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MANDRAGORA AND BELLADONNA – THE NAMES OF TWO MAGIC PLANTS

The fact that both these plants are treated together here is no accident. Their properties, appearance, history and – as a consequence – their names have been continually intertwined throughout the centuries, and we consider them by no means separately from a linguistic and general cultural point of view. The aim of the present study is to describe some of the names given to these plants in Europe in connection with the numerous beliefs and legends surrounding them.

Until quite recently mythical-magical consciousness was a characteristic feature of rural culture. It was an inseparable part of everyday life in the countryside. However, identifying such magic is difficult as it exists only in people's attitudes, their point of view and the way they organize their world (Paluch 1989: 11). On the other hand, the designation "magic" informs us that the origin of a causative power, i.e. one which generates specific results, is unknown. In its common meaning, therefore, the adjective "magic" refers to something 'mysterious and unusual' (Szot-Radziszewska 2005: 16).

The magical power attributed to plants originated in beliefs regarding the way they came into existence, their appearance, and their medicinal or poisonous effect. These beliefs originated in Antiquity from China, India, Sumer, Egypt, and later from Greece and Rome. Moreover, the conviction that charms pronounced by initiated persons have magical effects when used in connection with plants, has survived since Antiquity and the Middle Ages (for more on this subject see Engelking 1988: 36–45). It should be pointed out that many beliefs and medicinal recipes have existed independently in various parts of the world for centuries before they were noted down in written sources (Moszyński 1934 *passim*).

The great role played by superstition and magical practices in popular culture is evident in people's explanations of unintelligible (and thus awe-inspiring) natural phenomena and their tendency to ascribe to them occult powers that affect human beings and their surrounding environment. Ignorance of the laws of nature and natural processes as well as man's great dependence on them meant that in the past humanity lived in constant fear that all its achievements could be

wiped out at any time by natural disasters or serious disease. Hence, in order to neutralize this menace people created sorcery (Dobrowolski 1958: 48).

Elżbieta Szot-Radziszewska (2005: 44) writes that popular magic can be divided into positive and negative forms of sorcery. Positive magic aims at ensuring an abundance of crops, fertility, health, love and prosperity, while negative magic, comprising all practices that are supposed to have fatal consequences, falls under the label of bad witchcraft and spells.

One plant, which has been widely known for its powerful magical properties (positive as well as negative) since immemorial time, is the mandrake (*Mandragora officinarum* L.). It is arguably the most celebrated of all “magical” plants in history, and has thus given rise to a mammoth literature.¹ The various names given to the mandrake in European languages confirm its extraordinary properties, for instance: the Germ. *Zauberpflanze* and *Hexenkraut*, the Serb. and Croat. *велико (велье) зелье* (Simonović BR).

The mandrake is a Mediterranean perennial plant and a member of the Nightshade family (Solanaceae). It should be pointed out that the mandrake is native only to warm parts of the Middle East and is unusually rare in other parts of the world. It has small, longish corrugated dark green leaves, cup-shaped yellow or purple flowers, plum-sized yellow berries and, most importantly, an impressive (up to 1m long) thick fleshy often bifurcated brown root which in the past was used for magical purposes (compare below) because the root bore some resemblance to the human form, as was already noticed by the ancient Greeks and Romans. Many names given to the mandrake reflect its anthropomorphic root, for example the Serb. and Croat. *телсти (толсти, тустти) корен* (Simonović BR) and the Ukr. *ludokoriń*. The plant has a musty smell.

What is more, the mandrake contains several tropane alkaloids such as atropine, hyoscyamine, and scopolamine, and is thus a medicinal plant. However, the alkaloids have terribly strong effect, as a result of which the mandrake is deadly poisonous. They temporarily paralyze certain muscles in the eyes, resulting in the unnatural enlargement of the pupils, slow down the activity of the stomach and intestines and also reduce secretions in all parts of the body, including the lungs.² They can also be used as both a narcotic and a local anesthetic. They can induce hallucinations, hence the likely origin of the Serbian and Croatian name for the mandrake: *буновина* (Simonović BR),³ which is connected with *búniti* “to mistake, to be delirious” (Skok ER s.v. *búniti*). In addition, these alkaloids also have stupefying properties and were believed to excite erotic inclinations. As a consequence, the plant was once considered to be a great aphrodisiac. Hence mandrakes were called “love apples” or an “Aphrodite’s plant”. In many parts of Europe the mandrake is still believed to be able to increase sexual desire and performance, hence the origin of, for instance,

¹ I have only referred to a number of selected publications in this article because all botanical and historical sources contain similar information (see Bibliography). I would like to thank Dr Stanisław Cygan for his advice on the appropriate literature.

