

The Energetics of Western Herbs

A Materia Medica
Integrating Western
and Chinese Herbal
Therapeutics



PETER HOLMES

Revised & Enlarged
Fourth Edition Vol. 1 & 2

This classic book, now extensively revised and updated, provides a creative revisioning of western herbalism. Clear, concise and comprehensive, it elegantly defines an integrated energetic model with specific indications for the therapeutic use of western herbs. An exceptional and immensely useful text.

Chanchal Cabrera, M.N.I.M.H., A.H.G., President, Gaia Garden Herbal Apothecary, Vancouver

The Energetics of Western Herbs is an excellent resource for the practitioner. Peter Holmes' unique and masterful blending of Western physiological and Eastern diagnostic principles adds depth and clarity to the art of herbal formulation. This revised edition incorporates the most recent research in plant medicine. This brilliant two-volume set is a must for any herbalist.

Linda Costarella, N.D., co-author of *Herbs for Women's Health*

This is a text that deserves respect. As an account, even encyclopaedia, of traditional uses, these monographs and their introductions are probably the most complete and integrated anywhere ... This is an impressive opus: I believe Holmes succeeds very well on his own terms, and many practitioners will be grateful to him for illuminating their therapeutic deliberations.

Simon Mills, M.N.I.M.H., author of *Out of the Earth: The Essential Book of Herbal Medicine*

In this important volume, Peter Holmes has accepted [a] challenge, gone to the libraries and shown that there is a rich herbal tradition in the west that was discarded by the enthusiasm and ideology of the scientific revolution. Peter Holmes has creatively engaged the best of the buried western herbal tradition in a dialogue with the rich tradition of the east. *The Energetics of Western Herbs* is an important discussion that can only enhance the creativity, depth, intelligence and clinical skills of all herbalists both in the east and in the west.

Ted Kaptchuk, O.M.D., author of *Chinese Medicine: The Web That Has No Weaver*

Every user and lover of Western herbs can gain tremendous insight into the nature and "energetics" of herbs with careful study of Peter Holmes' ground-breaking book, *The Energetics of Western Herbs*. This book has become the *de facto* standard reference work for everyone interested in the integration of Western and Chinese herbal medicine. This is absolutely where the excitement is today!

Christopher Hobbs, L.Ac., A.G.H., author of *Handbook for Herbal Healing*

The largest and most important study of materia medica in the Western world. It should be on every herbalist's bookshelf.

Brenda Cooke, M.N.I.M.H., Editor, *Greenfiles*

Here is perhaps the first attempt in a millenium or more to classify Western herbs in terms of their "energetics." Holmes views Western herbs through the eyes of a practitioner of Chinese medicine. *The Energetics of Western Herbs* is borne of the author's lifetime pursuit of thinking of Western herbs in oriental terms. It is an impressive, massive undertaking ... This is an impact herb book, one that will be talked about reverently and irreverently for a long time.

Steven Foster, author of *Herbal Emissaries: Bringing Chinese Herbs to the West*

It is the original work that is sorely needed in the Western herbal tradition, and perhaps we didn't know how much we missed it until it arrived ... I hope it becomes a landmark, an historical breakthrough, on the way to an authentic modern herbal medical system. Peter Holmes' work is not merely one of refined scholarship. It is also full of insight and practical application.

Stephen Fulder, PhD., author of *The Tao of Medicine*

The Energetics of Western Herbs goes back to the roots of both Eastern and Western traditions of herbal medicine and integrates them into a new and original work. This is an attempt to provide continuity between the ancient systems and present-day practices, and classifies Western herbs according to a system that applies equally to all traditions. It is far and away the best study of Western herbal medicine, indeed the only one of its kind. It is a creative and original work which has gone right back to fundamentals, and could provide the key to the future understanding and application of herbal medicine.

Brenda Cooke, Council Member, National Institute of Medical Herbalists, England

There is no question in my mind that this book will become the classic reference work on Western energetics by which other herbal scholars and practitioners will measure their research.

