A clinical history of *Zincum metallicum*: homeopathic pathogenetic trials and case reports

Silvia Waisse¹,* and Gheorghe Jurj²

¹Center Simão Mathias of Studies in History of Science (CESIMA), Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo, Rua Caio Prado 102, São Paulo, SP, Brazil
²Romanian Association of Clinical Homeopathy (ARHC), Str. Traian Vuia 21 A, Timisoara, Romania

In the present study, we investigated the experimental basis for the indications of homeopathic drug *Zincum metallicum*. The current body of knowledge about *Zinc met* has a core composed of pathogenetic and clinical data collected in the 19th century surrounded by layers of clinical observations reported over time. In the description, we prioritized poorly known sources, especially the ones that were never translated from the original German. We also performed quantitative and statistical analysis of repertory data. Through a literature survey and a call to practicing homeopathic doctors from many countries, we were able to put together a relevant case-series that represents homeopathic indications of Zinc. *Homeopathy* (2017) ¹, 1–17.

**Keywords:** *Zincum metallicum*; Homeopathic pathogenetic trials; Case reports

**Introduction**

In the present study, we investigated the experimental basis of the current knowledge about the clinical indications of *Zincum metallicum*. As is traditionally held,¹ the sources of the homeopathic materia medica are three: provings (presently known as homeopathic pathogenetic trials — HPTs), toxicology data and clinical observations; to that we might now add the pharmacological actions and physiological effects (when applicable) of substances with potential for therapeutic application. However, we chose to forsake the toxicological, physiological and pharmacological data, because they are easily available in the literature, and restrict our analysis to the information gathered from HPTs and clinical observations.

The first part of the present article describes the results of a review of the literature on the pathogenetic symptoms of *Zinc met*. Next follows a quantitative analysis of *Zinc met* symptoms in the homeopathic repertory and relevant information on symptoms’ likelihood analysis. The last part presents a collection of case reports taken from the published literature or communicated by homeopathic practitioners, which represent a trustworthy picture of clinical indications of *Zinc met*.

**Methods**

We first performed a thorough review of the published HPTs of *Zinc met*. For this purpose, we surveyed the literature starting from the first publication — a compilation of HPTs performed by Karl G Franz (1795–1835) in 1827.² In analysis we applied definite historiographical criteria to select relevant sources, which are described together with the results, as in every historical study we had to deal with single instances. We compared the information collected by homeopaths to the one published by the conventional doctors of that time, the reason being that zinc entered Western therapeutics in the 18th century, and thus homeopathic and conventional doctors made liberal use of the data as they became available. In the description of the results, we prioritized poorly known sources, particularly the ones never translated from the original German, which are thus now presented for the very first time to an English-speaking readership.
Next we surveyed the symptoms attributed to *Zincum metallicum* in the homeopathic repertory and performed a quantitative analysis. As an attempt to have a more encompassing picture of the quantitative and statistical data, we obtained from Lex Rutten interesting information on likelihood ratio (LR) analysis.

As concerns the clinical observations of the actions and effects of *Zincum metallicum*, we first performed a literature survey in medical databases Medline/PubMed and LILACS (Latin American and Caribbean Health Sciences Literature, Regional Library of Medicine/Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization). As the located publications were too few, we made a call via professional associations and e-mail lists of homeopathic doctors, as well as through social networks, for colleagues to contribute with well-documented cases. Once again the results were meager; in any case we were able to put together a relevant case-series that represents quite accurately, albeit certainly in an incomplete manner, the clinical indications of *Zincum metallicum*.