² For this reason, it was used in ancient times to treat asthma and respiratory problems.

³ The name *буновина* also refers to deadly nightshade (*Atropa belladonna* L., see below) and black henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger* L.).

the Fr. *plante d'amour*, the Ukr. *lubovyča* and perhaps the Old Pol. *niewieście ziele* (Symb. 297).

It is only natural then that the mandrake has been well known to physicians since ancient times. Egyptian tomb paintings show its use in healing ceremonies. It also appears in the oldest known medical document – Ebers' papyrus from 3500 years ago. Numerous ancient physicians recommended it – when properly prepared and in small doses – as a medicine. For instance, Hyppokrates (460 BC – c. 377 BC) suggested using it in cases of depression and anxiety. Theophrastus (372 BC – 287 BC), a pupil of Aristotle, confirmed its excellent healing effects of wounds and recommended its use for compresses. He was the first person who used the name *μανδραγόρα*. According to Frisk GEW (s.v.), the word is of unknown etymology; perhaps “die Pflanze nach einer Person (Arzt) benannt wäre”. Many European names for the mandrake come from the Gr. *μανδραγόρα*. Firstly, we can mention here the Lat. *mandragoras* (André 1956: 199) and then other forms: Engl. *mandragora*, (*true*) *mandrake*, Fr. *mandragore*, *mandegloire*, *main-de-gloire*, *maglore*, Sp. (Cast.) *mandrágora* (from 15th cent.), Cat. *mandràgora* (Old Cat. *mandràgola*, Cat. of Valencia *mandràgora*, *mandràgula*), Galic. *mandràgola*, It. *mandragora*, *mandragola*, Rum. *mătrăguna*, Pol., Slovak, Czech *mandragora* (Majewski), Russ. *мандрагора*, Sloven. *mandràgora*, *mandràgola*, Ukr. *mandrygula*, *matryduna čarivna*, Serb., Croat. *мандрагора*, *мандрагула*, *нارانгулина*, *мандрак* (Simonović BR), Alb. *madërgonë* (FGSS 1044, FGS 285) or *matërgonë* (FEB 148).⁴ We can observe various phonological and morphological processes here, which is a common occurrence in the adaptation of multi-syllabic loanwords, namely dissimilation (*r-r* > *r-l*), simplification, epenthesis and adideation. It is worth noting that, for example, the Catalan and Galician names for the mandrake also mean “ghost, terrific vision” and the Catalan name for the mandrake originating from Valencia bears the meaning “woman who is always on the streets and is lazy”.⁵

What is more, people from the East were convinced that it helped with fertility problems. We can find traces of such a belief in The Holy Bible:

And Reuben went in the days of the wheat harvest, and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them unto his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, Give me, I pray thee, of thy son's mandrakes. And she said unto her, is it a small matter that thou hast taken away my husband? And wouldest thou take away my son's mandrakes also? And Rachel said, therefore he shall lie with thee to-night for thy son's mandrakes. And Jacob came from the field in the evening, and Leah went out to meet him, and said, thou must come in unto me; for I have surely hired thee with my son's mandrakes [...] And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb. And she conceived, and bore a son: and said, God hath taken away my reproach (Gn. 14–23).

The plant is also mentioned in the Song of Songs where the mandrake's power is connected with its fragrance. It also appears, for example, in Homer's Odyssey. Hence the mandrake was also known as the “plant of Circe”, and some commentators contend that this was the drug that the sorceress gave to Odys-

⁴ The names also refer to black henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger* L.) in Albanian. I am deeply grateful to Dr CSc. Ľubor Králik for looking up the names used for ‘mandrake’ in Albanian dictionaries.

