

Bohemian Villages and Cow's Paws: My Search for Bomhenia

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Abstract: The author details his literature search for information about *Bomhenia*, a cancer remedy referred to by A. H. Grimmer. Unable to find any information about the remedy under that name, a creative rephrasing of the name finally led him to discover *Bauhinia forficata*, Brazilian Orchid tree, which must have been the remedy Grimmer was referring to. Information about the medical utility of botanical *Bauhinia forficata* in cancers, diabetes, and other ailments follows, with a final appraisal that this remedy would be well worth proving.

Keywords: Bomhenia, *Bauhinia forficata*, Arthur Hill Grimmer, cancer remedy

I stumbled across the remedy *Bomhenia* while reviewing cancer remedies for an ongoing project of mine. It was Arthur Hill Grimmer who introduced *Bomhenia* into homeopathic practice in 1956 by publishing his impression of it in a short article (1,2), describing it as an effective cancer remedy. He had taken notice of the botanical while conducting experiments to determine its potential use as a medicine using a method of vibratory analysis of its electromagnetic polarity. This method compares the vibratory patterns of diseases with those of drugs, and derives conclusions of a drug's putative clinical application based on the results.(3,2)

Grimmer described *Bomhenia* as a "new and valuable remedy especially efficient in the uterine hemorrhages at or around the time of the climacteric. The hemorrhage is dark red with few if any clots, with or without pain, and at times profuse and alarming. There is a marked tendency to ulceration and malignancy of the cervix, a condition in which a number of patients suffering from it have with this medicine been cured." Grimmer referred to cures achieved with potencies ranging from the lower to the CM. According to Grimmer, *Bomhenia* showed indications that it "corresponds to the acute destructive effect of chronic malignant disease" and called for a Hahnemannian proving,

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reminding us that "too few of even our well-proven remedies have such properties."(1,2)

I was intrigued by the potential application of this medicine in cancer; however, I had no other information than its name and its description by Grimmer: "This wonderful remedy is prepared from the beautiful flowering tree, *Bomhenia*, whose numerous blossoms resemble the delicacy of the orchid, but unlike the orchid, it is not parasitic. This tree is a native of Brazil, but grows in Florida."

Grimmer had a fresh portion of the leaves, twigs, and flowers of the tree sent to Ehrhart & Karl in Chicago to prepare his remedies.(1,2)

The drug is neither listed in Boericke nor in Clarke, nor in any other homeopathic materia medica that I poured through. I searched the Homeopathic Pharmacopeia of the United States, the British Homeopathic Pharmacopeia, the Homeopathic Pharmacopeia of India, and the German Homeopathic Pharmacopeia, and *Bomhenia* was not listed in any of these. I searched

through a variety of homeopathic databases, such as Jeremy Sherr's proving website, which invites practitioners to submit their provings. I checked in my older version and then a friend's newer version of *MacRepertory* and *ReferenceWorks*, and looked on the web in *Synthesis*, *Radar*, and *Encyclopedia Homeopathica* for a proving, a description, or at

least a listing or even a mention of *Bomhenia* and, still, found nothing. The only thing I found was Ahmed Currims's additions to the Kent repertory based on Grimmer's notes.(4)

I searched several search engines on the web, and the only information I could find was a scanty reference to remedies by that name offered for sale from a few pharmacies in various potencies. I found one reference to *Bomhenia* by an American supplier. When I called their office, nobody could tell me the species from which the source substance or mother tincture originate. I spoke to the pharmacist and was told that they make this remedy with a radionics machine. Two other suppliers located in Europe had a listing for *Bomhenia*, available only by request. Nevertheless, my attempts to find the source material for the drug proved unsuccessful. I was also unable to find any published record of cases or clinical notations referring to this remedy other than Grimmer's report. Apparently, in the sixty years since Grimmer sang its praises no proving of *Bomhenia* has been conducted.

My next task was to search for the medicinal plant name. To my consternation I could not find the plant on any medicinal plant database, or for that matter, on any ornamental plant database. I searched in other languages, including in Portuguese (since the plant supposedly originated in Brazil), but to no avail. There was simply no further information. This was highly unusual. After repeated web searches my search engines now kept suggesting I conduct an alternate search for the word "Bohemia." I had to laugh. In German there is a colloquial expression that is used for something extremely strange and incomprehensible: "ein Böhmisches Dorf" (a Bohemian village). I had exhausted my search. *Bomhenia* did not exist. *Bomhenia* turned out to be a Bohemian village, quite literally.

However, I refused to quit. There had to be a plant by some name that matched Grimmer's remedy. I played with variations of the name, looking for ornamental trees originating in Brazil, with a flower resembling an orchid. I tried Bumhenia, Bamhenia, Bomhinia, Bumhinia, and Bamhinia. Nothing. It took a number of modifications of the name before I had results. When I finally entered the term "Bauhinia" and "orchid-tree," I came upon a tropical tree called *Bauhinia purpurea*, a member of the family of Leguminosae/Fabaceae/Caesalpinjiaceae, complete with pictures, and also known as the Purple orchid-tree. *Bauhinia* and *Bomhenia* are sufficiently similar; it seemed I had found the proper name for the tree I was looking for, or, at least, the name of the family. I learned

that the genus of bauhinias comprises over two hundred species worldwide. There are bauhinias in China, Australia, South Africa and, I was happy to find out, in South America. A very few are cultivated in North America. To identify Grimmer's *Bomhenia* species – the one he had Ehrhart & Karl of Chicago prepare his remedies from – would yet take more detective work.

