

## BOOK REVIEWS

### A COLLECTION OF TRADITIONAL YORUBA ORAL AND DENTAL MEDICAMENTS (IN YORUBA AND ENGLISH)

By Nestor Oluyimika Hollist

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This 123-page book, perhaps one of the very first of its kind in the world, consists of a compilation of the findings of an ethno-dental field survey. It involves traditional recipes, incorporating various species of Nigerian medicinal plants with oral and dental health implications. The author, a renowned Professor of orthodox dentistry, begins by giving introductory remarks on the paucity of documented information on traditional dental practice as well as the various difficulties encountered in the course of his research work in the field.

In the Introduction to the book, he has re-echoed some of the major criticisms, limitations and shortcomings of traditional healing systems namely: (1) lack of adequate standardization; (2) lack of qualitative and quantitative dosages; (3) lack of reproducibility and repeatability; (4) lack of quality control; (5) lack of proven efficacy and (6) lack of pharmaceutical quality. We do know however that the strict quantitative dosage rules for topical or dental drug applications (orthodox or traditional therapy) are not generally critical unless buccal absorption is intended.

Within the introduction, Professor Hollist gives the challenge to all serious-minded dental researchers: "There is no documented record of any clinical trials on the medicaments used in treating dental problems."

The author divides the text into three main parts. Part I is devoted entirely to toothache (*akokoro* in Yoruba). Part II consists of all the remaining treatment options for other conditions, while the Part III supplies a list of the most common Yoruba chewing sticks, with oral and dental implications.

About 10 different oral and dental conditions have been covered in the book and each of them contains a number of alternative herbal therapies in Yoruba with their English translation and botanical names as follows: *Akokoro* (tooth ache or tooth decay) is presented as Part I of the book while Part II consists of recipes for *kolobo* (black tongue), *efu ahon* (oral thrush), *belubelu* (tonsillitis), *yoro* (gingivitis), *gbofungbofun* (swollen tonsils), *segede* (mumps), *ibe enu* (angular stomatitis), *owo enu* (mouth ulcers) and *jehinjehin* (ulcerative gingivitis). Each recipe includes the method of preparation, method of application or administration, as well as the dosage. From this work, it would appear that toothache, black tongue; tonsillitis and gingivitis are the most common dental and oral diseases in this part of the world, all of which are treatable by our people. There are 113 different traditional

recipes in all, distributed among the various oral and dental manifestations, with 32 recorded for black tongue, 29 for toothache, and 16 each for tonsillitis and gingivitis. The others are of lower frequency and occurrence. The plant components of these recipes cover about 50 different plant families with *Leguminosae* as the most predominant family, followed by *Anacardiaceae*, *Rutaceae* and then *Euphorbiaceae*. Ninety different plant species within the 50 plant families have been incorporated in all the recipes. The most predominant species are *Piper guineense* (*iyere*, appearing in 48 recipes), *Xylopiya aethiopica* (*eeru*, in 34) and Lime juice (*Citrus aurantifolia*, *orombo wewe*) in 33. Up to 48 different plant species are used for the treatment of black tongue alone, 41 for toothache, 35 for tonsillitis and 36 for gingivitis. Tooth decay and black tongue appear to be most susceptible to the effects of *Piper guineense* and *Xylopiya aethiopica*, going by their frequency in the respective recipes, while lime juice appears most common for the traditional management of black tongue. Apart from the plant components of the recipes, as presented in the book, the following materials are identified as non-plant components: trona (*kaun*), table salt, alcohol, gun powder, calcium sulphate, alum and camphor. Dental researchers must study the implications of the use of the following minerals in various dental conditions: (1) trona is a potassium ion salt; (2) ordinary table salt is sodium chloride; (3) calcium sulphate and alum are both calcium salts. The preponderant use of alcohol as the vehicle for traditional oral medicaments as opposed to the normal practice in modern dentistry is noted and may need to be reconciled. Modern dental practice prohibits the use of alcohol in denture repairs as well as in other kinds of dental management. On the other hand, the use of table salt solutions is common to both orthodox and traditional dental practices. Over eighty of the total number of recipes are prescribed as local applications such as mouthwashes, paints and gargles while 70 of them are presented for oral administration at the recommended doses.