⁵ I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Isabel Molina Martos for all this detailed information.

seus's men and so brought about their disastrous metamorphosis, which thus explains the following names for the mandrake: the Engl. *herb of Circe*, the Fr. *circéa* and the Germ. *Circe*.⁶

The Greek physician, Pedanios Dioscorides, who lived during Nero's reign, c. 60 AD, wrote that mandrake's root "seems to be a maker of love-medicines" and he prescribed its juice mixed with wine as an anaesthetic for use in surgery.⁷ Pliny the Elder (23 AD – 79 AD), the Roman scholar, also suggested using the mandrake as an anaesthetic before operations, which perhaps gives us the Russian name *сонное зелье* (Simonović BR). What is more, he divided the mandrake into two species: the male mandrake (*Mandragora vernalis* L.) and the female mandrake (*Mandragora autumnalis* Bertol.), in other words – the black mandrake. This dual classification made a strong appeal to the popular mind, and spread through the folklore of all European peoples as is attested to in certain Old Polish forms: *pokrzyk męszczyźni*, *pokrzyk samiec* and *pokrzyk białogłowi*, *pokrzyk samica* (Symb. 297–298).⁸ In Jewish tradition, both the apotropaic and the aphrodisiac powers of the plant are maintained. In addition, the plant was also used under the name *morion*⁹ (André 1956: 199, 211) or 'death wine' to render insensible those about to undergo torture. Hence under Roman rule, Jewish women would administer it to those who were being crucified.

It is impossible in this paper to list all the extremely numerous references made to the mandrake over the centuries. It need only be stressed that the plant remained in medical use until the late 17th century. What is more, many famous people in history are supposed to have owned mandrakes to ensure prosperity and happiness. For instance, according to some historical sources, Alexander the Great owed his conquest of the East to the magical power of the mandrake and The Maid of Orleans was also reputed to have made use of the plant.¹⁰

As was mentioned above, the mandrake has been a symbol of mysterious forces since time immemorial. Its extreme properties have given rise to numerous legends. Once upon a time people believed that demons (or even the devil) lived in its root and hence the Polish name for mandrake, i.e. *czartawa* (Majewski) and the Engl. *satan's apple*, which probably refers to its fruit. The Engl. *crazy apple* and the Serb. and Croat. *дјеља јабучица* (Simonović BR) also appear to refer to the mandrake's fruit. Another European superstition concerning the mandrake was that it grew from the moisture that dropped from a hanged felon, as it was sometimes found near the gallows. Some people believed that the most efficacious roots grew under gallows or where suicides had been buried at crossroads. The reason why the most potent mandrakes were supposed to

⁶ We should not mistake these names of the mandrake with the Lat. *Circaea*, i.e. enchanter's nightshade from the Onagraceae family.

⁷ It is worth noting that the mandrake was used by early Greek physicians to induce sleep and to relieve pain.

⁸ They are the calques of the Lat. *mandragoras masculus* and *mandragoras femina* (André 1956: 199).

⁹ It comes from the Gr. *μόριος* 'deadly, fatal'.

¹⁰ There were various factors which exposed her to charges of witchcraft. As we all know, Joan of Arc heard the "voices". Some said the voices were hallucinations induced by chewing mandrake, a narcotic which they believed Joan carried in her bosom.

grow under gallows was the belief that they were produced from the semen ejaculated by a hanged man (compare for example Kopaliński 1988: 646–647, Symb. 297–298) hence the following names of the plant: the Old Pol. *stryczek*, *wisielec*, *wisieliczy nasik* (Symb. 297) and the Pol. *szubienicznik* (Majewski). The mandrake was thought to scream, for instance, when it was pulled out of the ground. We can quote here some Old Polish names for the mandrake, such as *krzykawiec*, *krzykwa*, *pokrzyk* (Symb. 297),¹¹ which attest to this belief. According to legend, the mandrake was moulded out of the same clay from which Adam was created. The devil regarded the plant with great favour therefore it was associated with underground demons and other dark powers. The pulling up of the root required a magical ritual, which was usually enacted by moonlight. Firstly, the earth was loosened for mechanical reasons, then three concentric rings were drawn around the plant with the point of a sword. The magical ritual accompanying the latter act was to prevent the demons rising with the root. After that, a dog,¹² usually a black one, was attached to the plant by means of a string, and the mandrake-collector, standing at a short distance with a trumpet to his lips, threw a piece of meat at the poor hungry dog. Care was taken to ensure that the titbit landed just out of the animal's reach, with the result that the animal's frantic endeavours to seize its prize caused the root to yield. The moment the plant showed signs of leaving the ground, the gatherer, who had stuffed his ears with cotton and wax, made a loud shrill blast of the trumpet, as it was believed that the uprooted mandrake emitted a death-dealing shriek. One treatise warns all to beware of a changing wind carrying the deadly sound. The blast on the trumpet effectively drowned out the cry of the plant, but the dog, the poor animal, dropped dead as though felled with an axe, for the underground demons demanded a life for a life, and immediately took that of the mandrake's murderer.