Jake Fratkin, O.M.D., author of *Chinese Herbal Patent Formulas*

Peter Holmes has given us an audacious new work that is global in perspective. In this text he opens a new frontier for our exploration by revitalizing the traditions of the western world's herbal healing art. By means of his research we are introduced to the saga of the largely forgotten progenitors of the herbal traditions in Europe and the Near East. Through the practical eye of his clinical experience as an eclectic herbalist emerges the possibility for a unified theory of herbal healing. As you move with Peter through this text, you will not only be offered a new integrated methodology for using herbs, but you will also have the enjoyment of joining in his quest to recover the past, be delighted by the stories he has to tell, and be enlightened by the insightful commentaries he has carefully crafted for us.

Randall Barolet, O.M.D., co-author of *Chinese Herbal Medicine: Formulas and Strategies*

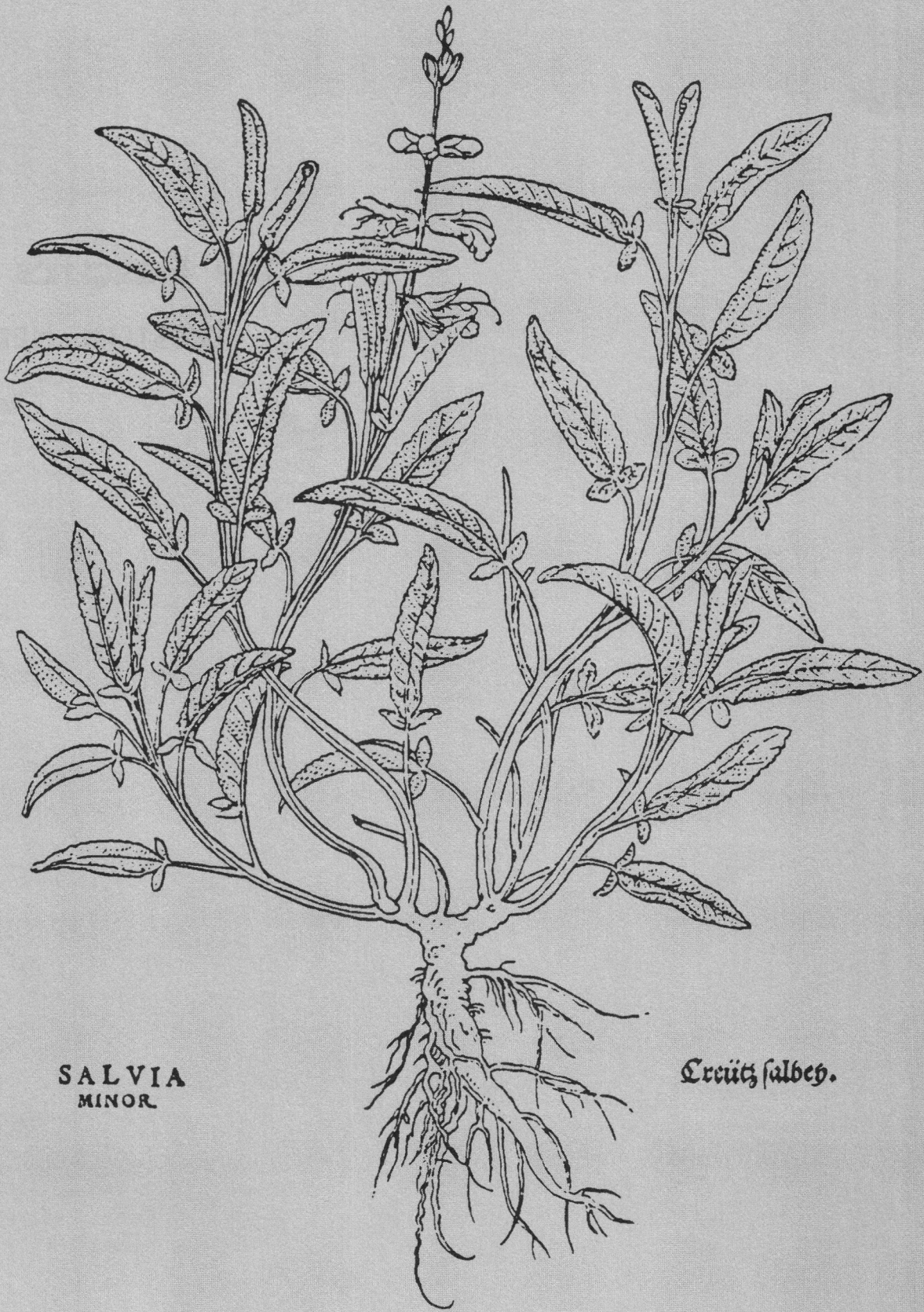
As a practitioner of Chinese medicine I find this text to be the most exciting and useful reference in my library. It not only allows me the option of choosing environmentally related herbs for my patients but assists me in maintaining the status and integrity of the medicine I've come to know.