Part III gives a brief account of the use of chewing sticks for oral hygiene among the Yoruba people while presenting a list of the twenty-two most commonly used chewing sticks. He gives the botanical and local names, the parts of the plants used as chewing sticks, as well as the plant families in the subsection that follows. The various chewing sticks with their botanical identities are matched with their vernacular names and grouped under specific oral or dental ailments. For example, about 10 different chewing sticks are grouped under toothache and black tongue respectively; 3 are placed under acute ulcerative gingivitis, 4 under mouth ulcers, 4 for oral thrush, and 2 for tonsillitis. In the concluding pages, Professor Hollist has included a glossary of scientific names with the corresponding Yoruba names of the plant species. A comprehensive index at the end of the book facilitates consultation and citation. It is hoped that future editions of this book will address traditional tooth extraction techniques as well as tooth cosmetics.

It is hoped that Ibo and Hausa versions will also receive future attention. However, the first edition before us throws a challenge to African dental scientists to investigate all these traditional claims for the possible use of all mankind. It is a pity that since Sofowora's

report of 1971 on the antimicrobial properties of some common Nigerian chewing sticks, followed by Odusanya's report of their mineral content, African dental scientists in the year 2004 cannot make definite pronouncements on the role of our chewing sticks in modern oral therapy.

This book is an excellent research lead, and a pioneer source of Yoruba ethno-dental information. It is sure to be useful to dental research scientists, particularly in dental research Institutes such as the Regional Centre for Oral Health Research in Jos, schools of dentistry in our universities as well as Dental Teaching Hospitals and indeed to all traditional medicine researchers, promoters of traditional medicine, literate traditional medical practitioners, basic biomedical, biochemical and biological scientists, natural product chemists, traditional dental clinics, herbal research centres, specialists in oral manifestations of HIV/AIDS, various NGO's in Care and Support for People Living With HIV/AIDS, university libraries and finally, to all those who may wish to broaden their knowledge.

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### **THE JACARANDA CHILDREN**

**Margaret Mamaki**

**Harmattan Press 2004. 196 pp.**

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Any profit or donations will be given to the charity "Hope for the Village Child" that helps mothers and children in some remote villages in Northern Nigeria.

In London of the 1950's a Nigerian medical student, Eli Mamaki, meets an English girl, Margaret Nunn. Their love overcame cross-cultural obstacles, and in 1960 man and wife docked in Lagos to make the journey to Kaduna on government medical assignment.

Their give and take adaptability ensured a durable marriage and they gave their three children the best of two cultures.

Eli's venture into private practice assured not only the delivery of quality health care, but also enabled him to accommodate charity cases and provide reasonable amenities for his immediate and extended family.

Margaret at first was caught up in the swing of "expat" social life, but as time went on local

culture caught and eventually monopolised her interest. All this began with a pottery industry which she founded on a piece of land outside Kaduna which she named "Jacaranda" after the acronyms of her children: Joe, Caroline, Andy. One day the firing of pots was jeopardised by the absence of a key local employee. She thereby discovered how his village lacked basic health requisites, such as pure water. Before long her primary occupation turned into providing the infrastructure of basic health care for villages all around, draining all her willing husband could spare in medicine and personnel.

Yet the heat of Northern politics was beginning to vent itself on the streets of Kaduna under the cloak of religious disparity. A riot in 1992 saw the Mamakis besieged in their Kaduna home, while people were being killed outside their gate. Yet they stayed on.

The 2000 riot was worse. Their house was burned and they had to flee for their lives. After their military escort left them outside town, they ran into a roadblock of angry wild-looking youths. The car behind them was in flames, and it seemed the end for them, until one of the group spotted Margaret and shouted, "Mummy, mummy, are you travelling?" — The previous week Margaret had saved the life of his child.

Eli and Margaret have now settled in England.

The story is powerfully presented. I could not put it down, and finished it in one sitting.

— Joseph Kenny, O.P.  
Dominican Institute, Ibadan

