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Ethnopharmacological Note

A note on “*hippuris*”, “*ephedron*” or “*anabasis*” of Pliny the Elder: a long forgotten plant used by ancient Greek runners

Christophe Wiart

School of Pharmacy, University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus, Semenyih, 43500, Malaysia

Christophe Wiart: Christophe.Wiart@nottingham.edu.my

Evidence suggests that ancient Greek athletes used opium, henbane, darnel, hellebore, mushrooms, nightshade, pennyroyal, and purslane to boost their physical endurance during Olympic Games. The purpose of this note is to bring attention to the fact that Pliny the Elder in his Natural History Book 26, Chapter 83 relates to a plant named “*Equisetum*” or in Greek “*Hippuris* that was boiled in an earth pot and resulting in a decoction that was taken for 3 days to consume the spleen of runners”. He also relates to the fact that one had to refrain from fat meals before starting the regimen. Book 26, Chapter 20, Pliny speaks of “*caucon*”, “*ephedra*” or “*anabasis*” that climbs trees, without leaves, with articulated stems and given in wine for cough and asthma. He also adds that among the Greeks they are various opinions in relation to this plant that he calls “*hippuris*”, “*ephedron*” or “*anabasis*”. He precises that the plant stops bleeding of the nose, is diuretic, and assuages hardness of breathing. The botanists Bellon and Tournefort called this plant *Ephedra sive anabasis* and the botanist *Desfontaine* identified it as *Ephedra altissima* Desf. Pliny probably refers his “*hippuris*” from Dioscoride, Book IV, Chapter 38 who speaks of 2 plants: one that grows in moist soil and another that climb trees. The first one is *Equisetum arvense* L. and the second one is *Ephedra altissima* Desf. Surprisingly, *Ephedra altissima* Desf. being a common Mediterranean plant has not been studied yet, but being an Ephedraceae it may contain ephedrine and other alkaloids worth being studied in nutrition.

Keywords: *Ephedra altissima*; *Equisetum arvense*

Declaration of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest associated with this work.

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