The foregoing general technique was altered and added to in history and, of course, became widespread throughout the world. For instance, the famous Polish physician and botanist Szymon Syreniusz (1540–1611) described the mandrake (or *mandragoras*, *morion*) as *trzeci pokrzyk Dyoskoridow*:

Jest mniemanie, a głupie, między ludem, iakoby pokrzykowe korzenie miało rósć, na kształt człowieczy. Samiec mężczyzny, a samica białygłowy. Y są tak w tym od mataczów y szalbierzów utwierdzeni, że się od tego nie dadzą odwieść: dosyć drogo te pokrzyki na czary y gusła, które im z tymże przedaią, płacąc. A niechcą prawdziwie wierzyć, że to nie pokrzykowe korzenie, ale przestepowe albo mieczykowe, albo wodney trzciny, albo koszatcowe. Wyrzynaia postać oboiey płci człowieczy, ci machlerze y oszukacze ludzi. A gdzie włosy mieć chcą, tam ziarko prościane, albo ięczmienne przez dni dwadzieścia, zakopuią. Potym zaś wykopawszy obrzeziuią y formuią postać człowieczą. Włosy na głowie, na brodzie y w łonie, nożykiem ostrym formuiąc. Y udaia to ludziom prostym, powiadaiać z iaką trudnością y niebezpieczeństwem te pokrzyki wykopuią. Na iakich mieyscach, y z czego rosna: to iest, pod szubienicami, gdzie z moczu tych które wieszają, rosna. Do tego, iako do Psa czarnego, do kura czarnego, ten korzeń

¹¹ The name *pokrzyk* refers to deadly nightshade (*Atropa belladonna* L.) in Polish today (see below).

¹² Josephus Flavius (c. 37 AD – c. 103 AD), the Jewish historian, is the first person who recorded the practice of employing a dog to assist in the plucking, when he described the herb called *baaras* (from the Hebr. *ba'ar* 'to burn'), which was certainly none other than the mandrake.

przywiązawszy, sobie pierwey uszy woskiem zatkawszy, żeby głosu tego Pokrzyku niesłyszeli, wryywaia. Który krzyk kiedyby słyszeli, zarazby pomarli, iakoż iednak pies y kur na on krzyk iego, zdychaia. (<http://www.zielnik-syrenniusia.art.pl/Syren/Ksiega5/1378.htm>).

We can find the traces of this horrible mandrake's shriek in belles-lettres, compare for example Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*:

Alack, alack, is it not like that I
So early waking, what with loathsome smells,
And shrieks like mandrakes torn out of the earth,
That living mortals hearing them run mad (Shakespeare 1955: 116, Act 4, Scene 3).

The valuable mandrake's root was carefully carried or placed in homes in the belief that it would assure health, love and prosperity (compare for example Grimm 2003: 424, 1005). A number of European names given to the mandrake, for example the Engl. *sorcerer's root*, the Germ. *Zauberwurzel* (Simonović BR), the Engl. *witch's manikin*, the Germ. *Heckemännchen*, *Galgenmännlein*, *Erdmännlein*, *Goldmännlein*, *Glücksmännlein*, the Lith. *kaũkas* (Majewski), the Czech *mužijk* (Majewski) and the Old Pol. *mężyk* (Symb. 297) confirm this point of view. They even believed that it could tell the future (Kopaliński 1988: 646–647), so in Germany the mandrake is called *Alraun* (the male mandrake), probably 'the all-wise one', *Alraune* (the female mandrake) and *Alraunwurzel* hence Serb. and Croat. *алрауна*, *алрун* (Simonović BR). The origin of the German word is not clear. According to Kluge-Mitzka EW (s.v. *Alraun*), "Ahd. *al-rūna* stimmt zu Frauennamen wie *Friderun*, *Gudrun*, *Sigrun*. [...] Als Name einer Seherin ist aus Tacitus, Germ. 8 *Albrūna* 'die mit der Zauberkraft der Alben Begabte' zu gewinnen; als Frauennamen sind ahd. *Albrūn* [...] seit dem 10. Jh. bezeugt. Die Menchengestalt der Wurzel gab Anlaß, ihr einen Menchennamen zu geben". Kluge-Seebold EW (s.v.) agrees with this opinion and adds just in case that „die zugehörigen abergläubischen Vorstellungen sind wohl alle nicht-germanischen Ursprungs". A similar custom concerning the root of the mandrake has been preserved in some Russian, Serbian and Croatian villages where people prize it as an exceptional talisman (or familiar spirit) that will bring them fame and fortune. It has been given the name of *Adamova golova* 'Adam's head'. In connection with this tradition we can see the Russ. *адамова голова* (attested in 1843, 1847; SRNG s.v. *Адамов*), the Serb. and Croat. *адамова глава* (Simonović BR).¹³

