cover in an adequate way the phytochemical aspects of the species, in a broad way the harvesting and industrialization aspects and in a poor way the pharmacological aspects. The book is part of the series 'Medicinal and Aromatic Plants-Industrial Profiles', and the expectative; Industrial Profile is covered. However, considering the high number of reports available in the international literature about the pharmacological proprieties of the genus, the inclusion of chapters about the pharmacology of capsicum, would have been essential.

If you have plans to cultivate, or are involved in the industrialization of capsicum for food purposes this book is adequate, but if you expect information about the ethno-pharmacological aspects of the species, this book will not be what you expect and need.

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