

A TOOTHACHE REMEDY: ITALY 1514

Introduction

Giovanni Da Vigo was an Italian physician who published a text in 1514 that was translated into English in several editions – I used the edition from 1550. I have analyzed one of his toothache remedies and recreated it.

“Sometyme there chaunceth a certeyn dormition in the teeth, by holding cold thinges in the mouth, a stupefaction... medicines in the mouth, for the remotion weroft, they shal use the medicine under wrytten, comaundiying it to be holden in the mouth warme...:

ied, and
it saveng.
inceth of
synowes,
ne. Whet-
the teeth therwyrth, in the moring
fastynge thysc a wecke.
Sometyme there chaunceth a cer-
teyn dormitatiō in þ teeth, by holding
cold thinges in þ mouth, & stupefacti-
on. Wher-
ff. ii. medit-

Cha. v.

The syfth boke.

Loosenes.

medicines in the mouth, for the remo-
tion wherof, ye shal vse the medicine
vndet wrytten, comaundyng it to be
holde in the mouth warme. R. of odo-
riforous wine. It. 5. of aqua vite. 3. i. of
rosemarye, sage, & camomill. asia. in.
5. of cloues, of nutmegges. asf.) : (i. of
sandrake. 3. i. 5. let them scethe all toge-
ther, tyl the thyrd part be consumed,
then straine them, & vse them as is a-
foresayd, Item aqua vite applied to
the teethe, wyth cotton, taketh awy
the dormyption and congelation of
the same. Laxation or loosenes of the
teeth, chaunceth through the loosenes
of the guinimes, or through debilita-
on or weakeunge. of the rootes or

dyes, the sa-
ued, for as
the teethe, i
that kylle
syre cause
the teethe r
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mentes o
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the teethe
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English translation of the text

Theory of Toothaches

Prior to learning about bacteria, tooth pain not related to an obvious injury was believed to be due to unbalanced humors or tooth worms living inside the tooth. Most herbal remedies sought to balance the humors – tooth worms were chased out by more extreme methods.

Ingredients

Odiferous wine

This refers to wine vinegar. Vinegar was a common ingredient in toothache remedies as it was thought to be strong enough to carry the other ingredients into the structure of the tooth.

Aqua vite

Otherwise known as distilled liquor. This may be another carrier like the vinegar since simmering would cause most of the alcohol to evaporate.

Rosemary

Required warm according to Dioscorides, warm and dry according to Banckes.

“The distilled water of the floure of Rosemary being drunke at morning and evening first and last, taketh away the stench of the mouth and breath, and maketh it very sweet....”

John Gerard

Sage



Sage, Fuchs 1543

Should be hot in the first degree and dry in the second.

“Of sage there are two manners, sage of the garden and wild sage. If thou will have sage for medicines, take the leaves of garden sage....”

Banckes

Chamomile

Should be warm. “*The roots, flowers, and herb have a warming, relieving strength.*”
Dioscorides

Clove

Hot. A topical numbing agent especially useful in the mouth and used to relieve sinus pressure. "If one suffers in his head, so that his head is stuffy, and it is as if he were deaf, he should eat cloves often, and the stuffiness in his head will diminish." – Hildegard von Bingen

Nutmeg

Hot and dry in the second degree according to Banckes

Mandrake





Mandrake, Fuchs 1543 and Trento 1591

A plant that depresses the central nervous system and is also associated with the human body due to the shape of the root.

Mandrake is a powerful pain reliever and was used extensively in European medicine for a wide variety of ailments.

“The wine within the root hath been boyled or infused provoketh sleepe and asswageth paine.” – John Gerard

“Twenty grains of the juice.... expel phlegm...”

Dioscorides

Analysis

At the beginning of this chapter Da Vigo states that teeth "are wont to be vexed" due to matter descending from the brain. My theory is that this remedy is for toothache caused by sinus congestion which would include phlegm (which is the cold and wet humor) dripping down from the sinuses (matter "descending from the brain"). This would also explain the ingredients which are a mixture of hot/dry and pain relievers. Sinus congestion puts pressure on the nerves going to the roots of the upper molars which can cause general pain in those teeth.

Recipe

Da Vigo uses common apothecary symbols of the time.

A handfull is written thus	—	M.j.
Halfe a handfull thus	—	M.β.
A little handfull thus	—	P.j.
A Scruple thus	—	ʒ.j.
A Draunme thus	—	ʒ.j.
An ounce thus	—	ʒ.j.
Halfe an ounce, or halfe a dramme thus	—	ʒ.β.—ʒ.β.
An ounce and halfe, thus	—	ʒ.j.β.
A Grayne thus	—	G.j.
The number of any thing, thus	—	no.j.&c.
A Pound , is thus	—	l.j.
So much as shall suffice, thus	—	q.ʒ.
(Ana) is of either of them.		
xx. Graynes make a Scruple.		
ij. Scruples, make a Dramme.		
vij. Drammes, make an ounce.		
xij. Ounces, make a pound.		
	•	

The waight of	1. A pounde.	2. An vnce.	3. A drame.	4. A scruple.	5. A Grayne.	6. The waight of	7. of ech part, ana.	8. A quarter.	9. Halfe.	10. A handful.
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My Redaction

of odiferous wine, half a pound

of aqua vitae, an ounce

of rosemary, sage, and chamomile each a half ounce

of clove and of nutmegge each, a scruple

):(– this symbol means to pound in a mortar

of mandrake, a dram and half a pound

“Let them all sethe together until the third part be consumed, then straine them”
Simmer until reduced by 1/3, strain the solids. Hold in the mouth while it is still warm.

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