

2005 EARTHWATCH INSTITUTE FIELD REPORT

Project Title: Medicinal Plants of Antiquity

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Research Site: National Library, Rome, Italy

Key Research Objectives:

- Medicinal plants
- Traditional knowledge
- Mediterranean societies
- Ancient history
- Sustainable development

Date this report was completed: December 15 2005

RESEARCH

Data Collection and Results:

Collected data were **a)** inventory of the plants used for therapeutic purposes from early printed books (15th and 16th centuries); **b)** representations of these plants in the works under consideration; **c)** texts reporting the uses of such plants (in Latin and Italian); **d)** names of these plants in Renaissance and contemporary vernacular.

Progress

We have **a)** checked data collected in previous years; **b)** increased the collection of texts; **c)** photographed 6,500+ pages of books not previously included in our collection.

Summary of Results

This year research has made it possible to increase the collection of data so as to cover Renaissance production as exhaustively as possible. All collected data will contribute to the creation of the Renaissance plants website currently under construction.

Significance/Benefits of Research

- Local (in the area of the research site): the research contributes to the preservation of ancient books exposed to gradual deterioration. Not only are the books and their contents inventoried, but also they are reproduced digitally.
- National: the research program will contribute to affirm the role of Rome National Library as a major repository for scientific information and research. On the other

hand, the research will contribute to confirm the role of Italy as a leading country in the study of traditional medicines.

- International: the Web site deriving from the research will be a reference work for the preservation of traditional knowledge on medicinal plants. It will make it possible to re-activate the cultivation and foster the therapeutic applications of plants used in the past. As such, the program will probably contribute to diversify the plant resources and, as a consequence, to avoid over-exploitation of some species. This will lead to protect species threatened with extinction. From an economic viewpoint, diversification of sources for plants and use of local flora should have an impact on the economy of emerging countries: they will be able to rely on their own resources, and not necessarily on expensive drugs imported from industrial countries.

Dissemination of Results

The programme will lead to the construction of a Web site open to the public. A preview of the site was organized on October 3rd, in Rome, at the National Library.