



# NEPHRITIS AND REMEDIES DURING THE 19TH CENTURY



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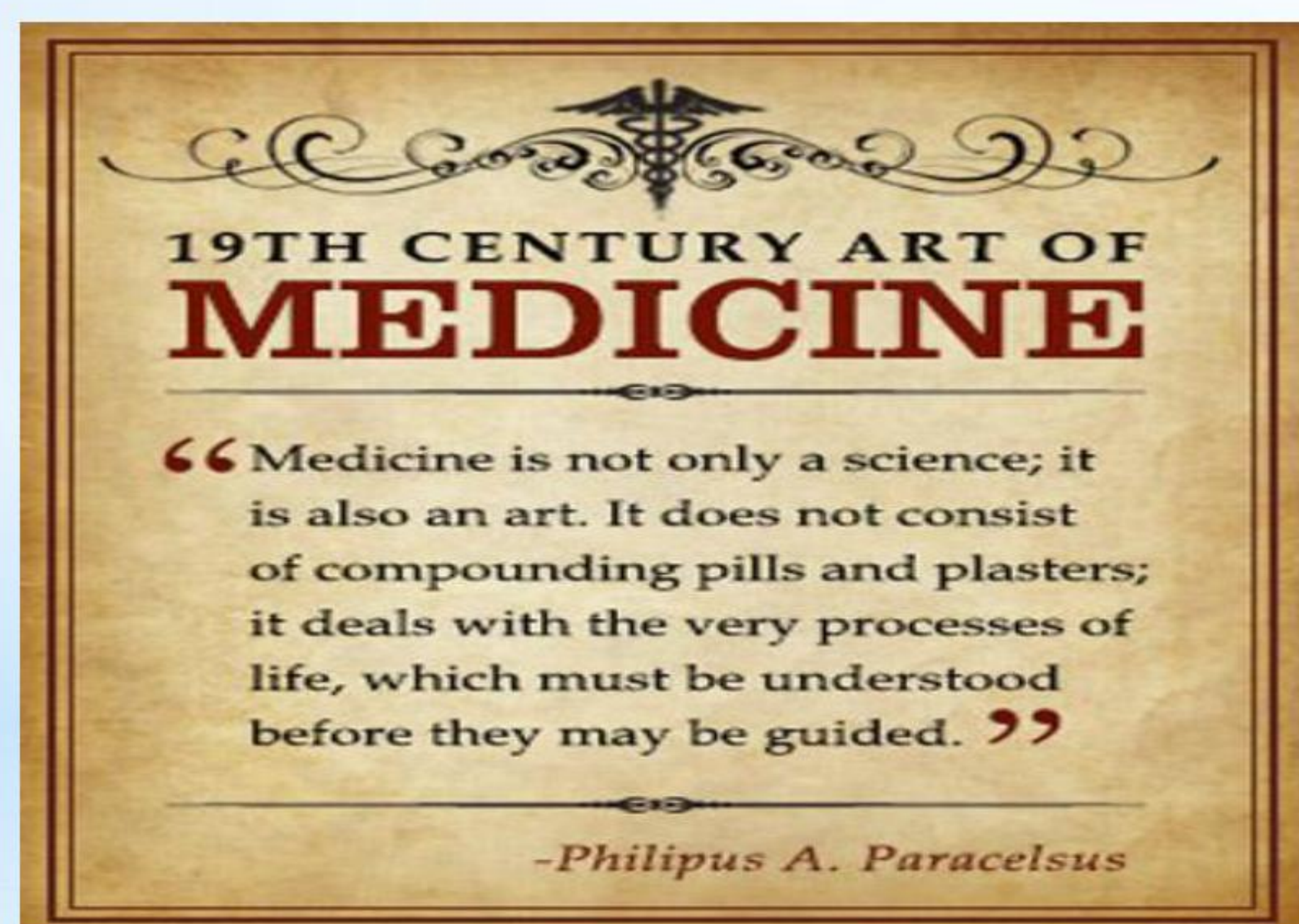
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## INTRODUCTION AND AIM

The term of Nephritis comes from Ancient Greek νεφρίτις, where νεφρός means kidney and ῖτις, was a feminine adjective ending. In ancient time, it was thought that the causes of nephritis syndrome were due to injuries and falls on the lumbar regions, caused for example by falling from a horse. Later on it was thought that ingestion of toxic substances might cause corrosive injury to the urinary tract like us narcotic poison, diuretic in overdose and abuse of liquor in predisposed individuals. In addition scientist discovered an important symptom that the sudden suppression of perspiration was explained the close relationship between skin and kidneys. The purpose of the study is to evaluate how the pathology was treated during the 19th-century and assess which kind of remedies were used through a review of ancient medicine manuscripts.

## METHODS

This paper aims to analyze the ancient remedies for nephritis treatment through an extensive review of ancient medicine manuscripts. The analysis follows to stages: (1) identification of ancient remedies; (2) systemic search and assessment of medical records.