Besides the above, many other names have been given to the mandrake in Europe, especially in the Slavic languages, but they are not so interesting because they usually refer to medicinal properties of the plant.¹⁴

As was mentioned above, the mandrake is native only to warm climates and is extremely rare in Europe. As a result, it was a highly prized plant in ancient times. A number of dishonest people tried to make a profitable living by selling spurious mandrakes (compare it with the quotation from Syreniusz). Others

¹³ It appears that the name is associated with a legend, according to which the mandrake is made of the same clay as that from which Adam was created.

¹⁴ Anyway, I am convinced that the various European names given to the mandrake are so interesting that they deserve a separate and larger work.

looked for different plants which might have similar properties and could act as a substitute for the powerful mandrake. One such plant in our temperate climate was deadly nightshade (*Atropa belladonna* L.), which has also been famous over the centuries for its great magical properties.

The deadly nightshade is a medicinal perennial herb from the Nightshade family (Solanaceae) like the mandrake.¹⁵ The species originally came probably from southern Europe and Asia. The plant is between two and four feet in height. The leaves are dull and dark green. The flowers, which appear in June and July, are bell-shaped and dark purple in colour. Its green berries turn shiny purplish-black as the plant matures and they are the size of the common cherry (compare the following names: the Engl. *black cherry*, the Fr. *bouton noir* and the Engl. *scarlet berry*). Some people say the berries taste sweet and others find them bitter (compare the Engl. *bittersweet nightshade*). The whitish root of the plant is about six inches long or more, it is thick, fleshy and branching in shape. The deadly nightshade is widely distributed over Central and Southern Europe and South-west Asia. It is common in the Crimea, in the Caucasus and in the Carpathians.

Like the mandrake the plant contains potent hallucinogenic tropane alkaloids such as atropine, hyoscyamine, scopolamine and belladonnine concentrated mainly in the root so it is deadly poisonous.¹⁶ Researchers claim that these substances cause dilated pupils, dryness of the mouth, nausea, depression, muscle failure, delirium, even general paralysis and eventually death due to respiratory failure. However, it is the fruits of the belladonna, often mistaken for bilberry or even for cherries, that are the most poisonous. Moreover, people who handle the plant can have absorbed the poison through their skin. A peculiar symptom in those poisoned by the deadly nightshade is complete loss of voice (hence we have the following names for the belladonna: the Czech, Slovak *nemnica*, the Czech *nimnica*, *němnice* (Majewski) and the Ukr. *nimyča*¹⁷), together with frequent forward bending of the trunk and continual movements of the hands and fingers and wide dilation of the pupils.

Its extreme properties – just as in the case of the mandrake – have been known since Antiquity. A lot has been written about it in the course of time but I only use a few general publications for this article (see Bibliography). The plant acquired its name from Theophrastus' back. It was referred to as *the Mandragoras of Theophrastus* (Symb. 294). Like the mandrake the deadly nightshade was used as an anaesthetic in surgery in ancient times. Some herbalists of the 16th century also noticed that it makes people fall asleep and called it *sleeping nightshade*. The following names are connected with this belladonna's feature: the Old Czech *lilek větší*, the dialectal Czech *l'ulek*, *lulík*, *l'ulák*, *l'olek*, the Czech and Slovak *lilík* (Majewski), the Slovak *l'ul'ok*, *l'ul'ok zlomocný*, *l'ul'ka*, *l'ul'kovec*,¹⁸ the Sorbian *rulik* and the Czech and Slovak *rulík* come from *lulík*

¹⁵ NB: the potato and the tobacco also belong to this family.

¹⁶ The toxicity of the deadly nightshade dwindles in the warm zone because hyoscyamine begins to transform into racemic atropine exposed to higher temperatures.

¹⁷ The last form also refers to the henbane, *Hyoscyamus niger* L. in Ukrainian dialects.

