

Okoubaka aubrevillei. A new homeopathic medicine for the side effects of chemotherapy



Okoubaka aubrevillei : un nouveau médicament pour les soins de support en cancérologie

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SUMMARY

The homeopathic medicine *Okoubaka aubrevillei* is very little known in France. Yet it is available from the mother tincture to 30c. Putting together and summarising the different known provings enabled me to come to a complete Materia Medica for *Okoubaka*. The repertorisation of its principle symptoms places it between *Nux Vomica* and *Arsenicum Album*. Its "aftereffects of poisoning" aetiology and its digestive tropism have led me to use it with some success to prevent and treat the side effects of chemotherapy.

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RÉSUMÉ

La souche homéopathique *Okoubaka aubrevillei* est très peu connue en France. Elle est pourtant disponible de la teinture mère à la 30 CH. Une synthèse des différents provings existants nous a permis de dégager une matière médicale complète d'*Okoubaka*. La répertorisation de ses symptômes principaux la situe entre *Nux vomica* et *Arsenicum album*. L'étiologie « suite d'intoxication » et son tropisme digestif m'ont conduit à l'utiliser avec intérêt pour prévenir et traiter les effets secondaires de la chimiothérapie.

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INTRODUCTION

The homeopathic medicine *Okoubaka aubrevillei* is very little known in France. Discovered in 1970, its use remains limited despite its availability in all French pharmacies from the

mother tincture up to 30c. It is only mentioned in O.A Julian's *Materia Medica* in 1980 [1].

The bark of this tree is traditionally used in Africa to combat tummy upsets and poisoning. It is frequently prescribed in Germany in low dilution (D1 to D4) to treat poisoning whether from food, chemicals or drugs.

After presenting the various German provings, I will give the full *Materia Medica* of *Okoubaka* and explain my experience in its use for supportive care.

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BOTANICAL DESCRIPTION

The *Okoubaka aubrevillei* is a deciduous monoecious tree of the equatorial forest in West Africa. It can grow to 30 meters in height and 80 cm in diameter. It belongs to the Santalaceae/Sandalwood family. This is a hemi-parasite whose roots attach to those of neighbouring plants. This allows it to destroy surrounding plants likely to compete for water, light and food. It is currently ranked as vulnerable and is subject to special monitoring because of its scarcity due to the intensive trade of its bark for its phytotherapeutic use [2].

COMPOSITION AND THERAPEUTIC PROPERTIES

The bark contains various catechins with antioxidant properties: gallo catechins, epicatechin gallates and epigallocatechin gallates. It also contains gallic acid, β -sitosterol and stigmasterol. These polyphenols have a detoxifying, antibacterial and anti-inflammatory effect on the digestive system. The presence of phenolic compounds gives the bark antimicrobial and immunostimulant properties [3].

TRADITIONAL USE

In local application, the bark is used after maceration or infusion to treat various skin conditions, especially in cases of accidental poisoning. It seems to also have an effect on bruising. But it is mainly its traditional use by local healers which interested Western ethno-botanists. Indeed, the bark of *Okoubaka* is considered to be the perfect antidote to all food borne (rotten food), infectious (gastroenteritis) or toxic poisoning. Local witch doctors also use it to drive away evil spirits, giving the plant magical, symbolic purifying properties.

HOMEOPATHIC USE

We owe its introduction in the Homeopathic Pharmacopoeia to the German doctor Magdalena Kunst and pharmacist Willmar Schwabe who prepared the first strain in 1970.

The mother tincture is obtained by maceration of the ground dried bark of branches of *Okoubaka aubrevillei* in a water-alcohol solution for 3 weeks. The macerate is then expressed and microfiltered. The different dilutions are made in accordance with the usual methods of production of homeopathic medicines. The main therapeutic indications given by M. Kunst [4] in 1972 are:

- infectious or toxic food poisoning (insecticides, nicotine...);
- consequences of infectious diseases (influenza sequelae, tropical diseases, toxoplasmosis, childhood diseases);
- prophylaxis of traveller gastroenteritis and food intolerances.

