

Traditional Knowledge: the View of a Folklorist

Tatiana Volodina





Traditional Knowledge

Unlike folklore, i.e. oral and poetic creativity, it is applied knowledge related to human life and his or her environment.

At the same time, their traditional nature is not related to antiquity, but associated with the method ethnic experience is transmitted from one generation to another in the form of customs, order and rules of conduct that can be learned through practice, demonstration or story. Traditional knowledge is generated every day and it develops as people and communities respond to the problems posed by the environment for them.

This work deals with **only one** of the units of traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources – *medicinal plants*.

- Data related to the use of animal origin agents in folk medicine has been collected. However, slightly different methods and a new database are required for their comprehensive consideration.



- In Belarusian folk medicine, more than 600 species are used.

- Still *terra incognita* for modern ethnobotany called Belarus the authors of one of the last serious works (Łuczaj et al. 2013, 2) devoted to the wild edible plants of Belarus.



Łuczaj et al. *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine* 2013, **9**:21
<http://www.ethnobiomed.com/content/9/1/21>

international readership, as they were originally, predominantly published in their national languages. However, some eastern European countries still remain *terra incognita* for modern ethnobotany. One of them is Belarus. We have not found any modern ethnobotanical studies concerning this country, apart from a short FAO report on crop genetic resources [13]. At the same time it is a

From the history related to the study of medicinal flora of Belarus

- The main task of the front-line study of primarily ethnographic and ethnologic literature in general was the desire to understand a bundle of traditional knowledge Belarusians have accumulated over centuries. Indeed, a comparison of historical and present-day knowledge can testify to the stability (including effectiveness) of a tradition.
- Zelniki, a book of herbs, a book of home cures
- Works of Polish and Russian scientists and travelers until the middle of the 19th century
- Formation of ethnography and interest to the plant kingdom
- Contribution of Belarusian-Polish ethnographers to the development of ethnobotany
 - Wandalin Szukiewicz
 - Michał Fedorowsky
 - Eliza Orzeszkowa
- A turning point of centuries and the development of ethnobotany
- Achievements and problems of Belarusian ethnobotany of the 2nd half of the 20th century
- Modern stage



- “Wormwood (*Artemisia*) is a very good thing, including for evil spirits. And when a stomach ache occurs and for no mouse to appear and for no witch to reach into the house”

(2018, Susha Lepelsky, L. Volkava).

