Medicinal plants in the Mediterranean area: Synthesis of the results of the project Rubia

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Abstract

Aim of study: Within the scope of the European project RUBIA (ICA3-2002-10023), research has been performed on the traditional use and handling of plant species in several Mediterranean countries, Albania, Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Italy, Morocco, and Spain. This paper synthesises the chief results related to the medicinal utilization of those plants.

Material and methods: The information has been gathered by means of semi-structured interviews (1256) and techniques of participant observation with 803 informants. In each of the participating countries the study areas were selected by means of uniform criteria defined at the beginning of the study.

Results and conclusions: A total of 985 species have been catalogued, of which 406 have medicinal use.

This work constitutes the first comparative study performed with ethnobotanical data gathered by a coordinated methodology in the Mediterranean area. An exhaustive list is provided for the species catalogued, indicating the regions where each plant was mentioned.

Ethnopharmacological relevance: This information underlines the ethnobotanical richness of the region and the need to broaden this study to other areas of the Mediterranean. Furthermore, this constitutes a base for future phytochemical and pharmacological studies which could lead to new therapeutic products.

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Keywords: Ethnobotany; Mediterranean; Medicinal plants

1. Introduction

The Mediterranean region, despite its location in a temperate zone far from the diversity hotspots popularized by the media, it is one of the areas with the greatest diversity on the planet, and thus it is considered that it should be maintained as a conservation sanctuary (Myers et al., 2000). Some 10% of the world’s higher plants can be found in this area, which represents only 1.6% of the Earth’s surface (Medail and Quézel, 1999). Around 25,000 species are found in the region,
and a very high percentage of these are endemic (Heywood, 1999; Quézé, 1985; Greuter, 1991). Therefore, as indicated by Pineda et al. (2002a): “El Mediterráneo es una zona histórica de ecotonía, refugio y cierto ‘fondo de saco’ para la vida (“The Mediterranean is a historical area of ecology, a refuge, and a certain baseline for life”). For this reason, one of the priorities of the work groups dedicated to the study of the flora and vegetation of the Mediterranean region is to conserve diversity, including the uses made of plants by local inhabitants. The observation of the intimate and harmonious relationship of indigenous cultures with their environment, their accumulated knowledge of the biodynamics of the natural world, and their traditions of stewardship that sustain fragile ecological balance offers scientists, ethnobotanists, and others with insight into the management of land reserves, plant communities, and the biodiversity they sustain, so as to help maintain a balanced ecosystem for future generations (Plant Conservation Alliance and Medicinal Plant Working Group’s in http://www.nps.gov/plants/medicinal/committees/ethnobotany.htm).

Although it may be a mechanistic argument, one of the many reasons for conserving biodiversity is the utilitarian value of natural resources (Pineda et al., 2002b). In this sense, our study seeks to evaluate ethnobotanical knowledge, focusing specifically on the medicinal use of plants as part of a series of works that compile other aspects of the overall study conducted within the framework of the European project RUBIA (ICA3-2002-10023).

Arguments such as species richness and uses, migration, cultural shift, or the disappearance of the communities are put forward to prioritize ethnobotanical studies in places such as the Amazon (Given and Harris, 1994). These same reasons continue to be valid in industrialized countries or emerging countries, such as those of the Mediterranean Basin, where the alteration of the physical and biological environment, rural depopulation, the new means of communication, etc. are causing an accelerated loss of traditional knowledge, making these types of studies perhaps even more urgent. As indicated by Pieroni (2000): “Systematic explorations of traditional pharmacopeias are urgent in southern Europe, especially in those areas which, for geographical and historical reasons, remain relatively isolated and where industrial development has not led to a complete decline of their traditions”.

The current pharmacopeia of Western countries has its origin in the works of Classical authors, such as Theophrastus or Dioscorides, implying an ample fund of plants and medicinal uses in the Mediterranean basin. This ancient tradition of using medicinal plants has not been reflected in an ethnobotanical study line until relatively recent times, when researchers have realized the urgent need to collect this knowledge, which represents a rich heritage both for the exploration of new resources (drugs, food, etc.) as well as for constituting a irreplaceable part of the traditional culture of Mediterranean peoples.