One article on ornamental landscape trees in Florida mentioned a *Bauhinia blakeana*. This tree is also called the Hong-Kong orchid-tree and is a hybrid of *B. purpurea* and *B. variegata*. The document on *Bauhinia purpurea* came from the Florida Department of Agriculture, and had no exact information as to this tree's origin. It only said "not native to US." I learned this species is a native of India and China. *B. blakeana* has been more commonly used in Florida landscaping because it grows faster and is more drought-resistant. The Hong-Kong Orchid-tree is also the emblem of Hong-Kong and depicted in its regional flag. *Bauhinia variegata*, also called "Buddhist flower," is cold tolerant and is also potted and trimmed for Bonsai culture. It has been cultivated in Central and South Florida, but it is not native to Brazil. This eliminated it as a candidate for Grimmer's *Bomhenia*.

Using the keywords "*Bauhinia*," "Florida," and "Brazilian," I found an article from the University of Florida Extension office on a tree called *Bauhinia forficata*, also called the Brazilian Orchid-tree.(5) This was promising. Searching *Bauhinia forficata* yielded a website mentioning that this Brazilian *Bauhinia* had been reportedly cultivated in the regions near Homestead, Florida and Houston, Texas. After a thorough search I determined that this was the only Brazilian *Bauhinia* or Orchid-tree traditionally cultivated in Florida, and that it is likely the species Grimmer used. One of my students who lives in Florida recently informed me she had found it offered for sale as an ornamental tree at a local lawn and garden store near Homestead.

"One of the hardiest of the bauhinias, Brazilian Orchid-Tree is a deciduous semi-evergreen reaching 25 to 30 feet in height with interesting twisted ascending branches which droop at the ends, an often-leaning trunk, and large, bilobed, dark green leaves. The beautiful, white, three to four-inch-wide, orchid-like blooms appear in abundance from spring through summer and are followed by flat, dark brown seed pods. Brazilian Orchid-Tree makes a spectacular vase-shaped specimen, shade, or patio tree, or fits well into a mixed shrubbery border."(6)

Bauhinia forficata is commonly known in Bra-

zil as "pata-de-vaca" (cow's paw) or "unhas-de-vaca" (cow's hoof), so named after its hoof-shaped bilobed leaves. Its natural habitat is the edge of the rainforests. Phytochemical research shows it contains alkaloids, tannins, mucilage, essential oils, cyanogenetic heteroglycerides, anthocyanins, saponins, catechols, and fixed volatile acids.(7,8) In folk medicine, the plant is widely used to treat diabetes, and has remarkable anti-diabetic properties.(9) In Brazil, it is one of the most frequently used herbal remedies for this disease, a use which is confirmed by many studies.(10-14) One Brazilian study has shown that a decoction of the leaves of the plant administered to streptozotocin-diabetic rats for a month lowered the serum and urinary glucose levels substantially.(13) The species has also been used to treat snakebites, and one study shows it is an anticoagulant, par excellence, capable of antidoting the thrombotic effects of the venom of Bothrops and other snakes.(15,16) This would seem to confirm its homeopathic use in uterine hemorrhages and bleeding malignancies.

The Orchid-tree family is commonly used for a wide variety of diseases. Anti-inflammatory, analgesic, antipyretic and antihistaminic actions have all been verified.(17) The plants have been employed as folk cancer treatments by many cultures and in many parts of the world, since long before homeopathy was born. A considerable number of bauhinias have been studied for anti-cancer and anti-tumor potential, and many studies found substantial anti-cancer properties, with both protective and restorative effects on multiple levels.(18-24) This is especially true for *Bauhinia purpurea*, from which several anti-neoplastic agents have been isolated.(19) Bauhiniastatins, for example, were found to exhibit significant growth inhibition against a mini-panel of human cancer cell lines.(20) Flavonol glycosides from some species of *Bauhinia* showed higher antioxidant activity when compared to vitamin C.(24)

"Pata-de-vaca in Brazil has a reputation of having anti-cancer properties, and it is used this way," according to a resident of Rio de Janeiro. It has been investigated for anti-cancer properties and several studies have confirmed this reputation.(25,26) These studies found that the drug prevented cell proliferation and caused apoptosis in the diseased cells. One study confirmed such an effect in leukemia and indicated that *Bauhinia forficata* has anti-leukemic action.(27) These findings would seem to corroborate Grimmer's impression that there is a homeopathic affinity of the plant with cancer.

My search had ended. What seemed at first glance a wild goose chase was rewarded with

a wealth of information on a group of trees that should play a significant role in homeopathic cancer treatment in the future. These remarkable trees, found around the world, should someday become a welcome addition to our cancer, as well as general, materia medica. *Bauhinia forficata*, along with every one of its cousins, does indeed deserve a thorough Hahnemannian proving.

Notes

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