PROVING¹ OF OKOUBAKAS

There are two of them. The first was published in 2012 by David Riley [5], the second in 2013 by Michael Teut. [6] The latter deserves attention because it was done in a modern and

rigorous manner. It is a multicentre phase I, randomised, double-blind versus placebo proving. Investigators, healthy volunteers and statisticians knew neither the name of the studied homeopathic stock nor its distribution amongst volunteers. After a period of 7 days of observation without medication, healthy volunteers took five granules of *Okoubaka* 12 c or 5 placebo granules according to the draw, to be dissolved in the mouth 5 times a day for 5 days. Observation of symptoms was collected daily in an online semi-structured diary for a period of three weeks from the first day of taking the medicine. There were 31 subjects, 19 in the verum group and 12 in the placebo group. The primary outcome parameter was the number of symptoms expressed in the verum group compared to the placebo group after a 3 week period. The secondary outcome parameter was the qualitative differences of the symptoms in both groups.

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of symptoms did not reveal statistically significant differences for these two parameters. The authors believe that a nocebo effect, due to the fear or expectation of clinical symptoms, may explain the difficulty in obtaining statistical differences. Nevertheless they were able to identify symptoms which were only present in the *Okoubaka* group which we will study and compare with the proving of David Riley.

Pathogenetic symptoms of *Okoubaka aubrevillei*

Following M. Teut's article, I exhaustively classified symptoms observed only in the group *Okoubaka* by M. Teut then those collected by D. Riley and finally those presented in the 9th edition of the directory and *Materia Medica* of W. Boericke, published in 2008 [7]. I will use the Kent's repertory order of classification of symptoms (*Fig. 1*).

Mindset

Proving M. Teut: irritability, impatience, helplessness and sadness. Weakness and lack of concentration with confusion. Proving D. Riley: irritability, discouragement, with the feeling of being incompetent. Remains calm in stressful emotional situations. Fear of ageing and poverty. Wants to chew and bite his inner cheek.

Materia Medica B.: irritable, angry, aggressive and depressive (aggravation before menstruation), self-loathing. Cannot cry. Ambitious and avaricious. Impaired concentration after flu or a viral infection.

Head

Proving M. Teut: feeling of being in a fog. Nauseous headache. Suction-like feeling to the right side of the skull.

Proving D. Riley: stroke feeling. Pressure at the top of the skull. Feeling of pressure in the left temple, as if the brain were caught in a vice.

Materia Medica B.: awaken at 5 in the morning by headaches. Migraine. Scalp eczema. Alopecia.

Eye

Proving M. Teut: dryness and feeling of having sand in your eye, allergic conjunctivitis.

Proving D. Riley: swelling of the lower eyelid. Watery eyes and itching during pollen period. Sharp pain through the eye. Ocular discharge.

Materia Medica B.: Ophthalmic dryness, conjunctivitis, allergic swelling of the eyelids.

¹Experimental pathogenesis.

Okoubaka aubrevillei													
		As	Nux-v	Alum	Kali-c	Rhus-t	Bry	Sep	Calc	Graph	Ph-ac	Zinc	
	V	23	15	14	13	13	12	13	10	11	12	14	
	O	10	6	6	6	6	5	5	4	5	5	6	
	G	23	18	12	12	11	11	10	10	10	10	10	
+/+	3	MND : ANGER, irascibility	3	3	3	2	3	3	2	2	2	2	
/	1	EYE : SWOLLEN / Lids / oedematous	3			3	3			2		1	
/	3	STM : INDIGESTION / abuse of drugs, after		3									
/	2	STM : PAIN / BURNING / warm / drinks, amel	2										
/	2	STM : NAUSEA / warm / drinks / amel											
/	1	STM : VOMITING / warm / hot water, amel											
+/+	2	STM : STONE, sensation of	3	3	1	1	2	3	1	3	2	1	
/	3	STM : AVERSION / food / thinking of eating, when	2						2			1	
/	2	STM : PAIN / warmth / drinks / amel	2	3	1	1	1	1		2	2		
/	2	STM : NAUSEA / eating / after	1	3	2	2	2	2	3	2	1	1	
/	2	STM : PAIN / BURNING / night	2										
/	2	STM : NAUSEA / morning / waking, on			2								
/	2	STM : NAUSEA / brushing the teeth, on											
/	3	REC : DIARRHOEA / food / game, high, after	3										
+/+	3	GE : LASSITUDE	2	3	3	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	

Figure 1. Répertoire using PC Kent2.2®.