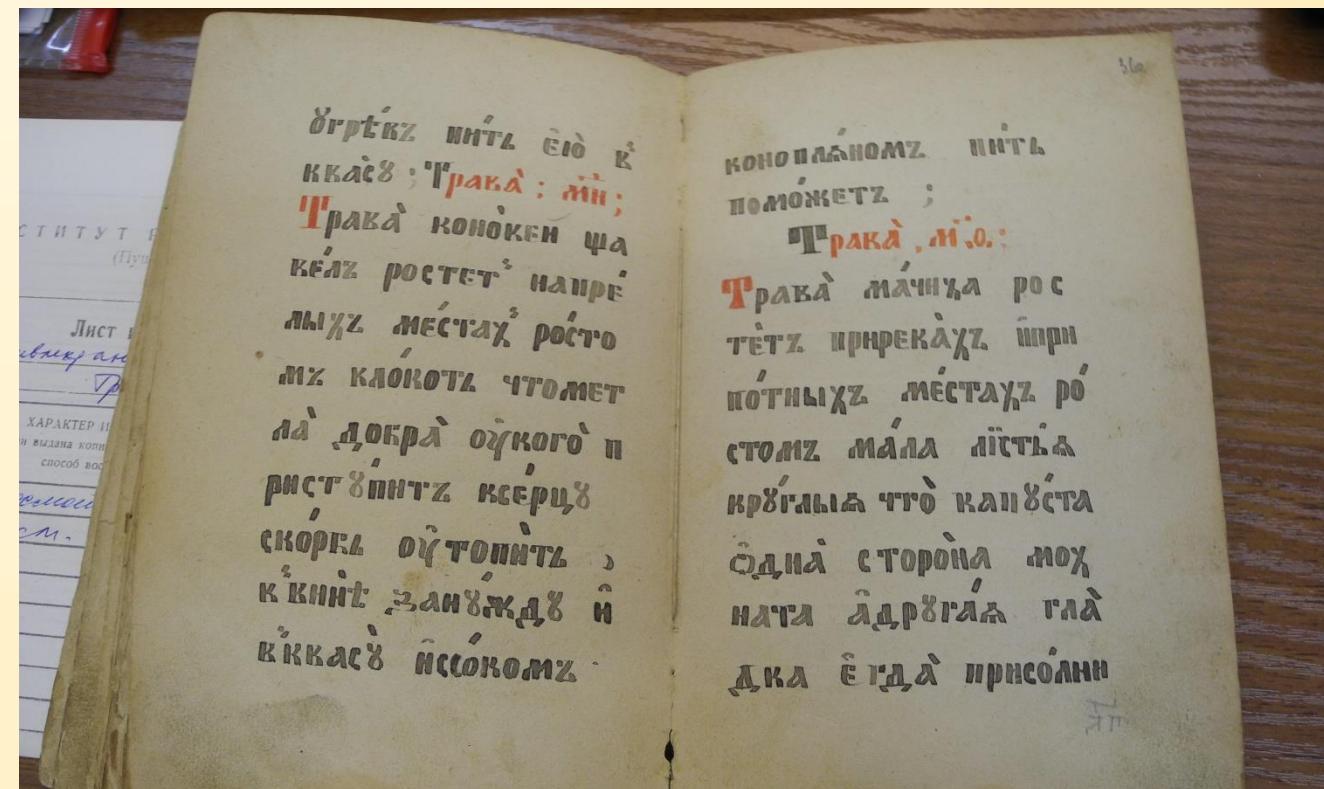
- G. Spichinsky is one of the best educated people of the 16th century. He left solid work on folk remedies, which describes plants, fish, animals and their use for various diseases. Some information finds almost literal repetition in present-day records. Thus, the plant bylica (wormwood), according to the data from the 16th century, when hung above the door, took away the power of enchantment and “devilry”.



«Тую омелу пити з вином,
уздоровливает утробу гниющую и
морит робаки, которые гризут у бруху.
А коли дитя в семи летех покушает
тоей ж омелы, не будет мети падущой
немоцы. А листие омельное
уздоровливает подсовы и почныя
болести. Омела выгонит из человека
избытный кус, а этот кус ростет в
человеке з недокипенья и недоваренъя»
(с.94, л.119),

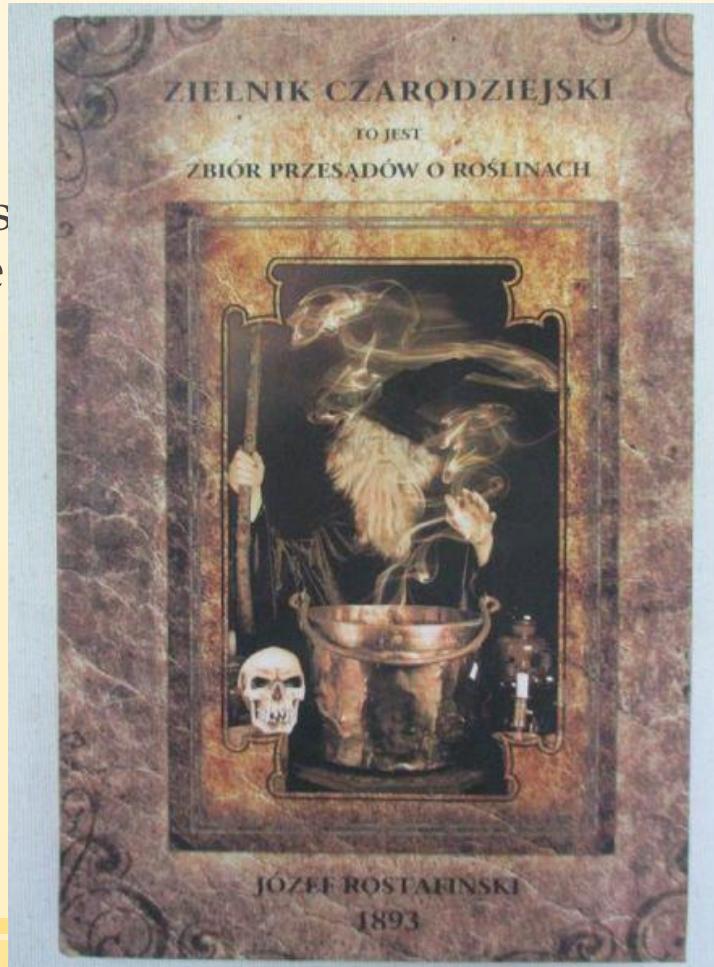
«О подсовы: гусинное сало и воск
сырой лист да маково млеко, истерши
вмесце, на плат приложиьти где болит,
поможет» (с. 95, л. 121)