Douglas Vickerd, licensed acupuncturist, Victoria, B.C.

Many a satisfying winter evening awaits the herbalist who owns a copy of *The Energetics of Western Herbs* by Peter Holmes. These volumes throb with the pulse of life, sing with the laughter of Artemis (to whom they are dedicated), and twinkle with the truth of the wise woman way. By looking holographically, Peter has seen into the inner forms of illness and plant medicines, and shows us clearly—and with much love—the patterns of connection. Packed with information which is easily accessed, *The Energetics of Western Herbs*—like Artemis herself—will be a lifelong friend to the student and practitioner of herbal medicine.

Susun Weed, author of *Healing Wise*

**The ENERGETICS OF
WESTERN HERBS**



SALVIA
MINOR.

Creutz's sage.

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Herbal Therapeutics*

PETER HOLMES

Revised & Enlarged Fourth Edition

Snow Lotus Press ➤ Cotati

Important Notice

The information contained in this book is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to diagnose, treat or prescribe, and does not purport to replace the services of a duly trained physician or practitioner. The information presented herein is correct and accurate to the author's knowledge up to the time of printing. As herbal medicine (like everything else) is in constant development, however, it is possible that new information may cause future modifications to become necessary.

The only Chinese medical terms that have been retained in their original form is the word Qi, pronounced chee and meaning breath(s) or vital force(s), and the terms Yin and Yang.

