



Preface

Traditional herbal medicines that have been used for centuries in the eastern parts of the world represent a real challenge to the analytical chemist. No matter whether these medicines consist of single herbs or collections of herbs in composite formulae, they always represent complex mixtures of naturally occurring compounds (metabolites) the assay of which almost routinely requires a separation step. Another aspect is that in most countries of the western world these traditional medicines are not officially recognized [1]. Consequently, most of the research in this area has been done in the countries of other parts of world and quite a few papers on the subject (inclusive the applied separation methods) have been published typically in Chinese, Japanese, etc. journals, which means that there is a considerable language barrier for a European or American reader.

The current Volume is a modest attempt to overcome this gap; the present collection of reviews and original papers may in a way be considered as a continuation of the successful special issue of the *Journal of Chromatography A* edited by Verpoorte and Raggi [2]. While the latter issue emphasized particularly the different chemical entities involved, in the present Volume the potential reader will (hopefully) find a more complex picture. In this context, we attempted to classify the individual reviews according to the pharmacological effects of the plant metabolites of concern. This is, however, extremely difficult as most of the natural herbal medicines

cover usually many pharmacological aspects. Also, of course, we were forced (because of the nature of the field) to make some marginal excursions into the field of, for example, toxic plant metabolites, which, we believe, complements our understanding of physiologically active plant components.

Let me say at the end of the Preface what I have said many times over the years in different volumes and books we had the pleasure to publish: Nobody is perfect. We would really appreciate any critical comments from our readers.

References

- [1] WHO, General Guidelines for Methodologies on Research and Evaluation of Traditional Medicines, 2000.
- [2] R. Verpoorte, M.A. Raggi (Eds.), Chromatographic and Electrophoretic Analysis of Secondary Metabolites in Plants, *J. Chromatogr. A* 967 (1) (2002) 1.

Z. Deyl
Academy of Science of the Czech Republic
Institute of Physiology, Videnska 1083
Prague 14220, Czech Republic
Tel.: +420 2 41062558; fax: +420 2 41062558

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