«Книга глаголемая лечебник Литовскій»



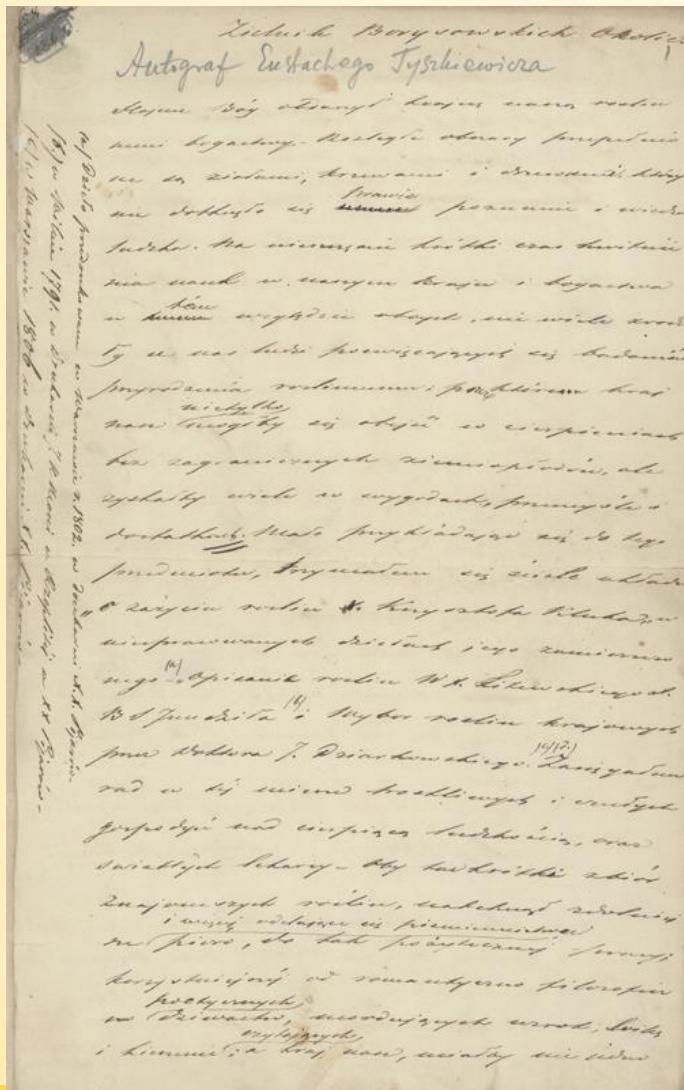
- It is impossible to categorically separate “scientific” and “superstitious” ideas about this or that plant or animal origin agents, since for traditional knowledge holders they constitute an inextricable and organic unity.

- In fact, interest in the “extra-rational” side of public life is also characteristic of Józef Rostafiński, a Polish ethnobotany pioneer – not without reason, he published his work on plants under the title “*Zielnik czarodziejski to jest zbiór przesądów o roślinach*” (1895).