**Results**

**Introduction of zinc into German medicine**

The first publication on homeopathic zinc is the aforementioned compilation of HPTs performed by Franz. According to him, and also to Trinks and Müller, zinc was not known in antiquity, being first mentioned by Albertus Magnus (1193–1280). In turn the name ‘zinc’ was first used by Basil Valentine (1394–1450), while the first exact description was given by Paracelsus (1493–1541). Zinc was introduced in the common materia medica by the German physician and chemist Hyeronimus D Gaub (1705–1780), in the 18th century, who first learned about zinc flowers (zinc oxide) from a market vendor named Lüdemann, who sold it as an *arcanum* and miraculous cure with the name of *Luna fixata*. Long time and many studies were needed before the medicinal properties of pure zinc became recognized. Franz, however, observes that its mode of action and curative powers had not yet been sufficiently demonstrated in his time, for which reason a large part of the contemporary doctors still doubted many or all the properties attributed to it. The homeopathic doctor Joseph B Buchner (1813–1879), in turn, stated that, as a fact, zinc flowers were mentioned as a medicine by Pliny (1st century AD). While Gaub prepared pure zinc by means of a dry method (precipitation with an alkali) based on the recommendations of the reputed chemists Lorenz FF von Crel (1744–1816) and Jean-Baptiste van Mons (1765–1842), it came to be replaced by another, being the one described in Samuel Hahnemann’s (1755–1843) *Apothekerlexikon* (1793) and Johann F Westrum’s (1751–1819) *Handbuch der Apotheker kunst* (1797), to wit, manuals for apothecaries.

According to modern authors, zinc ore was used to produce brass since the Bronze Age, and Marco Polo (1254–1324) brought information from Persia to Europe, including the use of zinc sulfate to treat eye inflammations. By 1374 zinc was recognized by the Hindus as a new metal, and in Europe by Paracelsus later on, however, the isolation of zinc as a pure metal (in nature it only exists as a salt) was achieved by the German chemist Andreas S Marggraf (1709–1782) in 1746.

These data are relevant, because they show that zinc entered conventional and homeopathic medicine practically at the same time, thus representing a quite interesting case study for the analysis of pathogenetic and therapeutic information.

### HPTs of *Zincum metallicum*

Lists of HPTs of *Zincum metallicum* were published by Richard Hughes (1836–1902) and Jaber P Dake (?) in 1900, and by Thomas L Bradford (1847–1918) in 1901; these lists were the basis of our study. We were able to locate most of the quoted references or transcriptions of them, which were subjected to critical analysis; the original sources with the results of critical analysis are described in Table 1.

As Table 1 shows, the core HPT report is the one compiled by Franz in 1827. Franz met S Hahnemann as a medical student in Leipzig, and according to Franz Hartmann (1796–1853) he became the latter’s assistant, being charged of the collection, identification and preparation of medicine sources, and then of arranging the symptoms according to Hahnemann’s scheme, in addition to setting them alphabetically. In time, he also engaged alone in the study of certain remedies. Having being trained by Hahnemann himself, his comments and critical analyses of symptoms certainly provide the modern reader an accurate glimpse of Hahnemann’s ideas at the time. For these reasons and the fact that there is no translation of his HPT compilation from the original in German, it is discussed at length below.

Franz’s report comprises the self-provings performed by himself (potency 1c, in several intakes along 1 and 2 days) and Carl Haubold (1c, one single intake) and reports by Heinrich A von Gersdorf (3c, several intakes along 3 days), Ernst F Rückert (1c; symptoms of a healthy educated woman, one single intake; other provers failed to report any symptom), S Hahnemann (potency unknown), Johann Stapf (potency unknown) and Hartmann (potency unknown) to a total of 316 symptoms. It further includes symptoms arising from external contact with zinc, here comprised those S Hahnemann observed in himself; zinc oxide; zinc acetate (including the series reported by Friedrich Hahnemann and Christian F Langhammer mentioned in Table 1); zinc sulfate; and zinc hydrochloride – most of the data on zinc salts were taken from the conventional medical literature. It should be observed that in the present study we only considered the information on *Zincum metallicum*.

The next series of symptoms are the ones included as updates (Nachträge) in Hartlaub and Trinks’ *Pure Materia Medica*. The symptoms listed in volume 1 were reported by Hartlaub and ‘Ng’ (see below); two further symptoms have no indication of source, the same is the case of all the symptoms reported in volume 2. In no case there is identification of provers, potency, dose and frequency of use or chronological order of appearance of symptoms.
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