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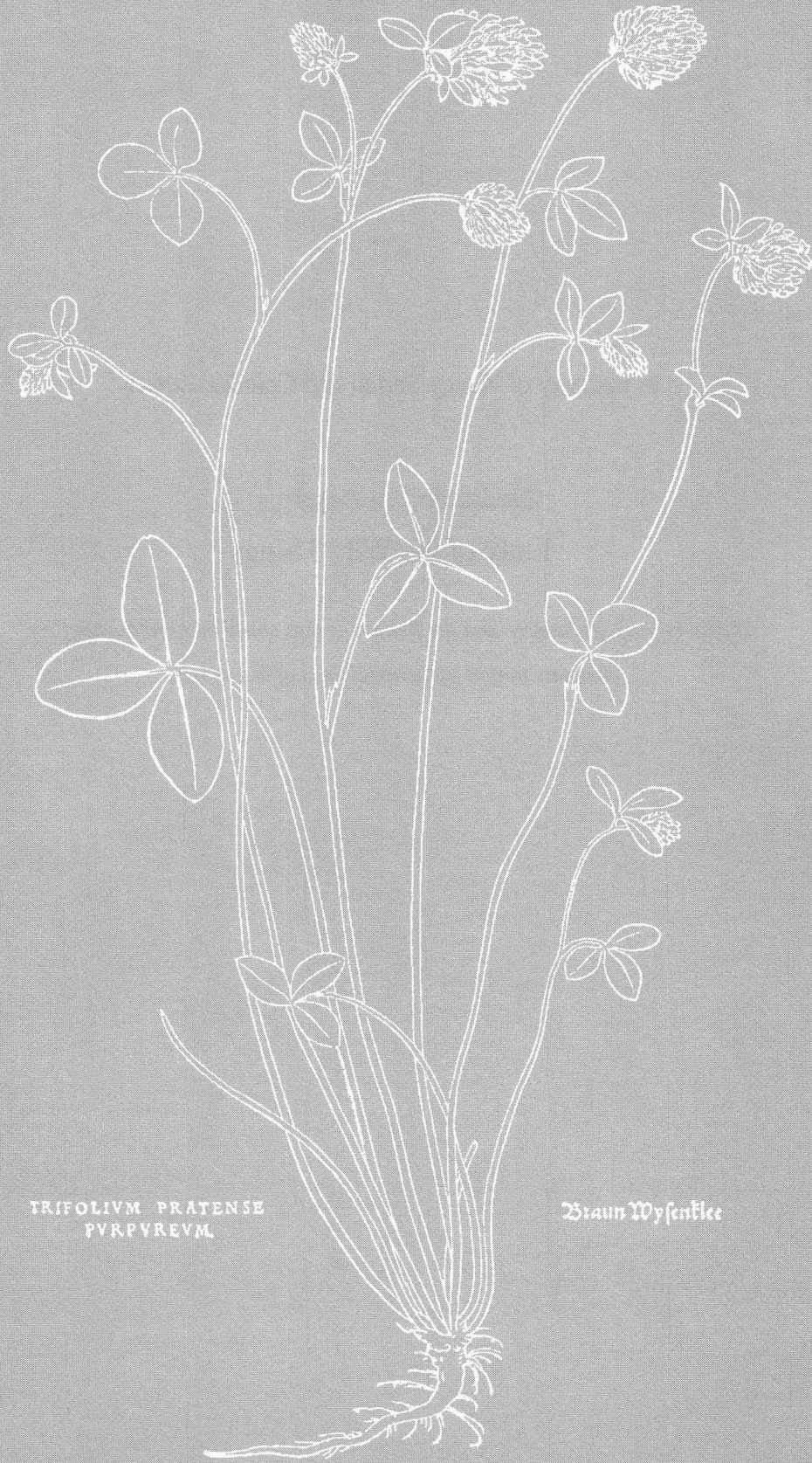
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In memory of Nancy Salian and Claudia Czasch

Dedicated to Artemis,
Lady of the Wild Things

As provider of the juniper and the hellebore that could be used for healing,

Artemis taught of the medicines of the woods



TRIFOLIUM PRATENSE
PURPUREUM

Braun Wylentlee

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Acknowledgements

For this New Edition

This fourth enlarged edition is the result of the most extensive overhaul since the book first came out. Michael Thompson, RSHom., FSHom., was one of the first practitioners to share his text queries and suggestions with me. I am greatly indebted to him for prodding me, several years ago already, in the direction of a complete emendation of this text based on my accumulated experience and research of the intervening years.

In the preparation of this revised text, a substantial part was played by three medical herbalists, Sarah Murray M.N.I.M.H., Andrew Murray M.N.I.M.H. and Daniela Turley, M.N.I.M.H. To them I owe an inestimable debt for taking a fresh look at this whole work and making critical suggestions on many aspects. It is the gift of their generous time that resulted in many of the important changes to this new edition. I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to Sarah Murray in particular, for spending countless hours discussing issues with me and relentlessly checking information for accuracy, not to mention editing and proof-reading the text as she went along. She became for me “the woman who stops at nothing,” for which commitment I am deeply grateful.

The specific changes and improvements to this edition include:

- The addition of over 14 new herbs that have gradually been incorporated into the Western herbal mainstream, including Eleuthero root, Rhodiola root and—in tandem with the advance of Chinese herbal medicine—several important Chinese herbs such as Shisandra berry, White peony root, Dong Quai root, Asian Buplever root, Rehmannia root and others. All of these were already incorporated into my 1997 textbook, *Jade Remedies*, but the last few years have seen a critical mass now make these actual Western herbs.
 - The addition of more specific information for the tincture preparations, namely the tincture strength (usually 3:1 or 2:1) and the ethanol content (between 25-90%). All dosages, strengths and percentages have been completely overhauled in light of
- current knowledge and clinical practice. This inclusion will make this new edition a more complete and practical textbook for both the student and practicing herbalist.
- The largely rewritten introductions to each herb class, reflecting current knowledge and including much new clinically useful material, such as the Treatment Considerations sections. The class introductions have also been reformatted into a more user-friendly text designed to make the information more quickly accessible (even in a busy practice!).
 - The complete reorganization of the Class 11 Qi regulating herbs. A category of *general relaxants* was created, divided into *restorative relaxants* that regulate the Qi and lift the mind; and *sedative relaxant* that regulate the Qi and calm the mind.
 - The creation of an important new category of *restorative* herbs, those that tonify Qi, blood and Essence, the neuroendocrine remedies with *adaptogenic* qualities. These include many of the above Chinese herbs just mentioned.
 - The extensive overhaul in the energetic terminology used to describe the remedy functions. My aim has been to simplify, clarify and refine all at the same time. Much was learnt through the preparation of my textbook, the *T.C.M. Materia Medica Clinical Reference* in the years since the last third edition appeared. For instance:
 - The herbs that promote sweating are now divided into those that “warm the exterior” and those that “cool the exterior.” This is in harmony with the Chinese medical expression “release the exterior,” yet a refinement of that concept as well.
 - Similarly, the *expectorants* that expel phlegm are now divided into those that “warm the lungs” and those that “cool the lungs.”
 - Likewise, the Class 8 subcategories are now expressed as “warming the interior to dispel cold,” “warming the exterior to dispel wind-damp-cold,” “warming the stomach,” and so on.
 - The Class 9 *nutritives* that nourish the blood are now divided into those that “nourish blood and essence” and those that “nourish the liver.”
 - The Class 11 *relaxants* now “regulate the Qi and relax constraint,” a concept again both closer to the

Chinese idiom and inclusive of the more Western concept of relaxation as a treatment strategy for tense or constrained conditions.

- The shunting of two herbs into more appropriate categories: Sage herb into the “tonify Qi, Blood and Essence” category and Mugwort herb into the “promote menstruation” category.
- The correction of minor errors or misplaced emphases as regards the physiological actions and indications of a few herbs.

As many a writer before me has stated, the final responsibility for errors of any kind still lie squarely on my shoulders. Herbal medicine itself is a body of wisdom and skill very much in the nature of a work in progress. This is especially true today, for instance, in relation to our understanding of women’s hormones and the herbs that influence them. We can only strive to be as accurate as possible in the context of our ever-limited knowledge, using a methodology as closely adapted to the reality of health and sickness as we know possible, the phenomenology of vitalistic medicine itself.

Outside of that is the realm of mystery, which too, one day, will become clearer, only to reveal more mystery.

The Acknowledgements of the Original Edition

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Also my teachers and mentors in Western herbal medicine, through the living word: Christopher Hedley, Henri Verdier, Michael Moore; and through the written: Simon Mills, Maud Grieve, Jean Valnet, Charles Lichtenthäler, Werner C. Simonis, Olivier Dezeimeris, Bernhard Aschner, Hans Funke, Finley Ellingwood, Edward Shook,

John Quincy, John Floyer, Wilhelm Pelikan. Not to forget numerous medical and herbal writers from the more distant past, in the Greek, Chinese and Ayurvedic medical traditions—some of them illustrious, a few of them divine and many of them unknown.

My deep gratitude extends to those who helped me understand the dynamics of health and sickness—in particular Cecile Levin and Claudia Lee-Czasch. I am forever grateful for having experienced Claudia’s wisdom beyond her years and inspiration beyond her ken in both the theoretical and practical aspects of the healing process.

The book itself came into being with contributions of various kinds from a number of people. I am grateful to many, too numerous to mention all, in the Chinese acupuncture and Western herbal medicine community in London, San Diego and Santa Fe: their hearts and spirits were open and inspirational.

I owe especial thanks to those individuals who were instrumental in helping me produce this text:

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And last but not least, my mother, for her positive support of this project from the very outset.