Eustachy Tyszkiewicz

“Zelnik of Borisovsky Uyezd”



František Verenko

“To the Issue of Folk Medicine”

- 1) Odwar z całej rośliny ziela „Harlanoczki, czyli Brunelka, czyli Barlink“ (*Prunella vulgaris*) jako napój lub płukania (Powsz.).
- 2) Odwar z całej rośliny ziela „Sabarnik czyli Hliśnik“ (*Solanum nigrum*) jako płukanie (Doksz.).
- 3) Płukać odwarem z gniazda jaskólczego (Doksz.).
- 4) Odwar z psiego łajna podawany jako napój i do płukania (Puciłk., Zarowie¹).

- The general tendency to assess folk healing practices was that “superstitious” (from the point of view of collectors) methods were explained by “age-old backwardness” and “useful” ones by “folk wisdom and experience”.

“Wisła” and “Lud”

1889

Bronisław Grabowski

“Kwestionariusz dla zbierających zwyczaje i pojęcia prawne ludu po wsiach i miasteczkach”.

“I appeal to all those who have an opportunity to learn about the methods and tools of traditional medicine, so that they kindly take care of collecting herbs that are used in local traditional medicine. Healers, grannies and even pani are involved in healing and we need to learn from them as well about this sphere. Each grass blade must be glued to a piece of paper, a common name of a plant should be recorded, if known, and if not, then a specialist will invent a scientific definition, then find out how it is used and what parts of the plant are used”.

- Professor Józef Rostafiński (1850-1928), a Polish botanist from Krakow (Jagiellonian University), compiled a questionnaire of 70 questions covering all aspects of ethnobotany.
- “Odezwa do niebotaników o zbieranie ludowych nazw roślin”

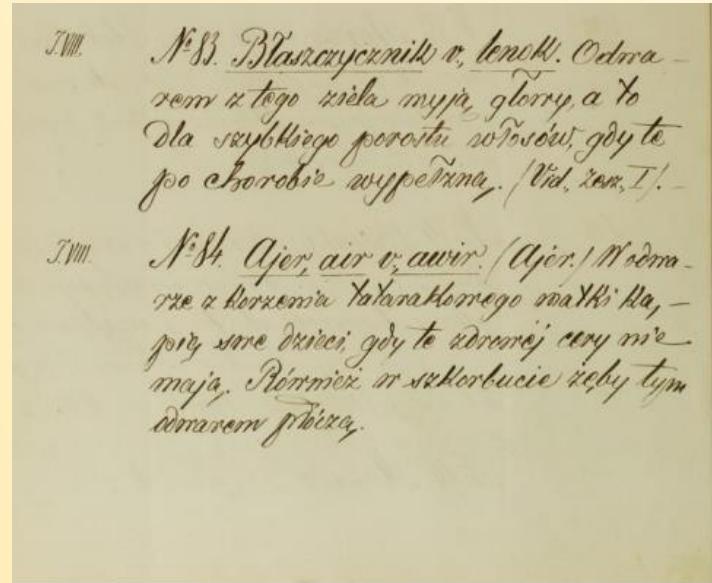
- Estonia
- A material collection campaign launched by Jacob Hurt in 1888, which yielded impressive results

Folk Botany Catalog contains a wealth of information (about 13 000 index cards) on plants

In the folklore collection of the Art History, Ethnography and Folklore Archive only occasional data on the use of plants were found.

- M. Federowski

- “Lud białoruski na Rusi litewskiej”, in its Part “On Medicinal Plants” the author mentioned more than 200 species



1. Fragment tekstu zeszytu 2. Ziół leczniczych... i odpowiadająca mu tablica z okazami

45) pieralotnik – przelot pospolity *Anthyllis vulneraria* L.

46) bylink – bylica polna *Artemisia campestris* L.

47) urocznik biały – przytulia zwyczajna *Galium mollugo* L.

48) urocznik żółty – przytulia właściwa *Galium verum* L.

49) husinyje łapki – przywrotnik *Alchemilla* sp.