In the Mediterranean area, many local works have been published (González-Tejero et al., 1995; Martínez Lirola et al., 1996; Agetet and Valles, 2001, 2003a,b; Pieroni, 2000; Camejo-Rodrigues et al., 2003; Merzouki et al., 2000; Said et al., 2002, etc.) but to date no previous study have involved the overall study with researchers working simultaneously and with the same methodology in different countries of the Mediterranean sphere, comparing the information and seeking to establish the existence or non-existence of a common typology in the use of plants.

RUBIA is a project that was undertaken from 2003 to 2005 and financed by the European Commission, in which countries related to the Mediterranean participated: Albania, Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Italy, Morocco, and Spain. The aim of the project was the coordinated collection of ethnographic data in areas previously selected by each of the participating countries to evaluate the species used as food, medicines, textiles, dyes, crafts materials, etc., as well as tools and technologies related to the use, identifying and evaluating the socio-economic and anthropological context in which these plants are used.

As an important part of this project, the information gathered was disseminated through texts, popular videos, a database that contains all the information compiled, ethnographic atlasses, and, in some of the study area, special sections in local botanical gardens and anthropological museums.

The present paper synthesises the use of plants in traditional phytotherapy.

2. Materials and methods

To attain uniform scientific results, the project RUBIA, at the outset of its activity, defined a number of requirements for the study areas to fulfil in each of the participating countries. These requirements stipulate that:

• It should be a relatively isolated and more or less homogeneous zone, both in the physical as well as the biological sense in terms of socio-economic and cultural characteristics;
• it should currently maintain a rural way of life;
• it should be representative of the Mediterranean region;
• it should lack prior ethnobotanical studies.

On the basis of these requirements, the following localities were selected (Fig. 1):

• Albania: Upper Kelmend Province (northern Albanian Alps);
• Algeria: The Mitidja area (northern Algeria);
• Cyprus: Site 1, Paphos vine zone; Site 2; Larnaca mixed farming zone;
• Egypt: Site 1, Saint Catherine, located in Sinai Peninsula; Site 2, the Nile delta (Dakahlia and Damietta) on the Egyptian Mediterranean coast;
• Morocco: Cercle de Ouezanne (northern Morocco);
• Italy: Site 1 Bagnacavallo, (Region Emilia-Romagna, north–eastern Italy); Site 2 District of Capannori in the province of Lucca (Tuscany);
• Spain: Sierra de Aracena y Picos de Aroche Natural Park (province of Huelva, south–western Spain).

The information was gathered by informal interviews and techniques of participative observation, following the habitual
model in ethnobotanical work (Alexiades and Sheldon, 1996; Cotton, 1996). Whenever possible, the conversation was recorded on cassettes or, sometimes, in videos. A total of 1256 interviews were made with 803 interviewees (Table 1). Prior informed consent was verbally obtained before commencing any of interviews. As Pieroni et al. (2006) indicates in a complementary article derived also from RUBIA project: “the chosen methodology was purely ethnographic and not sociological in nature, the research teams at each of the sites used snowball techniques to select between 50 and 150 ‘knowledgeable’ informants, without taking into consideration their gender or age ratios”.

All the information on species were confirmed by taking samples from the plants mentioned in each interview. The voucher specimens corresponding to each study areas have been deposited in the institutions mentioned in Table 2. The plants were identified and labelled according to the criteria of the following guides:


![Fig. 1. Location of the areas.](image)

Table 1
Synthesis of the results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No. of interviews</th>
<th>No. of interviewees</th>
<th>No of total species</th>
<th>Species with medicinal use</th>
<th>No. of different medicinal uses</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>45</td>
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<td>179</td>
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<td>167</td>
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<td>Egypt</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>73</td>
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<td>100</td>
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<td>Spain</td>
<td>310</td>
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<td>245</td>
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Table 2

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Herbarium</th>
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<td>Algeria</td>
<td>USDB</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>National Herbarium of Cyprus (in the Agricultural Research Institute (ARI))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>Herbarium of the National Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (Institut National des Plantes Médicinales et Aromatiques; INPMA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>MEP (Museo delle Erbe Palustri) MP (Museo della Piana di Lucca)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>Medicinal Plant Project at EEA (The Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>Herbarium of the Laboratory of Pharmacognosy at the School of Life Sciences of the University of Bradford (BRAD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Herbarium of the University of Granada (GDA)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the information on the species and their uses have been included in a database which was prepared within the framework of the project RUBIA and which is located in MAICH (Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania, Greece). This database is not accessible still to the readers.