Ear

Proving M. Teut: oozing, itchy exanthema behind the ears. Materia Medica B.: tinnitus, earache, hearing loss. Otitis media [8]. Enlarged adenoids. [9]

Nose

Proving M. Teut: allergic itchy rhinitis, stuffy nose, yellow and viscous to liquid mucous, epistaxis. Proving D. Riley: clear runny nose like allergic rhinitis. Painful and burning sinuses. Epistaxis from the right nostril. Materia Medica B.: chronic sinusitis. Allergic rhinitis.

Face

Proving M. Teut: redness and painful sensation of heat, dryness and burning of the face. Proving D. Riley: herpes on the lower lip. Materia Medica B.: lip herpes.

Mouth

Proving M. Teut: sensations of pain, dryness and burning. Ulcers and blisters on mucous membranes. Pharyngitis with weals and vesicles. Tightness in the throat, roughness. Changed tastes of food. Proving D. Riley: painful aphthae of the tongue and lower lip. Gum abscesses. Smell of rotting meat coming from the throat. Materia Medica B.: aphthae. Tongue covered with a white coating bearing the imprint of the teeth on the side. Discharges from the root of the teeth

Stomach

Proving M. Teut: nausea improved by eating, accompanied by headaches and made worse by thinking about food. Feeling of pressure on the stomach. Desire for food and hot drinks.

Proving D. Riley: nausea after eating or on waking up. Reflux and heartburn at night. Vomiting with feeling of weakness. Materia Medica B.: gastralgia as if a stone was lying in the stomach, improved by hot drinks. Morning sickness, aggravated by tooth brushing. Vomiting.

Abdomen

Proving M. Teut: oppressive stomach pain, as if a hand was squeezing your stomach. Epigastric pain on the right side. Dull and oppressive pain as though you have been punched in the region of the gallbladder, pulling sensation. Improvement when rising and stretching. Aggravation in slumped position. Burning myalgia, improved with heat. Proving D. Riley: abdominal pain. Cramping pain improved by bending forward; made worse by lying down and stretching. Intermittent searing pain of the left iliac fossa. Evening flatulence. Tightness during bowel movements. Diarrhoea. Materia Medica B.: stomach pain, flatulence, jaundice with cholestasis. Pancreatic insufficiency due to food which is heavily contaminated with insecticide. Diarrhoea due to food poisoning. Thin and shiny, offensive smelling stools.

Urinary tract

Proving M. Teut: burning sensation in the urethra, made worse by micturition.

Female genitalia

Proving M. Teut: dysmenorrhea with spasmodic pain. Stitching pain and breast tenderness before menstruation. Proving D. Riley: increased sexual desire after menstruation. Materia Medica B.: irregular bleeding between periods, premenstrual breast pain.

Thorax

Proving M. Teut: palpitations. Pulsations. Feeling of pressure and tightness of the chest, "as if something heavy rested on my

chest." Feeling of heat behind the sternum. Aggravated by lying on the left side.

Proving D Riley: bronchial irritation with cough. Feeling as if lungs were over expanded.

Materia Medica B.: allergic rhinitis, asthma.

Back

Proving M. Teut: burning muscle pain improved by heat.

Extremities

Proving M. Teut: myalgia, cramps. Feeling of heaviness and pain in the muscles. Tiredness.

Proving D. Riley: Calf pain improved by stretching.

Materia Medica B.: oedema of fingers and ankles. Pain in the joints of the fingers. Rhizarthrosis.

Sleep

Proving M. Teut: tiredness on waking up, nocturnal awakenings.

Proving D. Riley: sleep affected by prolonged times of wakefulness. Gloomy thoughts that keep one awake.

Materia Medica B.: fatigue, need for sleep.

Skin

Proving M. Teut: dry skin with roughness and abrasions. Exanthema. Warts, small pinhead sized warts on soles

Proving D. Riley: itchy skin.

Materia Medica B.: eczemas and rashes caused by chemicals and drugs. Acne.

