

HEALING HERBS (BELLADONNA, YARROW): THE SCHOLARLY DENOMINATIVE MODEL AND THE FOLK MODEL

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10.52846/SCOL.2022.1-2.18

Abstract

By referring to a few healing herbs (belladonna, yarrow), using as a reference point both the scientific (scholarly) denominative and the folk (naive) models, we underline the dividing line between scientific thinking and empirical thinking. The scientific name is intended to stop possible confusions that arise when two different plants have identical regional names. Even if most scientific names, related to phytonyms, are of Latin origin, we note that there are also exceptions (for example, a term of Greek origin and another of Roman origin – *Atropa belladonna* – or a term that reminds us of the legendary Achilles, and the other of Latin origin – *Achillea millefolium*). The regional names, on the one hand being multiple, on the other hand being diverse, impose a nomenclature that enhances the identified symbol (phytomorph, anthropomorph, avimorph, zoomorph, etc.), depending on the ethnographic area of the country. By referring to the aforementioned healing herbs, we discover that the binary scientific name - regional name reveals a linguistically captivating plant universe.

Keywords: *scholarly denominative model, folk model, belladonna, yarrow, healing herbs*

Résumé

En faisant appel à quelques mauvaises herbes comme remède (mandragore, millefeuille), ayant comme repère tant le modèle dénominatif scientifique (savant), et aussi le modèle populaire (naïf), on peut souligner la ligne de démarcation qui s'établit entre la pensée scientifique et la réflexion empirique. La dénomination scientifique a le rôle d'annuler les éventuelles confusions qui puissent apparaître lorsque les deux plantes différentes possèdent des noms régionaux identiques. Même si la plupart des dénominations scientifiques afférentes aux phytonymes sont d'origine latine, on constate qu'il y en a des exceptions (par exemple un terme d'origine grecque et d'autre d'origine romane – *Atropa belladonna* – ou

bien un terme qui nous rappelle au légendaire Achille, et l'autre d'origine latine – *Achillea millefolium*). Les dénominations régionales, d'une part multiples et d'autre part diverses, en fonction de la zone ethnographique du pays, imposent une nomenclature qui potentialise le symbole identifié (phytomorphe, anthropomorphe, avimorphe, zoomorphe, etc). En faisant appel aux mauvaises herbes médicinales, mentionnées au-dessus, on découvre le fait que la binarité dénomination scientifique- dénominations régionales dévoile un univers végétal captivant du point de vue linguistique.

Mots-clés: *modèle dénominatif savant, modèle populaire, belladone, millefeuille, herbes médicinales*

1. Introduction

The scientific (scholarly) denominative model and the folk (naive) model in relation to certain healing herbs (belladonna, yarrow), enhance the impact of scientific and regional names on linguistics. Most scientific names, the fruit of scholarly thought, are of Latin origin, but, as mentioned above, there are exceptions. Regional names rely on empirical thinking. The native ethnoiatric background, impregnated by the empirical knowledge, is based on a multitude of healing herbs, including plants such as: belladonna, yarrow. Both the traditional Romanian ethnoiatric universe and complementary therapies – acupuncture¹, crystal therapy², soul imbalances³ – enhance a fascinating linguistic universe.

Belladonna (*Atropa belladonna*) belongs to the genus *Atropa*, and therefore to the Solonaceae family. Belladonna is an ambivalent psychotropic plant (medicine or poison). Belladonna (*Atropa belladonna*)⁴, herbaceous and perennial plant, must not be confused with mandrake (*Mandragora officinarum*, *Atropa mandragora*)⁵. From a linguistic point of view, there is a similarity, and from a botanical point of view, there is a relationship determined by the genus *Atropa*: belladonna (*Atropa belladonna*) and mandrake (*Atropa mandragora*). Regarding the mandrake, we note

¹ See details on the lexicon of complementary therapies (acupuncture) in Silvia Pitiriciu, no. 1-2, 2021, pp. 307-320.

² See details on the lexicon identified in crystal therapy in Silvia Pitiriciu, no. 1-2, 2020, pp. 88-93.