For each of the species, in relation to the medicinal use, the following fields are included:

- Taxonomic Information (genus, species, sub-species, etc.); Herbarium Index and Specimen Number; Collector and Identifier; vernacular names. Interviewer and Interviewee.
- Perceived Abundance; Country, Area and Village; Occurrence; Habitat and Abundance, according to IUCN.
- Medicine: Organism; Disorder; Preparations; Common name of Disorder. Disorder Description; Administration Method and Dosage Frequency; Perceived Toxicity; Plant Part.
- Collected in; Traded in; Utilized in; Collectors; Cultivation Method; Collection Method; Storage Method and Preparation Technique.

3. Results and discussion

A total of 985 species of traditional use were censed, of which 406 species (the greatest use percentage) are employed medicinally in the localities studied. This result coincides with those found in most ethnobotanical studies made in the Mediterranean area (Martínez Lirola et al., 1996; Bonet et al., 1992; Scherrer et al., 2005; Guarrera et al., 2005, etc.), indicating the interest that traditional phytotherapy continues to have in this region.

The summary of the most relevant results from each locality studied is provided in Table 1, while Table 3 presents a catalogue of the species used and the main types of medicinal uses.

The characteristics of this work, in which zones of major cultural, social, and floristic differences were studied, made it difficult to draw conclusions from a simple analysis of the results. However, the breadth of the area evaluated and the methodological coordination with different work groups have provided noteworthy data on some concurring aspects in different areas, such as the best represented botanical families, the most used species, pathological groups, and diseases.

The comparison of the results was based mainly on the comparative analysis of the number of references for each item, and from this study we can highlight for the following points.

3.1. People interviewed

One of the most interesting aspects of this type of work is to know and characterize the informants, as this offers orientation on the current state of conservation of ethnobotanical knowledge. The interviewees were selected without taking into consideration their gender, age ratios or social status.

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Fig. 2. Maximum, minimum and average age of interviewed.
Table 3

Catalogue of species and pathological groups

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Species and Subspecies</th>
<th>Albania</th>
<th>Algeria</th>
<th>Cyprus</th>
<th>Egypt</th>
<th>Italy</th>
<th>Morocco</th>
<th>Spain</th>
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<td>Acanthus mollis L.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Acanthus monspessulanum L.</td>
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<td>Adiantaceae</td>
<td>Adiantium capillus-veneris L.</td>
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<td>D K</td>
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<td>Agave americana L.</td>
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<td>Amarilliaceae</td>
<td>Pancratium maritimum L.</td>
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<td>Anacardiaceae</td>
<td>Pistacia lentiscus L.</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>SE</td>
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<td></td>
<td>P. terebinthus L.</td>
<td>S R</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apiaceae</td>
<td>Anni majus L.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anni visnaga (L.) Lam.</td>
<td>K R</td>
<td>K C R</td>
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<td>Coriandrum sativum L.</td>
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<td>Cuminum cyminum L.</td>
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<td>Deverra triradiata Hochst. ex Boiss.</td>
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<td>Eryngium campestr L.</td>
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<td>Foeniculum vulgare Miller</td>
<td>D M E N</td>
<td>K M E R D</td>
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<td>Foeniculum vulgare Miller subsp. piperitum (Ucria) Sweet</td>
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Table 3 (Continued)

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Poaceae

- Agropyrum repens (L.) Beauv. D
- Cymbopogon schoenanthus (L.) Spreng. D M O
- Cynodon dactylon (L.) Pers. K D M O
- Hordeum vulgare L. R K N D
- Oryza sativa L. D
- Poa pratensis L. R
- Phragmites australis (Cav.) Trin. ex Steudel N
- Triticum aestivum L. SE S
- Zea mays L. K S K

Polygonaceae

- Atraphaxis spinosa L. D
- Polygonum aviculare L. D S D
- Rumex acetosa L. N S D
- Rumex scutatus L. subsp. induratus (Boiss. & Reuter) Maire & Weiller S