## RESULTS

In the past, nephritis syndrome was diagnosed by different symptoms, not only chills and severe pain on the lumbar regions but also with the difficulty starting to urinate. For treating acute nephritic syndrome (ANS) generally were used repeated bleedings, leeches were directed to be applied to the region of the kidneys, emollient poultices, prolonged tepid baths, emollients enemas and narcotics. Furthermore the diet should be absolute and only mucilaginous and diuretics drinks were permitted. Between diuretics drinks "*Borago Officinalis*" (called borage) was heavily used. Several approaches have been used to develop a proper care. In most cases, however, doctors were agreed only on the use of bloodletting and to drinking a little bit water. In fact it was recommended to the patient to suck a slice of orange for quenching thirst. Differently in chronic nephritis syndrome (CNS) diuretics were suggested but with a lot of attention. Mostly extracts of "*Physalis alkekengi*" (vulgarly called alchechengi), decoctions of roots or stems of "*Asparagus*", roots of "*Fragaria*" (strawberry), roots of "*Inula helenium*", roots of "*Elymus*" (wheatgrass), roots of "*Arctostaphylos Officinalis*" (bearberry), roots of "*Saponaria Officinalis*" (soapwort to which was added potassium nitrate and sodium carbonate) were used. Moreover water and milk serum were also used. In many texts we read also to combine a strict diet to drug treatment for promoting the course of the disease, do not drink any kind of wine and "spirits" and particularly do not eat red meat and salty foods. Last but not less important as well, lead a quiet lifestyle, avoiding activities as the horse and dance that could tire the kidneys. All of these attention were used for reducing the widespread inflammation of the kidneys.

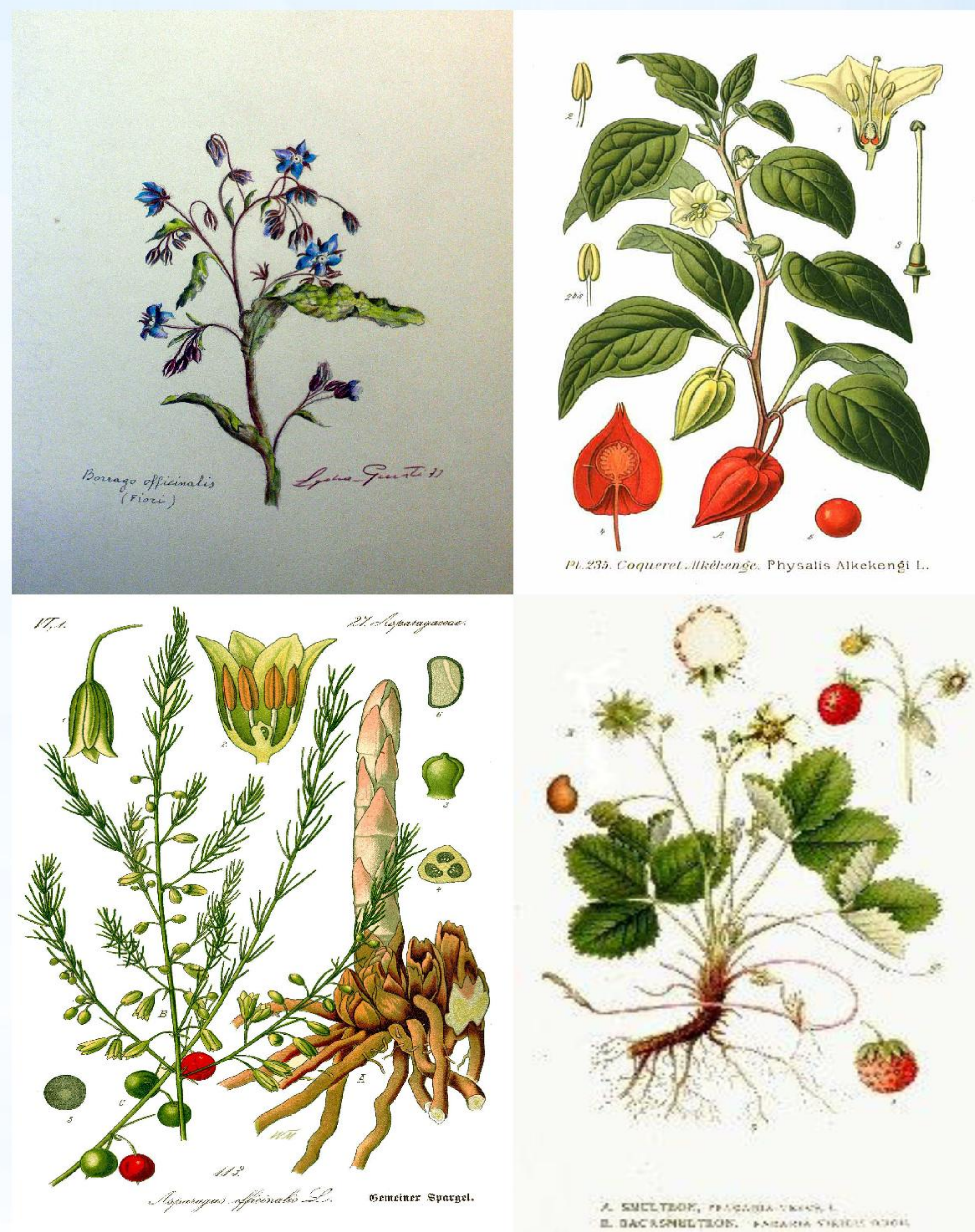


Figure 1: Diuretics drinks, *Borago officinalis*, *Physalis Alkekengi*, *Asparagus* roots and *Fragaria* roots.