Rediscovering our Traditional Greek Medicine Roots

There is a plethora of books available today on herbs. They cover uses, constituents, botany, history and so on. At first sight this appears to be as full a literature as at any time since the seventeenth century. However, a closer look shows that almost all of this literature is derivative, based on a few well known books that have been published over the last few years. Unfortunately these main sources are also not themselves original works of major importance. They too are haphazard collections of early literature and some practical experience. They do not bear the ancient herbal tradition intact across a century of herbal amnesia. Nor can they attempt the synthesis of traditions that is necessary and possible today. One cannot integrate fragments. Yet this integration is urgently required.

Partly for historical reasons, modern herbalism is not a full and coherent medical system. It is more a patchwork of ill-defined and semi-systematic therapeutic guidelines. The herbal lineage has zig-zagged its way from Greece to Arabia, to Europe, to America and back to Europe again, picking up and losing things on the way, and arriving in the 20th century as an eclectic mixture of Galenic flotsam, folk medicine, early Victorian therapeutic classifications and language, and a little chemistry and pharmacology. This does not denigrate its value, which is unquestionable. But instead of taking its place as the exemplary and primary complementary medical system, alongside conventional medicine, as in India, it is still struggling to find its roots. True and complete herbal medical systems do exist and have existed. Both Chinese and Ayurvedic medicine represent vast bodies of knowledge, with a philosophical basis sublime and deep as the oceans, with well constructed classifications, systems of diagnosis and treatment, ration-

al and universal principles for the cure of mind, body and spirit, and with astonishing and potent therapeutic discoveries. It is not only on the other side of the globe that we need to look for herbal erudition. In the Western tradition there is also a systematic body of knowledge, originally from the Greeks. It has undergone testing, development and refinement since Galen, and also much interruption, distortion and obscuration. These are our building blocks. We haven't understood them properly.

Recognising this, Peter Holmes has begun the work towards the reconstruction of the living herbal medical tradition. This can only be done by a painstaking restoration of the original picture, followed by a creative matching of herbal medical systems of East and West. This was the task he set himself, and this book is his offering. It is the original work that is sorely needed in the Western herbal tradition, and perhaps we didn't know how much we missed it until it arrived.

Like the herbal masters to whom Holmes pays respect, his work is not merely one of refined scholarship. It is also full of insight and practical application. He identifies the therapeutic properties of herbs as much by their taste and their clinical use as by the evidence from sources. The result is a fundamental classification that is a foundation upon which can be built a much more solid and self-consistent structure of theory and practice. It is a very important text, and I hope it becomes a landmark, an historical breakthrough, on the way to an authentic modern herbal medical system.

Stephen Fulder, M.A., Ph.D.
Oxford, England
November 1988

Foreword: An Historical Overview

The breakthroughs into new frontiers of knowledge that marked the west's scientific revolution reshaped our consciousness of what illness and health mean. Vesalius' anatomical studies (1543 A.D.) and Harvey's discovery of circulation (1628 A.D.) forever overthrew older notions of what is verifiable information and how to proceed to uncover new truth.

While such new theoretical knowledge continued to develop, little useful clinical therapeutics was discovered for centuries. Vesalius and Harvey never abandoned their herbal repertoire because of the new science, but the later generations of university trained doctors began to feel uncomfortable using the herbal knowledge of the prescientific Greco-Muslim traditions. The university trained elites felt that traditional herbalism was "tainted" by association with "archaic" ideas. The revolution in science began to zealously attack any "contamination" of the old order. An era of therapeutic chaos resulted which completely abandoned the old herbalism. Educated elite doctors infused with science would not be soiled with the past; herbalism was purged from the august halls of scientific universities. This nihilism reached its peak with the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' madness of bleeding (raised to a new fervor by Harvey's discoveries) and calomel poisoning (inspired by the technology of the times). Traditional western herbalism was exiled from the universities into the folk practices of uneducated practitioners.

The richness of the tradition was buried in rare book collections out of harm's way in inaccessible European libraries.