General symptoms

Proving M. Teut: feeling cold, dryness, burning,

PROPOSAL REGARDING OKOUBAKA AUBREVILLEI MATERIA MEDICA

I tried to bring all these publications together in a materia medica which will have to be confirmed by practical and clinical experience.

Aetiology

Aftereffects of poisoning and food poisoning, drug intolerance, nicotinic intoxication, food allergy, tropical or infantile viral infection.

Characteristic symptoms

Nausea improved by hot food or hot drinks.

General action

On the mind (irritability, anger, psychasthenia), digestive system (nausea, gastralgia, diarrhoea) and skin (pruritus, eczema)

Psychological signs

Irritability, anxiety, discouragement with the feeling of being incompetent, and fear of not having enough. Memory loss, confusion and difficulty in concentrating. Headaches, migraines and dizziness.

Head

Headache with nausea, feeling foggy brained, temporal pain from left to right.

Ear

Otitis media with enlarged adenoids.

Nose

Itchy rhinitis and allergic conjunctivitis.

Mouth

Painful aphthae of the tongue and the inner edge of the lower lip. Halitosis. Coated tongue with a white coating, keeping the imprint of the teeth. Dry mouth with paper taste. Itching of the lips and oral mucosa after eating. Swollen and bleeding gums. Pharyngitis.

Face

Redness, dryness and burning sensation of the face. Lip herpes.

Stomach

Nausea improved by eating, accompanied by headaches and made worse by thinking about food. Yearning for food and hot drinks. Burning stomach pains worse at night and improved by hot drinks. Heavy feeling in the stomach.

Abdomen

Bloating and flatulence worse in the evening. Right upper quadrant pain as though one had been punched. Diarrhoea.

Extremities

Heaviness and burning muscle pain improved by heat.

Skin

Exanthema and eczema in reaction to food or drug poisoning. Dry rough skin and abrasions. Allergic pruritus with bloody excoriations.

General symptoms

Feeling cold. Exhaustion with irritability and feelings of helplessness. Asthenia and apathy despite a long sleep. Difficulties in keeping one's eyes open during the day.

Feelings

Feeling foggy brained, compressed brain feeling in the right temple area, feeling of sand in the eyes, feeling of dryness and burning of the face, tightness in the throat, feeling as though you have a stone in the stomach, feeling as though a hand is squeezing your stomach, feeling of pressure on the sternum and chest tightness. Feeling of muscular heaviness and pain.

Aggravation factors

Thinking about food, after eating, on waking up, in the morning, on brushing teeth. Before menstruation; lying on the left side.

Improvement factors

Hot drinks, hot food, heat in general and stretching.

Desires and yearnings

Desire for hot food. Desire for hot drinks.

Main clinical indications

As a preventative medication for traveller gastroenteritis, toxic or allergic food intolerance.

As a cure for nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea as a result of food poisoning, digestive allergy, exposure to pesticides or poisoning. Heavy metal poisoning. Respiratory or food allergies. Gluten intolerance. Digestive intolerance to medicines.

Dosage

In preventative mode: 3 pills in 6c, 2 to 3 times per day

In curative mode: 3 pills in 6c, every hour gradually spaced out according to improvement.

Comparison

Ars, *Nux*, *Lycopodium*, *Rhus*, *Bryonia*.

Additional

Ars or *Nux*

DISCUSSION

A new *Nux Vomica*?

One might be tempted to see in *Okoubaka* and the host of digestive symptoms it can alleviate, the XXIst century *Nux Vomica*. Irritability, choleric tendency alternating with discouragement and allergic rhinitis would also make one think as much. It is especially the main aetiology "aftereffects of poisoning" that makes me think of *Nux*. Is it not the only one quoted under "Stomach, Indigestion after drug abuse" in the medication guide and which moreover is in the 3rd degree.

A new vegetal equivalent for *Arsenicum album*?

Yet it is not to *Nux* that *Okoubaka* is closest, but to *Ars*. It could become, after *Veratrum album*, the second plant equivalent. Indeed, if we list all the symptoms most characteristic of *Okoubaka*, we find *Arsenicum album* ahead of *Nux*, whether it is as regards the similitum, the number of occurrence or the degrees total. In comparison other drugs are much less close (Fig. 1).