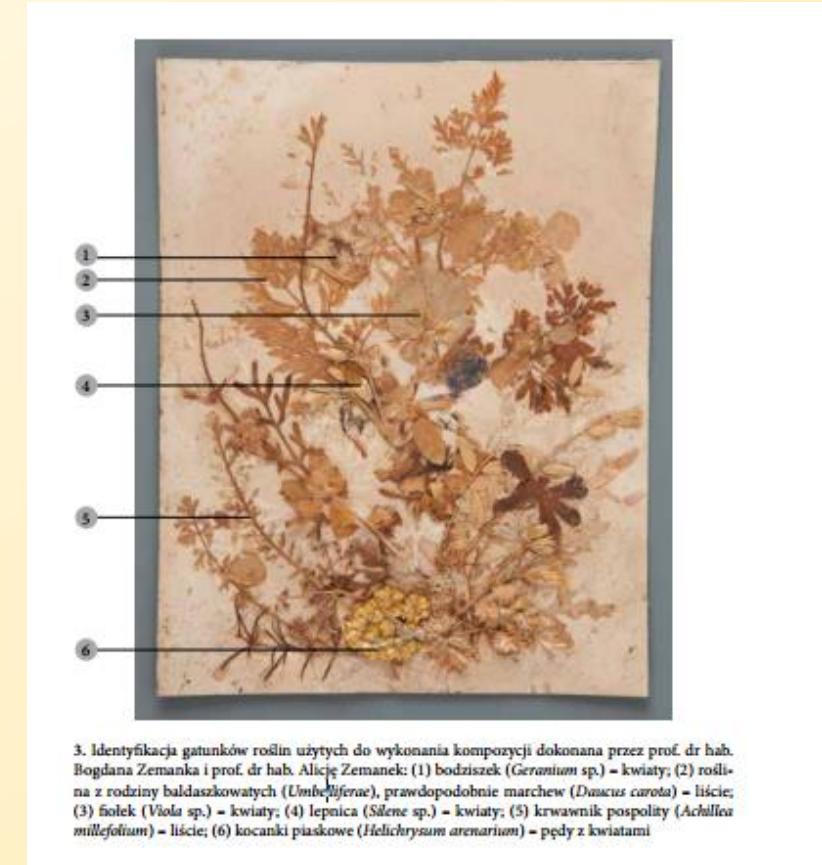
50) padarożnik – kuklik pospolity *Geum urbanum* L.



*Eliza Orzeszkowa (1841-1910),
The herbarium includes 280 plants.
In "Ludziach i kwiatach nad Niemnem", 260 plant species are
mentioned.*



ELIZA ORZESZKOWA
(1841-1910)



Zoska Veras

- Belarusian-Polish-Russian-Latin Dictionary of Botany, 1924
- It was the first publication of its kind in the national language. In 1924, the booklet "From the History of Herbs' Use in Healing".



L.I. Minko

"Traditional Medicine and the Harm of Witch Craft (Quackery)", "Traditional Medicine of Belarus", "Witch Craft (Quackery)"

- "A critical consideration of Belarusian traditional medicine allows to isolate rational methods and tools of traditional healing from all superficial, meaningless, magic ..."

1965

“Medicinal plants (wild-growing)”

[A.F. Gammerman, I.L. Yurkevich]

compiled by the Institute of Experimental Botany and Microbiology of the Academy of Sciences of the BSSR jointly with the staff of the Pharmacognosy and Botany Department, the Pharmaceutical Faculty, Vitebsk Medical Institute and the Pharmacognosy and Botany Cabinet of Mogilev Medical School.

123 settlements. Information was collected on 290 plant species; 130 out of them were approved by the USSR Pharmacological Committee for the use in scientific medicine (included in the Pharmacopoeia, state standards and technical specifications – temporary and permanent).



Folklore-Ethnographic Expeditions



Complex Field Work

(interview and overt observation) with subsequent decoding, processing and classification of the data obtained.



Database on the Use of Plants of Belarus (traditional medicine mostly)

Фильтр по растению:

Фильтр по сфере:

Фильтр по району:

Фильтр по лат. назв.:

Убрать фильтр

Растения

Латин. назв.

Обновить

Сфера

Районы

Паспорт:

Загрузить фото

Код записи: 2002

Район: Лепельскі

Растение: валаляр'янка.