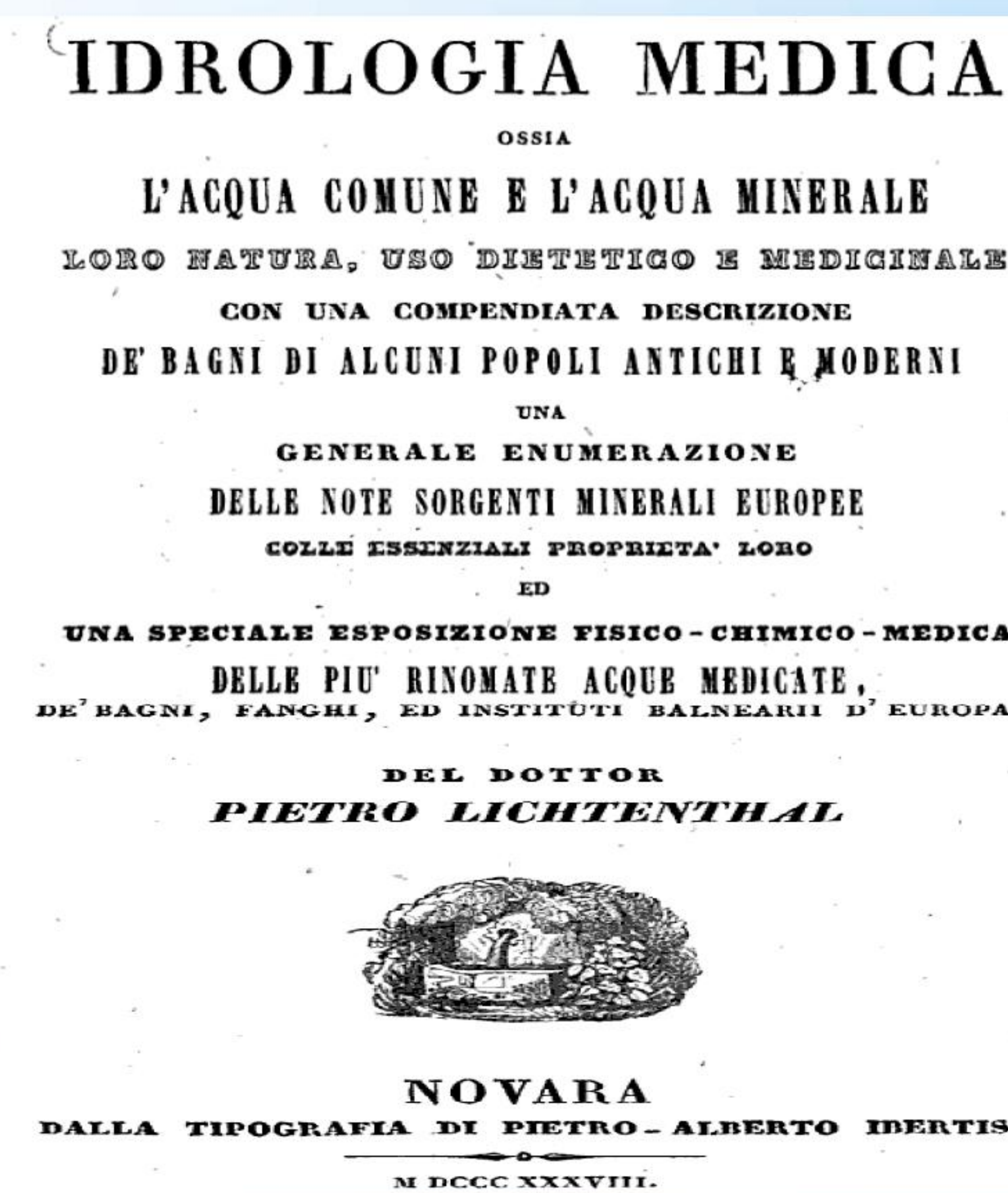


Figure 2: Peter Lichtenthal, Ibertis 1838.

## CONCLUSIONS

This review highlights that in 19<sup>th</sup> century it was not known neither the exactly causes of the disease nor the other appropriate treatment. In fact, if on one side an excessive consumption of natural diuretics drinks in ANS it was not recommend, on the other side in CNS diuretic use was suggested. Surely in both cases, as today doctors recommend, combining a healthy diet with quiet lifestyle was the best way for improving the course of the disease.