Portulacaceae

- Portulaca oleracea L. M N ME C

Primalaceae

- Anagalis arvensis L. SE S C R O
- Primula boveana Decne. C R O
- Primula veris L. D R

Punicaceae

- Pisonia granatum L. D D K R

Ranunculaceae

- Delphinium staphisagria L. R
- Nigella arvensis L. ME R
- Nigella damascena L. ME R
- Nigella sativa L. D

Resedaceae

- Sesamoides canescens (L.) O. Kuntze M

Rhamnaceae

- Rhamnus alaternus L. N D C
- Rhamnus alpinus L. S
- Rhamnus olieoides L. D
- Ziziphus lotus (L.) Lam. D
- Ziziphus spina-christi (L.) Desf. R C S R E D M

Rosaceae

- Crataegus azarolus L. C
- Crataegus monogyna Jacq. ME D C ME
- Crataegus sinaica Boiss. C
- Cytisus oblonga Mill. C SE S C N
- Eriobotrya japonica (Thunb.) Lindley N
- Malus domestica (Borkh.) Borkh. S
- Potentilla reptans L. D
- Prunus avium L. K
- Prunus cerasus L. K
- Prunus domestica L. SE S O R
- Prunus dulcis (Mill.) D.A Webb O
- Prunus persica (L.) Batsch O
- Rosa arctica Crep. RE
- Rosa canina L. D R M S D D SE
- Rosa damascena Mill. D
- Rosa pouzinii Tratt. R
- Rubus idaeus L. D N
- Rubus sanctus Schreb. C N
- Rubus ulmifolius Schott. N R
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<td><em>Ruta graveolens</em> L.</td>
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<td><strong>Salix alba</strong> L.</td>
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<td><em>Salix sp.</em></td>
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<td><em>Pisolithus tinctorius</em> (Pers.) Coker &amp; Couch</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Verbacum sinuatum</em> L.</td>
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<td><em>Verbacum sp. pl.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Verbacum thapsus</em> L.</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>SE</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Verbacum virgatum</em> Stokes</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Cheilantes guanchica</em> C. Bolle</td>
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<td><strong>Smilacaceae</strong></td>
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<td><em>Smilax aspera</em> L.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Smilax aspera</em> L. var. altisima* Moris &amp; De Not</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Datura stramonium</em> L.</td>
<td>SE ME O</td>
<td>R ME</td>
<td>ME</td>
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<td><em>Hyoscyamus albus</em> L.</td>
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<td><em>Hyoscyamus aureus</em> L.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Hyoscyamus maticus</em> L.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Lycopersicon esculentum</em> Mill.</td>
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<td><em>Mandragora officinarum</em> L.</td>
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<td><em>Nicotiana tabacum</em> L.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Solanum dulcamara</em> L.</td>
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<td><em>Solanum nigrum</em> L.</td>
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<td>S RE D O</td>
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<td><em>Solanum tuberosum</em> L.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Solanum vilosum</em> Mill.</td>
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<td><strong>Styracaceae</strong></td>
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<td><em>Styrax officinalis</em> L.</td>
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<td><em>Taxus baccata</em> L.</td>
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<td><strong>Thymelaeaceae</strong></td>
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<td><em>Daphne gnidium</em> L.</td>
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<td><strong>Tiliaceae</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Tilia cordata</em> Mill.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Tilia platyphyllos</em> Scop</td>
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<td><strong>Ulmaceae</strong></td>
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<td><em>Ulmus campestris</em> L.</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Ulmus minor</em> Miller</td>
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</table>
In this regard, our study showed the average age of the interviewees to be 55 years old, indicating (as suspected) that one of the prime objectives of ethnobotanical investigation should be to rescue information which is gravely threatened by remaining only in the hands of people of middle age or beyond. Fig. 2 shows the average age to be slightly higher in the study areas situated in Europe, where the interviewees averaged 64 years of age (Cyprus, 63. Italy 63. Albania 68. Spain 65) as opposed to an average of 53 years old, in northern African populations (Algeria 65. Morocco 55. Egypt 50). These figures reflect the fragile condition of this knowledge in European countries. Nevertheless, the interest that the middle-aged population maintains for this type of knowledge enables a certain degree of optimism on the future conservation of ethnobotanical heritage.