³ See details on the lexicon of complementary therapies (soul imbalances) in Silvia Pitiriciu, no. 1-2, 2019, pp. 201-207.

⁴ See details on belladonna (*Atropa belladonna*) (descriptive register, correlation with literature, mythology, folk medicine, association with ritual praxis, etc.) in Răchișan 2022, pp. 17-51.

⁵ See details about the mandrake (*Mandragora officinarum*, *Atropa mandragora*) (descriptive register, legends, thaumaturgical role, etc.) in Răchișan 2022, pp. 51-61.

two scientific names: *Mandragora officinarum* (according to Berthold) and *Atropa mandragora* (according to Linné). At the same time, belladonna (*Atropa belladonna*) can be confused with two other poisonous plants: black-fruited bryonia (*Bryonia alba* L., Cucurbitaceae family) and red-fruited bryonia (*Bryonia dioica* Jacq., Cucurbitaceae family)⁶.

The yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) is a peculiar plant that heralds the shift from linguistics to mythology and folk medicine.

Belladonna (*Atropa belladonna*). The binary scientific name - regional names

Belladonna (*Atropa belladonna*). Scientific name

The scientific name is unusual in several respects.

a_i Usually, most plants have scientific names that insert terms of Latin origin. In the case of belladonna, we note that the two terms are not similar in origin (*Atropa belladonna* < Greek *Atropos* and Italian *belladonna*).

a_{ii} On the one hand, the term *atropa* brings to our mind the Greek Pantheon, more precisely, Atropos, the Moira who ends the thread of life. The equivalent of the Moirai from the Greek Pantheon are the Parcaes from the Roman Pantheon and the Fates from the Romanian Pantheon. It is believed that there were three Moirai: Clotho spins the thread of life, Lachesis prolongs the life of mortals, Atropos ends life: “they determined the length of life from birth to death for each mortal by means of a thread, which one spun, the second wrapped around the spindle and the third cut, at the time corresponding to the moment of death. These three spinning deities were the daughters of Zeus and Themis”⁷. It is not by chance that Atropos is depicted holding a blunt object: “she was figuratively represented with a cutting tool, thus expressing the operation of severing the thread of life”⁸. It is also believed that there are three Fates⁹.

⁶ Borza 1968, p. 34.

⁷ Grimal 2003, p. 341.

⁸ Kernbach 1989, p. 58.

⁹ We note that the mythological level is generous when we refer to the term *Atropa* or to the belladonna, i.e. to the plant itself: “Extrapolating, in the Romanian Pantheon we find three Fates, dressed in white: The Spinner, The Fate, The Death. Their ritual-magic-symbolic props are made up of three objects: a spinning fork with a woollen reed, a spindle and scissors. The little one is believed to be ruthless and is attributed with physical deficiencies – she is crippled. It is not by chance that Death, according to Romanian mythology, is called “the Crippled one” or “Holy Death” [...]. We note that Death, regardless of the blunt object with which it is represented in the murals (scythe, sickle or scissors), is meant to cut the thread of life. Atropos in the Greek Pantheon is identified with Death in the Romanian Pantheon”. (Răchișan 2022, p. 18). See the details about belladonna related to the witch Circe (Greek

a_{1ii} On the other hand, the term *atropa* can be associated with atropine. This alkaloid, like belladonna, hyoscyamine, scopolamine, causes delirium, disorientation, hallucinations. We note that all component parts of belladonna (root, leaves, fruit) are harmful, even fatal if dosed improperly.

a_{2i} On the one hand, the term *belladonna* is identified in various languages “as equivalent to ethnobotanical names: fr. *belladone*, engl. *belladonna*, germ. *Belladonna*, rom. *Beladonă*”¹⁰.

a_{2ii} On the other hand, the term *belladonna* < it. “beautiful woman” brings to mind the potion which, once swallowed, toned the skin of the face, generating mydriasis [dilation of the pupils]¹¹.