¹⁸ We can compare here the Polish name *lulek*, although it refers to the henbane, *Hyoscyamus niger* L.

(dissimilation *l-l* > *r-l*; after Machek 1954: 204), also the Russ. *сонная трава* (Simonović BR), and the Ukr. *sonna oduř*, *sonne zile*, *sonnyj durman* (compare *дурманити* ‘to stupefy’).

Both in Antiquity and in the Middle Ages they often used the deadly nightshade as poison. It was a cause of many poisonings, deaths and suicides. They associated it with death, and Fuchs called it the *Solanum mortiferum* ‘bringing death’ in the 16th century; compare also the literal meaning of the *deadly nightshade* and the Sorbian *mordarske zele* (Majewski) (for more on this subject see Kmiec 2006b: 59).

Its poisonous properties were well known by Dioscorides, Paracelsus 1493–1541, Lonicerus and many others. For this reason it was given the generic Latin name *Atropa* from the Greek ἄτροπος ‘immutable, eternal, implacable’, which refers to the severest of three Fates, who cut the thread of life.

The Romans often used the plant as a kind of “weapon” to contaminate their enemies’ food reserves. It is supposed to have been the plant that poisoned the troops of Marcus Antonius during the Parthian wars. Moreover, there exists a tradition that when Duncan I was King of Scotland, the Macbeth’s soldiers poisoned a whole army of invading Danes by liquor mixed with deadly nightshade supplied to them during a truce. Suspecting nothing, the invaders drank deeply and were murdered in their calm sleep by the Scots.

Many historical sources attest to existence of a custom of Italian and Spanish women of Renaissance to use the deadly nightshade as a cosmetic to dilate their pupils, which made them beautiful and seductive. This occurs because the plant contains atropine, which is the alkaloid still widely used by eye specialists. Hence the second part of the scientific Latin name of the plant, namely *belladonna* ‘beautiful lady’ originating from Italian. This name has been used in European herbariums since 16th century. Gerard was the first English writer to adopt the Italian name, of which he made two words. The Italian form *belladonna* has been taken over by many languages, for example: the Fr. *belladone*, *belladonna*, the Sp. (Cast.), Cat., Aragon *belladona*, the Galic. *beladona*, *beladama*, the Engl. (American) *belladonna*, the Germ. *Belladonna*, the Pol. *belladonna* (*beladonna*), the Slovak *beladona*, the Ukr. *beladonna*, the Russ. *Белладонна* and the Sloven. *beladóna*. There are also some linguistic calques of this, such as the Russ. *красавка* (*белладонна*), the Ukr. *krasavyča*, *krasavka* the Czech, Slovak *krásavica* and the Czech *zlatá kráska*.

The strong effect (not only toxic and hallucinogenic) of the deadly nightshade provides an explanation why it has been given many various names usually connected with superstitions concerning the plant. Saladinus Aesculianus named it *Solatrum furiale* in the 15th century, and one of its modern scientific names is *Solanum furiosum*. It refers to the excitement and irritation, which can transform into a fury after taking a bigger dose of the extract of the plant (compare for example Kmiec 2006b: 59). We can include here the following names: the Fr. *morelle furieuse*, the Pol. *szalej*, the Germ. *Tollkraut*, *Tollkirsche*, *Wutbeere*, the Czech and Slovak *bláznivá čerešňa*.

The belladonna was thought to be a magical plant, hence we have the following names: the Engl. *great morel* (< Fr. *morelle*), the Serb. and Croat. *Белбиље*, *велико билје*, *VELO билје*, *велье билје*, *велье зелье* (Simonović BR)

‘great herb’, tended by the devil himself in old times, compare the following names: the Engl. *devil’s cherries*, *devil’s herb*, the Germ. *Teufelskirsche*, *Teufelsbeere*, the Czech *čertova čerešňa* and the Pol. *čertova višňa*.

According to the legend, the devil goes about trimming it in his leisure, except on Walpurgis Night, when he retires to prepare the witches’ sabbath. On that night, the herb transformed into an enchanting lady, beautiful but deadly to behold, hence we have the English name *enchanter’s nightshade*. The name *apples of Sodom*, originally referring probably to the fruits of belladonna, is also held to be related to the plant. I think that the English name *naughty man’s cherries* can also be included here. The belladonna has been regarded as a witch’s herb since ancient times. Essence of the plant has been the main ingredient of so-called “witch’s ointment”, which after giving a friction into temple has produced hallucinations.