### 3.2. Floristic features

In relation to the taxonomic analysis, although the floristic differences in each region hardly enable concordances at the taxonomic level of species, they indicate a trend to use, above all, plants of the families Lamiacaeae, Asteraceae, and Rosaceae, coinciding with other works (Bonet et al., 1992; Scherrer et al., 2005; Guarrrera et al., 2005; Novais et al., 2004; Camejo-Rodrigues et al., 2003). Also these families are well represented in Mediterranean flora. Fig. 3 shows the three best-represented families in each country.

Although, for the previous design of the work, we are conscious that the studied areas reflect only fragments of the territory and are not representative of the full potential of its medicinal flora, in accord with Moerman et al. (1999), we believe that the predominance of the families Lamiacaeae, Asteraceae, and Rosaceae may represent a relative floristic homogeneity together with a possible cultural heritage favoured by the witness of the botanical and phytochemical characteristics, with plants that are easily recognizable for their striking flowers, intense aromas, and peculiar flavours.

Although in the catalogue of species most referred to the medicinal purposes (Table 4) the genera Olea, Salvia, or Mint, habitual in Mediterranean flora, are repeated in several areas, we cannot draw conclusions concerning the homogeneity of the species used within the overall group of localities studied. It is noteworthy that there was a clear difference between the zones which are distinctly Mediterranean-in biogeographical terms- (Spain, Morocco, Algeria, and Cyprus) and those which are not (Albania, Italy and Egypt), as shown by the use of the Jaccard index.

This index allows the percentage of similarity to be calculated in each area. With this index, we can compare the samples two at a time according to species, bearing in mind only their presence or absence in the different samples. The formula to calculate this

![Fig. 3. Best represented botanical families.](image_url)
The index is:

\[
\text{Index of Jaccard} = \left( \frac{C}{A + B - C} \right) \times 100
\]

where \( A \) is the number of species of the sample \( A \), \( B \) the number of species of the sample and \( C \) is the number of species common to \( A \) and \( B \).

As shown in Fig. 4, the highest degree of similarity was found between Algeria, Italy, Cyprus, and Spain. In principle, the high degree of similarity between Italy and Algeria may be surprising, given the floristic differences, but this can be explained by the number of cultivated species used in both countries. Not surprisingly, Albania had the greatest number of species in common with Italy, and Morocco with Algeria. As might be expected, Egypt presented the lowest indices of similarity with the rest of the study areas, because of its position on the eastern edge of the Mediterranean together with its floristic and cultural differences.

The degree of affinity increased, as would be expected, when the genus level was used in the comparison (Fig. 5).

### Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Most cited species</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>Origanum vulgare, Salvia officinalis, Vaccinium myrtillus, Hypericum maculatum, Lilium martagon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>Datura stramonium, Artemisia herba-alba, Olea europaea, Rosmarinus officinalis, Trigonella foenum-graecum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>Salvia fruticosa, Dittrichia viscosa, Olea europaea, Sambucus nigra, Ceratonia siliqua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>Salvadora persica, Acacia nilotica, Ziziphus spina-christi, Mentha longifolia, Anastatica hierochuntica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Cichorium intybus, Taraxacum officinale, Urtica dioica, Thymus serpyllum, Oenanthae pimpinelloides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>Mentha pulegium, Origanum majorana, Olea europaea, Ceratonia siliqua, Trigonella foenum-graecum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Pulicaria odora, Dorycnium rectum, Mentha pulegium, Cistus ladanifer, Malva sylvestris</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As in the previous case, the highest levels of concordance were found between Algeria, Cyprus, Spain and Italy, the latter, as indicated above, for the number of cultivated species and wide distribution. The results for Italy and Albania also showed a high degree of concordance, corroborating our findings with respect to the species. Not surprisingly, 19 of the 27 genera catalogued in Morocco were common to Algeria. Finally, Egypt notably differed from the rest of the countries, though maintaining a certain affinity with Algeria and Morocco.

There were 30 genera that were cited in four or more countries. In general, all these were plants with an old medicinal tradition, notably *Salvia*, with an important diversity centre in the Mediterranean (Walker et al., 2004), where it is used in all the areas studied, primarily to treat disorders related to the skin, respiratory system, and digestive tract.

