

Sergio Balatri

AN EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURE



Watercolor by Anna Mauri

2020

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MATERIA MEDICA

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QUALITATES

VIRES V



Charles Linnaeus in Lapp costume - Hendrix Hollander 1853

PENT

233. *SEDUM Telephium* foliis planiusculis serratis, corymbo folioso, caule erecto. *Fl. suec.* 400 *Sp. pl.* 516.
Anacampseros vulgo Faba crassa. *Baub. bist.* 3. p. 81.
LOC: Europæ colles saxosi. *Perennis, vulgaris.*
PHARM: TELEPHII Radix.
QUAL: glutinosa, subacida, mitis. *Exoleta, infida.*
VIS: refrigerans.
USUS: Varix ani, Paronychia, Hæmorrhoids?

Even if popular usage indicates it as "grass of whitlow," only Linnaeus specifies this use (**Paronychia**) in his *Materia Medica* of MDCCLIII.

I may have been seven when I learned the expression “paronychia”. It must have been said by my mother who also told me: “Let’s go to Aunt Ida who has the herb plant of the Madonna”. Aunt Ida, sister of her paternal grand mother, lived in Desco, a small hamlet of the town of Impruneta where I was born and lived until 1957. Mom took a leaf from Aunt Ida’s vase, peeled it and put it on my finger.



The next morning my finger was as if boiled, the pain disappeared and the finger practically healed....
On October 5, 1978 I was on duty the emergency room of the hospital of San Giovanni di Dio in Borgo Ognisanti in Florence. A young shoemaker, Antonio, who

had injured the tip of the thumb of his left hand with an awl, came to the emergency room. The wound did not heal, in fact it got worse. Antonio had gone to the emergency room of the Santa Maria Nuova hospital, also in Florence and closer to him. He had been prescribed antibiotic treatment because osteitis had developed and he was told that if the treatment had not cured him, they would have to amputate his phalanx. The cure had no effect, Antonio then thought of a second opinion and so he came to San Giovanni di Dio. As soon as I saw it, I don't know why, I remembered the herb of the Madonna that my mother had put on my finger. I asked Antonio if he was willing to treat with the leaves and he immediately said yes. I did not even know where to find the plant, I got on the phone, asked the various nurserymen about the plant of the Madonna because I only remembered this name and finally I found one from Roberto Benoni in Via Cassia. He asked if it was the one he asked if it was that plant that you peel and put on your fingers, I said yes and sent Antonio to buy it. Antonio went and returned to the emergency room with a vase of Madonna's grass (which he still has). I peeled a leaf and put it on his fingertip. He came back the next morning, I took a picture, and told him to continue with a leaf every day. After about ten days he recovered. He went away happy and I was very impressed by this extraordinary healing.

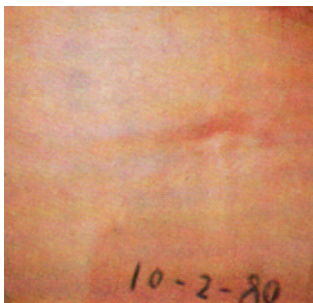


But who to tell it to? I tried to tell it to my fellow surgeons, but I don't remember them giving it any weight.

The hospital then had an excellent pharmacy «In the sign of St. John of God» connected to the hospital and in which I gladly spent some time. I was friendly with all the pharmacists and so I also told them about my adventure with the herb of the Madonna. Among the pharmacists was Dr. Franco Vincieri who had been interested in plants for some time and with the chemist Massimo Bambagiotti had organized a Phytochemistry Laboratory at the Faculty of Pharmacy in Florence. He encouraged me to study the plant, he taught me the scientific name, *Sedum telephium* and I decided to start the study of Botany by enrolling in the first year of the Faculty of Natural Sciences.

Thus I approached the history of Medical Botany, now abandoned by doctors for many decades. The winter

of 78-79 passed and with the spring and summer of 79 the leaves of the Madonna's plant reappeared in my studies and applications on patients progressed a lot. I was looking for leaves in gardens and also on windowsills. At that time I had started the treatment of gluteal abscesses, then quite frequent, with chopped leaves that I chopped on a cutting board in the emergency room, arousing the hilarious sarcasm of my colleagues, but the abscesses healed without incision, not only the complications of abscess incisions made in other locations and now fistulized were also cured ... That year some new facts occurred: a thoracic fistula from recurrent costal osteitis, the arrival of the Fixomull patch, the possibility of freezing the leaves for use during the winter and the Professor's boil. The thoracic fistula from recurrent costal osteitis belonged to one of our patients, Gino, who was polytraumatized due to a serious injury with the tractor, the costal osteitis had recurred after a previous rib resection surgery again for osteitis. Gino refused further surgery and on the advice of someone in the hospital came to me for the application of leaves. I taught him how to chop them and he continued at home. One day he told me that in his field he seemed to have a similar plant, he brought it to me, I took it to the Institute of Botany where it was recognized as *Sedum maximum*. I then told him to try his. So he did and after a patient and long application, he recovered.