They prepared a magical amorous drink containing essence of belladonna’s root and wine, which evoked and heightened erotic feelings. Researchers maintain that sexual representations and suggestive impression of flying are characteristic of the stupefying of the deadly nightshade (for more on this subject see Kmieć 2006b: 59). It seems that wine for famous Bacchanalian orgies, in which women would tear off their clothes, was spiked with the deadly nightshade, which yielded frenzy and hysteria.

Like the mandrake, the deadly nightshade was supposed to grow under gallows (compare e.g. Gustawicz 1882: 230). People have also credited the deadly nightshade with emitting a horrible scream, for instance, when it was pulled from the ground hence the Polish name *pokrzyk* and the dialectal Polish *pokrzykowe ziele*.

There have existed interesting customs connected with pulling out of deadly nightshade. For instance, they have offered “gifts” in the empty hole after extracting the root. They have put bread, wine and salt there, bringing in special linen bags.¹⁹ Wanda Budziszewska (1972: 575) writes that Ukrainian women, digging out the plant, have addressed it very humbly, as *moja caryczko*. Here the Ukr. *caryčka* means ‘deadly nightshade’. According to Bronisław Gustawicz (1882: 229), the plant could be used with the good or bad intention among Ukrainian country-people. Hence, there have been various names of the plant. When it has been used with good intention it has been named *caryčka*, and when it has served bad aims it has been called *matryguna* or *nimycia*.²⁰

As was noted above, the deadly nightshade with regard to its strong hallucinogenic properties and its characteristic anthropomorphic root has been one of the substitutes for the mandrake.²¹ Thus, the deadly nightshade has taken over many local names for the mandrake. We can quote here the following names: the Ukr. *madragan*, *madrygan*, *matraguna* (from Bukowina; Gustawicz, Majew-

¹⁹ They have believed that deadly nightshade can help with gaining love of beloved boy. A girl together with her mother in one’s Sunday best dresses have gone looking for this magic plant. They must have brought adequate traditional gifts in order to make sure about goodwill of the plant.

²⁰ Gustawicz (1882: 229) describes in detail all the rituals connected with extracting of the magic deadly nightshade.

²¹ The deadly nightshade also appears instead of the mandrake in old translations of The Holy Bible into Polish.

ski), *matrigan*, *matrydun*, *matryduna*, *matrygan*, *matryguna* (Gustawicz, Majewski), the Ukr., the Czech *nadragula*, the Czech *magradula* (Majewski) and the Slovak *nadragul'a*; in addition we have here the Polish dialectal *matryguna*, *matrygan* and *nedregula* (more SGGRT s.v. *nedregula*). All these names are transformations of a long and difficult to pronounce foreign form *mandragora* (see above; more Gustawicz 1882: 230–231).

The names of the deadly nightshade meaning ‘wolf’s berry (cherry, apple)’ or similar are connected with the practice of using the plant to poison wolves in forests in old times. They put out pieces of meat for them which were dipped in the fruit juice of the plant. This practice was common in Europe, as is attested by many names from various languages: the Netherl. *wolfskers*, the Germ. *Wolfskirsche*, the Czech *vlčia čerešňa*, the Sloven. *volčja češnja*, the Pol. *wilcza wiśnia*, the Ukr. *wowča vyšňa*, the Croat. *volčja črešnja* (Majewski), the Lith. *vilkovyšnė* (Majewski); furthermore, the Germ. *Wolfsbeere*, Pol. *wilcza jagoda* (*wilcze jagody*), *wilczo-jagoda*, the Ukr. *wowča jahoda*, *wowči jajody*, *wowči jahody čorni*, the Serb. and Croat. *волчја јагода* (Simonović BR), and the Croat. *kurjače jabučice* (Majewski), ‘wolf’s apples’ from the Croat. *kürjāk* ‘wolf’, the Serb. and Croat. *волчја чеиња*, *волчја чреиња* (Simonović BR); in addition: the Croat. *kurjača* (Majewski), the Serb. and Croat. *вовчје* (*волчје*), *волчир* (Simonović BR), the Sorbian *wjelčica* (Majewski); and other names connected with ‘wolf’: the Serb. and Croat. *вовчју забез* (Simonović BR) ‘wolf’s comfrey’, the Germ. *Wolfswut*, the Slovak *vlčie oko* and the Sorbian *wjelče woko* (Majewski); the two last forms mean ‘wolf’s eye’.