China never experienced a scientific revolution. Although its political revolutions have brought modernity and the scientific revolution itself to China, the older "archaic" therapeutics, for various reasons, still has a claim on its health care and its soul. The traditional medicine of China has been an inspiration to many of us in the west looking for an effective and rational way to be sophisticated herbalists. The Oriental herbal tradition has challenged many of us to ask Joseph Needham's question in reverse: "How is it that herbalism has become such an elegant and powerful tradition in the east and not in the west?" Peter Holmes in these important volumes has accepted this challenge, gone to the libraries and shown that there is a rich herbal tradition in the west that was discarded by the enthusiasm and ideology of the scientific revolution. Peter Holmes has creatively engaged the best of the buried western herbal tradition in a dialogue with the rich tradition of the east. *The Energetics of Western Herbs* is an important discussion that can only enhance the creativity, depth, intelligence and clinical skills of all herbalists both in the east and in the west.

Ted Kaptchuk, O.M.D.
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May 1989

Foreword: The Value of Integration

Peter Holmes' work, *The Energetics of Western Herbs*, serves as a strong and thorough foundation for an integrated system of energetic herbal healing. It offers us a synthesis of Galenic and Chinese herbal concepts, and establishes a classification scheme which, although possessing slight distinctions from that used in Chinese herbal healing, is essentially the same.

Peter Holmes has achieved something of significance. He has not acted merely as a scholarly intellectual or historian, though his work may certainly be appreciated at that level. Rather, he has moved on a path through the literature of the western herbal tradition using the scholarly mind as a vehicle, but ever watchful with the eye of a sensitive artist, in order to bring to us the product of his creative imagination. His journey has been a path of integration within and without. In reading his work, I feel both the focus of the dedicated scholar and the spark of the committed visionary. The careful literary archaeology and analytical thinking is admirable from the scholarly perspective; however, it is not used here as an end in itself, but rather as a means for the creative realization of an expanded and revitalized herbal healing system.

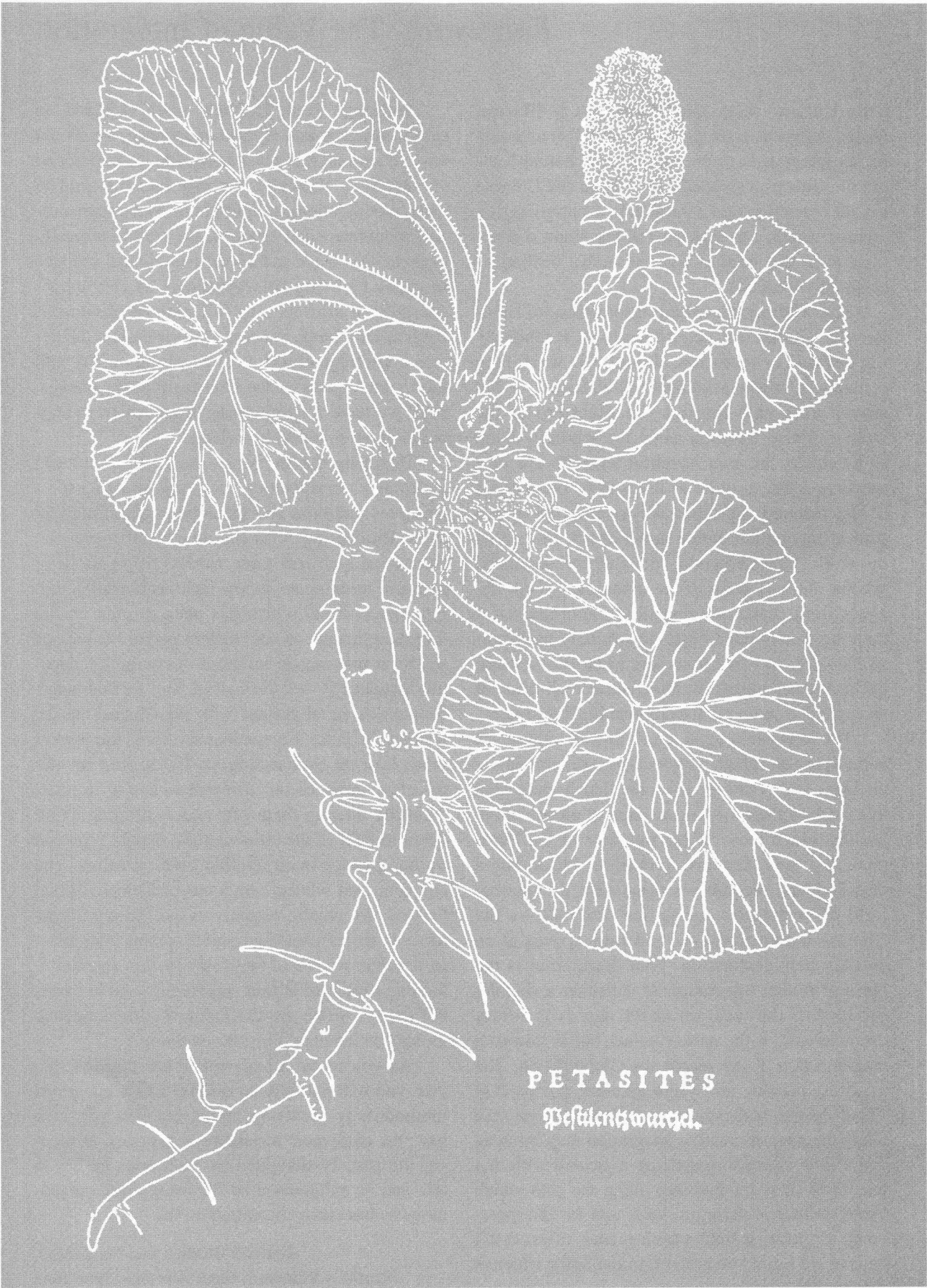
The foundation upon which this all takes place is the spirit of the quest: searching—discovering—testing—and creating. It seems that he has used this work to share with us a vision of global herbal healing which recovers the treasures of the European and Near Eastern herbalists and medical philosophers, recombines these with the guiding light of systematic energetics provided by the Chinese herbal tradition, and thus arrives at an entirely new destination. That destination is the place of further integration. It is neither a singular product of the western mind, nor is it solely characteristic of the eastern mind, but is instead a manifestation of the search for Global Mind. The mystics, monks, and yoga masters tell us that "Truth is one, paths are many." Each step we take along the path of creative integration may bring us just a little closer to practicing in accord with that one Truth. It is for that step along the path which Peter Holmes is daring to take, and for the increment of global insight which it may offer, that I believe we should be grateful to the Spirit which is moving him.

