



Screening of Maltese Medicinal and Aromatic Plants for Pharmacological Activity

Project Title

Screening of Maltese Medicinal and Aromatic Plants for Pharmacological Activity

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Records show that the traditional use of medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs) by the Maltese dates back centuries. As with other cultures, the Maltese exploited plants to improve their well-being and that of the animals they domesticated. However, with the advent of modern medicine, the use of plants for the treatment or control of diseases has declined, particularly during the last century. On the other hand, some natural compounds derived from plants are being investigated for their potential use worldwide.

The Institute of Agriculture (IoA) teamed up with the Department of Anatomy, Faculty of Medicine and Surgery (DA/FMS) to screen Maltese MAPs for potential pharmacological activity. Although it has been estimated that approximately 458 plants have been utilised in traditional medicine, we were particularly interested in the investigation of the most common plants utilised and the most abundantly found on the Maltese Islands.

Primarily, a survey was carried out to assess the relative abundance of the Maltese MAPs and information inputted in a database. The plants

were systematically collected in groups and selected according to their flowering period. Over 350 extracts were obtained from approximately 70 species and these were then tested for their constitution of natural compounds. A primary screening test was carried out on some of the extracts, from which a smaller number was selected to be investigated for their effects on human lymphocytes. Although this is an ongoing project, beneficial outcomes are already perceived. Through this project, MAPs are being organised into a database that will provide ease in data collection and cross-referencing within the database and with other databases. Another aspect is the link of this research project to other projects through data collected during the course of the project. This project will, hopefully lead to the discovery of extracts used in traditional medicine, which might still have value in the modern world. This would be an asset to the Maltese economy and hence will have to be taken forward with industry.