Numerous names of the deadly nightshade also refer to other plants that are supposed to have similar properties or appearance. For instance, the Polish name *szalej* also relates to some other plants, such as thorn-apple, *Datura stramonium* L., henbane, *Hyoscyamus niger* L., cowbane, *Cicuta virosa* and *Solanum incanum*; what is more, the Germ. *Tollkraut* also refers to cowbane, *Cicuta virosa* L.

It is necessary to stress that many names warn against the danger of poisoning or generally underline harmful features of the plant, as in the Ukr. *otravnycja* (from *otrpyimu* ‘to poison’), *otravnycja peša vyšňa*, and have negative connotation, such as the Pol. *psia wiśnia* (Majewski), the Russ. *песы вишни* (Simonović BR s.v.), the Lith. *šūnvyšnė*, the Ukr. *peša vyšňa*, *peša vyšňa*, the Czech *psí střešňa*, the Croat. *päsja* (*pesja*) *jàgoda* (Majewski), the Pol. *psinki* (Majewski),²² the Czech *psinky* and the Serb. and Croat. *pāskvica* (Majewski) (nowadays also bitter-sweet, *Solanum dulcamara* L.). We can similarly classify here, for example, the following names: the Germ. *Schwindelbeere*, the Engl. *weedy nightshade*, *banewort*, and – taking into consideration anti-Semitism prevailing here and there in the Polish countryside – the Polish dialectal form *żydówka* (Majewski).

Furthermore, many names are associated with stupefying peculiarity of the belladonna such as the Polish *leśna tabaka*, the Serb. and Croat. *виника*, *вињика* (Simonović BR), the Croat. *potamnica* (Majewski) and the Pol. *pijanica*; in addition the Croat. *būn*, the Serb. and Croat. *буника*, *буновина* (Simonović BR).²³

²² The Polish name also refers to other hallucinogenic and poisonous plants.

²³ Compare above the Serbian and Croatian name *буновина* for the mandrake.

It seems that the Engl. *dwale* ‘deadly nightshade’ (also the Engl. *dway-berry* and the Dan. *dvale-bær*) belongs to this group too. There exist a few various etymologies of this name. According to OED (s.v. *dwale*), the name probably originates from Scandinavian: cf. ON. *dvöl*, *dvalar* ‘delay’, Swed. *dvala* ‘trance’, Dan. *dvale* ‘dead, sleep, trance, torpor’; OE. **dwela*, *dweola*, *dwola*, *dwala* ‘error, heresy, madness’. Some scholars claim that the form *dwale* (< *dwaule*) comes from the Dutch word *dwaul* ‘to wander, to be delirious’ and other linguists derive the word from the French *deuil* ‘grief’ in connection with the fatal properties of the plant.

Considering all presented material and the whole history (including many ancient legends and superstitions) of both plants we can draw the following conclusions:

- the names of the mandrake have influenced designations of the deadly nightshade throughout centuries, which has led to a close connection of the plants;
- the names of both plants reflect the fact that they were credited with extreme magical powers and many popular superstitions and customs related to them;
- some names are associated with real properties of the plants and their appearance;
- they warn of the deadly poisonous properties of the plants.

All this shows that every name of a plant should be analysed taking into consideration the history of a given herb, its properties and all related customs and superstitions. Furthermore, it is necessary to collect many names from various languages, which allow to make comparative study and draw general conclusions on their grounds.

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Streszczenie

Mandragora i belladonna – nazwy dwóch roślin magicznych

Mandragora (*Mandragora officinarum* L.) i pokrzyk wilcza jagoda (*Atropa belladonna* L.) zostały tu połączone, ponieważ ich nazwy były splecione przez wieki i nie sposób rozpatrywać je osobno z językoznawczego, a także kulturowego punktu widzenia. Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie nazw obu roślin w powiązaniu z ich właściwościami, licznymi przesądami i legendami łączącymi się z nimi. W wyniku analizy możemy stwierdzić, że wiele nazw mandragory przeszło na pokrzyk. Nazwy obu roślin w większości odbijają wiarę w magiczne ich właściwości i przechowują pamięć o ludowych zwyczajach związanych z nimi. Niektóre z nazw łączą się z rzeczywistym wyglądem i cechami rośliny. Wiele nazw przestrzega przed śmiertelnym zagrożeniem ze strony obu roślin.