Although Peter Holmes' work is based on careful research and clinical experience, we do not have to assume that his classifications are definitive and final. Naturally, we may feel the need to make modifications in light of our own experience. As practitioners and scholars, we need to critically evaluate this work and apply it in clinical practice in order to bring this synthesis of two major energetic traditions into full play in the world. Until Peter's book, we lacked a systematic theoretical knowledge of how to align western herbs with their counterparts in the Chinese materia medica. Now we have a firm footing from which to start building our practical knowledge.

Honoring the ancestors, the Chinese cultural gaze rarely stops looking backward. In doing so, it preserves traditions and its feeling of continuity in time. Pioneering with the analytical mind, the European cultural gaze rarely stops looking forward. In doing so, it sees itself as blazing a trail into space. Peter's task has been to pick up the forgotten threads of our western herbal healing art so that it may regain its sense of continuity, become historically self-reflective, and in that sense become an equal partner with the Chinese herbal healing art. Peter is a creative and synthetic thinker who, like an archaeologist, is digging up the priceless relics of our discarded healing lineage, carefully dusting them off, and examining every detail in light of the cross-cultural insight provided by comparison with another rich tradition—the energetic and vitalistic tradition of Chinese herbal healing. By paying respects to the healing ancestors, the modern healing mind is reconnecting itself to another source of wisdom. In this manner—looking backward in time, moving forward in space, but always in the present moment—the collective global healing consciousness evolves.

As you move along with Peter through this text, you will not only be offered a new integrated methodology for using herbs, but you will also have the enjoyment of joining in his quest to recover the past, be delighted by the stories he has to tell, and be enlightened by the insightful commentaries he has carefully crafted for us.

Randall Barolet, Lic. Ac., O.M.D.
Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, June 1989



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