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Bush Medicine of the Bahamas: A Cross-Cultural Perspective from San Salvador Island, including Pharmacology and Oral Histories

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Bush Medicine of the Bahamas: A Cross-Cultural Perspective from San Salvador Island, including Pharmacology and Oral Histories by Jeffrey Holt McCormack, Kathleen Maier, and Patricia B. Wallens. Charlottesville, VA: JHM Designs Publications; 2011. Hardcover; 331 pages. ISBN 9780983767305. \$37.00.

Bush Medicine of the Bahamas is a well-written, informative, and richly illustrated account of the medicinal plants of San Salvador Island. While there is no doubt that it will be a useful reference for all who are interested in plant medicine, it will be welcomed especially by scholars of the Caribbean and the African diaspora. The authors' authoritative account of 120 medicinal plants on San Salvador Island and information on non-botanical remedies is significant in itself, but what really sets this book apart from similar studies is that the discussion of San Salvador's bush medicine is set clearly in context of the culture, history, and belief systems of Africans on both sides of the Atlantic. In addition to the detailed coverage of 120 medicinal plants that constitutes the book's essential content, it is noteworthy that the authors succeed in accomplishing their 8 stated goals, the first 2 of which are: "to preserve the knowledge of bush medicine on San Salvador Island, and the Bahamas generally," and "to preserve oral histories and cultural values associated with the use of bush medicine plants."

The history of bush medicine, its African "cultural roots" and related belief systems are discussed in the first 2 chapters. Chapter 3 provides an excellent introduction of the "principles and practices" of San Salvador's bush medicine, including topics such as harvesting, preparation, and dosage. Chapter 4 serves as an excellent introduction to the geography of San Salvador Island.

Of the book's 331 pages, more than half are devoted to Chapter 5, titled "Materia Medica: Medicinal Plants of San Salvador Island." This chapter provides details for each of the 120 medicinal plants of San Salvador Island, including information about the plants' common names (in San Salvador and the Caribbean), scientific names, habitat, flowering and fruiting seasons, parts used in medicine (individually or in combination with others), and indications for treatment.

It is noteworthy that in addition to native species like five-finger (*Tabebuia bahamensis*, Bignoniaceae), fig (*Ficus citrifolia*, Moraceae), and red mangrove (*Rhizophora mangle*, Rhizophoraceae), the medicinal plants of San Salvador Island, like the rest of the Caribbean, have come from all over the world. When Columbus stumbled across the Americas in his effort to demonstrate the possibility of reaching the wealth of the Indies by sailing west, he set in motion a biological and cultural exchange between the Old and the New Worlds that was to play a significant part in the development of the landscapes of the present world system. San Salvador Island's medicinal plants include such familiar species like the tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*, Fabaceae), aloe (*Aloe vera*, Xanthorrhoeaceae), and castor oil plant (*Ricinus communis*, Euphorbiaceae) of Africa and the periwinkle (*Catharanthus roseus*, Apocynaceae) of Madagascar; the pomegranate (*Punica granatum*, Lythraceae) and oleander (*Nerium oleander*, Apocynaceae) of the Near East and Mediterranean area; the mango (*Mangifera indica*, Anacardiaceae) of India; the banana (*Musa nana*, Musaceae) and lime (*Citrus aurantiifolia*, Rutaceae) of Southeast Asia; the avocado (*Persea americana*, Lauraceae), guava (*Psidium guajava*, Myrtaceae), soursop (*Annona muricata*, Annonaceae), and genip (*Melicoccus bijugatus*, Sapindaceae) of tropical America; hibiscus (*Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*, Malvaceae) of Asia; and the breadfruit (*Artocarpus altilis*, Moraceae) of the Pacific. People of the Caribbean would also recognize familiar wild plants such as jumbay (*Leucaena leucocephala*, Fabaceae), a native of tropical America that is common along roadsides, and most Caribbean gardeners would be familiar with cerasee (*Momordica charantia*, Cucurbitaceae) and crab's eyes (*Abrus precatorius*, Fabaceae), both natives of the Old World tropics that are often found on fences, as well as ubiquitous ornamental plants like goldenrod (*Lantana* spp., Verbenaceae) of the Americas and green croton (*Polyscias guilfoylei*, Araliaceae) of the Pacific.

Additional topics covered in chapter 5 include preparation; administration and dosage; properties and actions; pharmacological notes; contraindications and toxicity; cross-cultural medicinal plant uses (with a special focus on the Caribbean) and a category titled, "In their own words," which presents excellent excerpts from the audio and video interviews of residents of the island.

Chapter 3—"Principles and Practices of Bush Medicine"—amply realizes the authors' next 4 goals "to serve as a guide to the identification and uses of bush medicine plants, ... to identify potential useful medicinal plants that merit further investigation, ... to serve as a valuable tool for researchers who wish to expand the knowledge of bush medicine," and "to provide insight into the pharmacology of bush medicines, and their cross-cultural uses."

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 expand the scope of this book as evident by their titles, "Midwifery, Pregnancy, and Childbirth," "Non-botanical Remedies," and "Practitioner Portraits."

Bush Medicine of the Bahamas stands a good chance of success in meeting its last 2 goals: "to help establish an educational curriculum for the introduction of bush medicine knowledge within the Bahamian education system, and ... to help preserve the flora and ecology of San Salvador Island." The book is written with sensitivity and respect, and there is no doubt that it will be welcomed, not only by the people of San Salvador Island, but by the Caribbean as a whole, for its mission to educate readers and help conserve bush medicine traditions.

The authors' attention to detail and their clear presentation ensures that this scholarly work will be a valuable reference for the general reader and for researchers. The book's comprehensive treatment of the bush medicine of San Salvador Island makes it an excellent text for undergraduate and graduate courses, especially courses on the Caribbean and the African diaspora, ethnomedicine, botany, and other biological sciences.

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