Similarly, 32 genera were found to be common to at least three of the areas studied, but mostly with different uses. Nevertheless, a closer relationship was found between Cyprus and Spain, where for example *Asphodelus* was collected for treating skin-related afflictions, *Lavandula* for respiratory ailments, and, finally, *Dittrichia viscosa* was used in both countries for similar uses, i.e. digestive ailments, wounds, and fungal infections. The antimycotic activity of this latter plant has been demonstrated by Maoz and Neeman (2000) on dermatophytes and *Candida albicans*. Khalil et al. (2007) have studied the scar forming activity in tests with mice. Finally, the effect on the digestive tract has been demonstrated by Alkofahi and Atta (1999), with rats, particularly in the treatment of gastric ulcers, a pathology for which it is habitually used in the Sierra de Aracena (Spain).

### 3.3. Medicinal use

It is worth quantifying the degree of diversity of uses that plants receive in each region, as this may *a priori* be indicative of the richness of ethnobotanical knowledge and could set the pattern for comparing very different sites. For this, we propose the diversity index of use, which can be calculated according
Table 5: Main used species in each pathological group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disorders</th>
<th>Albania</th>
<th>Algeria</th>
<th>Cyprus</th>
<th>Egypt</th>
<th>Italy</th>
<th>Morocco</th>
<th>Spain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Digestive</td>
<td>Origanum vulgare</td>
<td>Globularia Alypum</td>
<td>Centauria Siliqua</td>
<td>Achillea fragantissima</td>
<td>Cicerion intybus</td>
<td>Trigonella foenum graecum</td>
<td>Ditrichia viscosa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skin</td>
<td>Phaseolus vulgaris</td>
<td>Euphorbia Helioscopia</td>
<td>Ditrichia viscosa</td>
<td>Achillea fragantissima</td>
<td>Malva sylvestris</td>
<td>Nerium oleander</td>
<td>Hypericum perforatum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respiratory</td>
<td>Phylitis scolopendrum</td>
<td>Papaver Rheas</td>
<td>Salvia fruticosa</td>
<td>Salvia multicaulis</td>
<td>Linum usitatissimum</td>
<td>Mentha pulegium</td>
<td>Mentha pulegium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardiovascular</td>
<td>Gentiana lutea</td>
<td>Citrus limon</td>
<td>Urtica Ursus</td>
<td>Crataegus sinaica</td>
<td>Allium sativum</td>
<td>Chamomilla recutita</td>
<td>Rhamnus AKAternas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental-Nervous</td>
<td>Hypericum calycinum</td>
<td>Citrus aurantiiflorus</td>
<td>Salvia fruticosa</td>
<td>Astracantha echinai</td>
<td>Anisolum officinalis</td>
<td>Rosmarinus officinalis</td>
<td>Crataegus Monogynus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidney</td>
<td>Asplenium Trichomanes</td>
<td>Plantago Coronopus</td>
<td>Plantago Coronopus</td>
<td>Anisolum officinalis</td>
<td>Cynodon dactylon</td>
<td>Sparganium Rubra</td>
<td>Mentha pulegium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reproductive</td>
<td>Urtica dioica</td>
<td>Fumana Rhytidifolia</td>
<td>Oreganum marjorana</td>
<td>Urtica dioica</td>
<td>Sambucus nigra</td>
<td>Mentha pulegium</td>
<td>Mentha pulegium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muscular-Skeletal</td>
<td>Tussilago Farfara</td>
<td>Taraxacum Kauritigum</td>
<td>Vitis Vinerea</td>
<td>Acacia Nilotica</td>
<td>Arum Italicum</td>
<td>Capparis Spinosa</td>
<td>Pulvania Odona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutritional</td>
<td>Senecio Vitalis</td>
<td>Trigonella Foenum Graecum</td>
<td>Rubus Sanctus</td>
<td>Mentha Pulegium</td>
<td>Allum Sativus</td>
<td>Rubus ULMifolius</td>
<td>Rubus Irmifolius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensory</td>
<td>Sempervivum Tectorium</td>
<td>Dantea St ammonium</td>
<td>Sambucus Nigra</td>
<td>Acacia Nilotica</td>
<td>Chamomilla Recutita</td>
<td>Pistacia Lentiscus</td>
<td>Rosa Canina</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The disorders were divided into 10 pathological groups (Table 5), adding a final group (11) as a catch-all for symptoms or illnesses that, according to popular terminology, are difficult to fit into any category. According to the number of references, we established an ethnobotanical vicariance that provided orientation on the most important uses for each species of the genus Rubus (Rubus spp. and Spain, Rubus ulmifolius). Different species of this genus have proven effective for treating hypoglycemias in experimental assays (Lamas et al., 1999). As might be expected, according to the Jaccard index, there was hardly any concordance at the species level between the medicinal flora used in the different countries. We found concordances only in cases of geographic proximity. Such as between Spain and Morocco, where Mentha pulegium, and Spergularia rubra, were considered the most effective species for treating reproductive and renal systems, respectively. Also, between the use of the genus Rubus (Rubus ulmifolius) in Spain and Cyprus for digestive and dermatological issues. As reflected in Fig. 6, the pathologies of the digestive system, considered to be the most important uses for the species Rubus ulmifolius (Rubus ulmifolius) in experimental assays (Lamas et al., 1999). In addition to the following equation: Diversity of use index (DUI) = no. of uses/no. of species, estimating that values greater than 1 signify high diversity and values lower than 1 signify low diversity. The data of our study reveal that in localities except in Cyprus and Spain the number of species used was similar to or even lower than the uses recorded. Aspirin is a common remedy against stomach-ache. Wounds, abdominal colic, cough, and acute dermatological symptoms were the most common symptoms treated with plants in all the countries studied. The disorders were divided into 10 pathological groups (Table 6), adding a final group (11) as a catch-all for symptoms or illnesses that, according to popular terminology, are difficult to fit into any category. According to the number of references, we established an ethnobotanical vicariance that provided orientation on the most important uses for each species of the genus Rubus (Rubus spp. and Spain, Rubus ulmifolius). Different species of this genus have proven effective for treating hypoglycemias in experimental assays (Lamas et al., 1999). As might be expected, according to the Jaccard index, there was hardly any concordance at the species level between the medicinal flora used in the different countries. We found concordances only in cases of geographic proximity. Such as between Spain and Morocco, where Mentha pulegium, and Spergularia rubra, were considered the most effective species for treating reproductive and renal systems, respectively. Also, between the use of the genus Rubus (Rubus ulmifolius) in Spain and Cyprus for digestive and dermatological issues. As reflected in Fig. 6, the pathologies of the digestive system, considered to be the most important uses for the species Rubus ulmifolius (Rubus ulmifolius) in experimental assays (Lamas et al., 1999).
frequently mentioned and show the highest diversity of uses. This is reasonable, given that most of these disorders can be qualified as light, sometimes chronic, and they respond well to treatment with plants.