Differential symptoms

However, neither of these two great polychrests covers all the symptoms of *Okoubaka*. In the rubric "Nausea improved by hot drinks" there is only one drug: *Theridion* in the first degree. In the fairly similar "vomiting improved with very hot water" there are two medications: *Chelidonium* in the second degree and *Sulfuricum ac.* in the first. If clinical use confirms it, *Okoubaka* could very well be added to these two rubrics.

The symptoms: "Nausea in the morning upon waking and nausea while brushing your teeth" are covered neither by *Ars* nor by *Nux* and also help make a difference.

Strong complementary medications

When we are dealing with the aftermath of a drug poisoning we will rather look to *Nux*. When we are dealing with the aftermath of poisoning or food poisoning we will look more in the direction of *Ars*.

A clinical confirmation needed

Before *Okoubaka* becomes for the aftermath of poisoning what *Arnica montana* is to the aftermath of trauma, or *Calendula officinalis* to skin abrasions and wounds and *Echinacea angustifolia* to immunosuppression, numerous clinical validations by practitioners are required. It will be noted that just like the three above-named plants and unlike *Nux vomica* and *Arsenicum album*, *Okoubaka* has no action reversal in its homeopathic preparation. It is as if the plant had already done this work in the manufacturing process of its bark.

Okoubaka and sustainable development

Homeopathic Pharmacopoeia, besides the absence of drug interactions and side effects, proves to be an example in environmental protection, the bark of one tree being able to cover the homeopathic needs of mankind. Respecting both ecology and our body, homeopathy is part of a sustainable development approach.

CANCER

An exciting new drug in supportive care

It is interesting to note that many of the symptoms are common to those that may be encountered in the aftermath of chemotherapy.

- aetiology: a result of poisoning
- psychological signs of irritability (side effect of corticosteroids)
- the feeling of weariness and helplessness (collateral effect of post-chemotherapy fatigue)
- poor attention span and feeling foggy brained (central side effect of chemotherapy on memory functions)
- headaches (side effect of anti-emetics)
- conjunctivitis with watery eye secondary to dry eye (corneal toxicity of chemotherapy)
- redness and painful heat sensation of the face (side effect of taxanes and corticosteroids)
- mouth ulcers and dysgeusia with a tongue covered with a whitish coating bearing the imprint of the teeth (oral thrush secondary to immunosuppression)
- nausea, inflammatory gastritis, bloating and diarrhoea (chemical toxicity on the gastrointestinal mucosa)
- eczema and rashes (side effect of docetaxel)

Supportive care is one of the areas of use of *Okoubaka* due to the iatrogenic effects of the treatments used [10]. Homeopathy is not a treatment for cancer, but it has its place in the fight against side effects [11].

Personal experience

I have been prescribing *Okoubaka* for the past three years whenever *Nux* was inactive for nausea with fairly good results, making it the first candidate for replacing *Nux*.

For a year now, the "after poisoning" aetiology has led me on reflection, to routinely prescribe it as a preventative of the side effects of chemotherapy according to the following protocol:

Okoubaka 6c 3 pills twice a day, on the day before, on the day and on the day after each chemotherapy session.

Nux vomica 6c, *Arsenicum album 6c* or *Ipeca 6c* (depending on symptoms) in cases of nausea.

CONCLUSION

If the main indication for *Okoubaka* is the prevention and treatment of food poisoning, chemical poisoning or travellers' diarrhoea and sequelae of infectious diseases, it has a place in supportive care to prevent and treat the side effects of chemotherapy.

Like any new homeopathic medicine it is in using it that the homeopathic community will appreciate its action and its best indications. Most of the pathogenetic symptoms I have described need to be checked clinically and should be the subject of new experiments and publications.

If the aetiology of "aftermath of poisoning" and the symptom "nausea and digestive disorders ameliorated by hot foods or drinks" are currently the two main "keynotes", I feel sure that a greater use of *Okoubaka* will verify the usefulness of this remedy. Already, in my practice, it has successfully integrated the homeopathic battery of homeopathic medications for the supportive care of cancer patients.

Disclosure of interest

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest concerning this article.

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