Информант: Скакун Соф'я Іосіфаўна

Собиратель: Валодзіна Т.

Деревня: Суша

Источник:

Год записи:

Разное:

Сфера использования: сердечные заболевания

Запись: Валаляр'янку ад серца. Харашо каранькі тыя пасушыць і ў бутылачку і нюхаць. І чай харашо, алі так дыхнёш і харашо.

Запись: 1 из 1

Нет фильтра

Поиск

Запись: 14 1999 из 2000

Нет фильтра

Поиск

Database

- The Database contains 2000 records and is organized according to an important conceptual principle: 1000 included records were taken from the printed sources of the late XVIII - early XX century (i.e. the notes were made before the revolution in the classical period of the traditional peasant culture); 1000 records belong to the late XX - early XXI century and more than 300 out of them were made in 2018 as a result of a focused survey. About 500 present-day records were obtained during fully fledged folklore-ethnographic expeditions with a primary interest in magical folk medicine.
- The database contains information on 450 plants (360 have Latin names). Additional work is needed to identify the remaining names.
- The data encompass nearly all territory of Belarus (the least number of records is from Western Polesie)

According to the Database, the frequency of records from the most investigated districts is as follows: Polotsk District – 106, Kastryčnicki District – 104, Grodno District – 80, Lepel District – 69, Slonim District – 67, Braslav District – 44, Smolevichi District – 62, Glusk District – 67, Dribin District – 51, etc.

- plantain 44,
- St.-John's-wort 36,
- celandine 33,
- oak tree 31,
- yarrow 30,
- garlic 32,
- birch tree 29,
- onion 28,
- raspberry 26,
- wormwood 25,
- lime blossom 21,
- bilberry 18,
- pine tree 18,
- valerian 18,
- aspen 17...



Herbs



Health Problems & Herbs

- Gastric diseases 221
- Skin lesions 162
- Colds 133
- Pulmonary diseases 131
- Gynaecological diseases 119
(19 fixations over the last 20 years and about a hundred pre-revolutionary)
- Joint pains, backache 101
- Childhood diseases 96
- Injuries 86
- Cordial remedies 63
- For a fright and evil eye 76 (53 over the last 20 years)
- For magic purposes 36 (19 in the records over the last 10 years)
- Sedatives 37



Back to more extensive use of plants to cure various diseases

- A woman wrote in the journal, "No chase for drugs, use your own remedies. I went, Mom, and filled a three-liter jar with dandelions. We are all in the eyes of God and who knows what someone will face with. I filled it in with 2 bottles of vodka, and I kept my dandelions for 3 weeks like that and then, Mom, I must confess that I should have made 2 jars of it".
- "You need wormwood or tansy for a stomach ache. Wormwood is bitter – a tea spoon per glass and drink slowly, drink it by a spoon. And you'll feel better shortly. I still subscribe for "Zdravushka" and read it. There are various herbs there. – And have you read about it in a newspaper or knew before? – We already knew about it. They write here, "Stop taking chemicals, it's time to use herbs".

(2016, Aljaksandrajka Slaŭharadski Vera Liaŭkova, 1926
A. Bohanjeva, T. Valodzina)

(2018, Shastaki Drybinski, Marya Malašanka, 1941, T. Valodzina,
T. Kucharonak)

New time brings up *res nova* (new issues)

- “Неякая е, каб не піў гарэлку.
Нейкі капыщень, яна высокенъкая
такая, і па іх жоўценькія цвяточкі.
Жонка куды падстаўляла, каб не
яна налівала, а то ім пасля гэтай
траўкі робіцца дрэнна. Каб не
ўгнявіць, а так ён знянацьку
знойдзе гэту бутылачку і вып’е»
(2018, Пратасы Акцябрскі,
Прасякова Марыя Васільеўна,
1940г.н., Валодзіна Т.).

- New trends include indoor aloe, the use of which for healing wounds and for preparing medicine for pulmonary diseases is confirmed by a number of records; also kalanchoe and *Ornithogalum caudatum*.



Much fancied



- Stinkhorn



Traditional Knowledge Holders