Table 6 presents the two illnesses most frequently mentioned in each of the countries; we confirmed that the affections treated with plants were related primarily to the respiratory and digestive system and the skin.

Finally, in all the countries, the preparation methods were simple, mostly boiling and infusion. These preparations were administrated mainly orally or externally in compresses.

4. Conclusions

As in previous work (Pieroni et al., 2006), the results of the present study do not demonstrate a common ethnobotanical heritage throughout the Mediterranean region.

Nevertheless, the project RUBIA does not have among its main objects the strict comparison of the results, and thus the localities studied were selected in a free way by each team without taking into account the parameters such as the floristic or bioclimatic characteristics, which surely would have offered more coincidences from the taxonomic standpoint. The few coincidences found suggest, more than a common ethnoflora, a set of similar practices in the preparation, administration of the medicinal preparations, or the ailments treated with plants, reflecting a fund of common heritage in the different regions studied.

It is important to highlight that this work constitutes the first comparative study performed with ethnobotanical data gathered by a coordinated methodology in the Mediterranean area. An exhaustive list is provided for the species catalogued, indicating the regions where each plant was mentioned. This information underlines the ethnobotanical richness of the region and the need to broaden this study to other areas of the Mediterranean. Furthermore, this constitutes a base for future phytochemical and pharmacological studies which could lead to new therapeutic products.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to due to all the local communities involved in the study. We would also like to thank David Nesbitt for translating the English version of the text.

References