Then I went to Gino's field and collected his plant which I planted and multiplied in a field in Impruneta. In this period 78-79 a large-sized band aid with support on the market appeared: appeared on the market Fixomull of the Beiersdorf company was perfectly suited to both whole leaves and chopped leaves. The patch was soon followed by the even more adaptable and superimposable stretch shape. The boil of the nose belongs to Prof. Muntoni Primary Surgeon and

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Director of the San Giovanni di Dio Hospital, who was healed overnight with the application of the frozen leaves, arousing his enthusiasm and my presentation to the Tosco-Umbrian Society of Surgery with photos of my healed cases and the publication of an article with photos in the Society Bulletin in 1981.

The first thesis for a Degree with Nadia Mulinacci candidate, Supervisor Prof. Franco Vincieri and Co-Advisor Prof. Massimo Bambagiotti with the title: "Approach to the study of the active principles of *Sedum telephium*" is from 1984-85. Thus began a whole series of studies and publications on *Sedum telephium* in various specialized journals.

At the end of the 80s, the collaboration with Dr. Fabio Firenzuoli gave me the opportunity to present my experience to the courses of his School of Herbal Medicine in Empoli. On one of those occasions, prof. Daniela Giachetti, professor at the Faculty of Pharmacy at the University of Siena became interested in my experience and invited me for a presentation at her school of Phytotherapy in Siena. Thus began our collaboration in 1997 which has never stopped. Many theses on *Sedum telephium* were discussed at the University of Siena until 2009 and beyond. An occasion in July 2006: The School of Specialization in Anesthesia and Intensive Care of the University of Florence directed by prof. Sergio Boncinelli, organized a seminar entitled: «Interaction between plants

and medicines in anesthesia» to which I was invited to present the herb of the Madonna. On that occasion I was lucky enough to meet prof. Franco Bettiol, a well-known specialist in pharmaceutical preparations, to whom I proposed a gel with the juice of *Sedum telephium*.

After several tests, the gel was finally prepared by the Kos company and put on sale. In February 2008, prof. Marina Ziche, professor of Pharmacology at the University of Siena together with Dr. Lucia Morbidelli with an experimental test, put a final point on the properties of *Sedum telephium* and maximum:

«Modulator of the inflammatory process».

The latest «Update on Madonna's plant and other crassulaceae as modulators of the inflammatory process» took place in the Aula Muntoni of the new San Giovanni di Dio hospital on 22 May 2010. The professor Marco Biagi, with his young collaborators, are now continuing his studies on this family, a member of which he has given and will probably still give a lot of satisfaction.

In recent days a thought came to mi mind: I never asked my mother: **«Who told you about the Madonna's herb?»**

But I can't ask her anymore.



The plant of the Madonna by Peter T. Foster (August 2013 - Oil on wood, 40x55 cm), commissioned by Sergio Balatri, and the watercolor by Anna Maury (cover), are part of the Sedum telephium artistic collection. Peter Foster studied at art schools in New Zealand and Australia, but learned the secrets of oil painting from a Dutch artist. After a period in Venice, in 2006, he opened his studio atelier in Florence in via del Porcellana, where he paints and exhibits his paintings.

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Sergio Balatri

Born in Impruneta (Fi) on 22 November 1943. Enrolled in the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery of the University of Florence in 1962. Graduated in Medicine and Surgery at the University of Parma in 1969. In 1965 he began attending the hospital of San Giovanni di Dio in Borgo Ognissanti, a hospital he was already familiar with since the cousin of his paternal grandmother Paris Sacchi served as staff inspector. He began his work on May 1 1969 in the surgical hospital of San Giovanni di Dio, mainly in the emergency room, until its closure in 1982, and then continuing work at New San Giovanni di Dio Torre Galli until his retirement in 2001. Since then he has continued the study and applications of Sedum he returns to the ancient San Giovanni di Dio in Borgo Ognissanti with the Association of the same name and contributes with the ASL to the difficult maintenance of the old building.