a₃ Interestingly is the fact that in the past, belladonna was understood to be a collection of psychotropic plants: “Belladonna was not only the variety *Atropa belladonna*, but sometimes other narcotic plants as well: henbane, jimsonweed, small belladonna or henbane bell (so called because it causes amnesia and, consequently, muteness)”¹². It should be noted that the henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*), the jimsonweed (*Datura stramonium*), the henbane bell or small belladonna (*Scopolia carniolica*) are toxic plants of the Solonaceae family. Like belladonna, the psychotropic plants mentioned above contain potent alkaloids (atropine, hyoscyamine, scopolamine), but each herb has its own status, as indicated by its scientific name. The ancient ethnoiatric background, relying on empirical thinking, including healing herbs, is still proving effective today. In general terms, we find a wide range of regional names for plants. In particular, referring to the triad henbane/jimsonweed/henbane bell, we note that one of the identical regional names is precisely *mătrăguna* (in Romanian). Examples: the jimsonweed (*Datura stramonium*) has among its regional names *thorn apple*, *devil's snare*, *devil's trumpet*; the henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*) is also called *stinking nightshade*; the henbane bell (*Scopolia carniolica*) is also called *European scopolia*¹³.

Pantheon), the goddess Ceres (Roman Pantheon), Aphrodite (Greek Pantheon), or Venus (Roman Pantheon) in Răchișan 2022, pp. 35-36.

¹⁰ Ioan Milică, <https://limbaromana.md/index.php?go=articole&n=1077>, website visit: 18.07.2022.

¹¹ The Italian women used to make frequent use of the belladonna decoction. See Gledhill 2008: 68.

¹² Oișteanu 2013, p. 428.

¹³ Borza 1968, p. 57, 85, 157.

Belladonna (*Atropa belladonna*). Regional names

This healing herb, found under various names in different regions of our country, requires a taxonomy¹⁴ that enhances certain symbols (anthropomorphic, avimorphic, phytomorphic, zoomorphic, etc.):

b₁ Phytomorphic isotopy: *Floarea codrului, Floarea pădurii, Iarba codrului, Iarba pădurii*;

b₂ Anthropomorphic isotopy: *Doamnă, Doamnă Bună, Doamna codrului, Doamnă Mare, Împărăteasă, Împărăteasa buruienilor*;

b₃ Plant + zoomorphic isotopy: *Cireșa lupului*¹⁵, *Iarba lupului*;

b₄ Plant + avimorph isotopy: *Floarea cucului*.

b₅ Medical isotopy: *Nebunele, Nebunica*¹⁶.

Other regional names are identified with the botanical name (*Beladonă*)¹⁷ or enhances the qualities of the anthropomorphised plant (*Cinstita –the honest one*)¹⁸ or warn of possible contamination: *țilidonie*¹⁹ (*Atropa belladonna*) < *helidonie*²⁰, *hilindunea*²¹, i.e., *the greater celandine* (*Chelidonium majus*).

c. Euphemistic names²²: *Doamnă, Mamă Bună, Doamna cerului, Doamna florilor, Doamna vișorului, Mama Mătrăgună, Împărăteasă* etc.

¹⁴ See details in Răchișan 2022, p. 20.

¹⁵ It is believed that the black fruit of belladonna is immune to wolves, but also to thrushes and blackbirds: “It is curious, however, that neither thrushes nor blackbirds suffer anything, they eat the juicy part of the fruit, spreading the seeds”. (I. Simionescu, 1947, p. 72).

¹⁶ The fruit of belladonna, mistaken for black cherries, blueberries, currants, becomes harmful to both humans and other unreasoning creatures (eating too much of the fruit causes madness, hallucinations, even death). If the ritual praxis is not strictly observed, it is believed that belladonna weeps. Whoever has the misfortune to hear its wail, becomes insane or passes away: “Whoever hears this cry, when he plucks it, goes mad”. (Aurora Liiceanu 1996, p. 79).

¹⁷ Mihăescu 2007, p. 122.

¹⁸ Borza 1968, p. 27.

¹⁹ See Pârnu 1997, p. 374; Borza: 1968, p. 27; <https://dexonline.ro/definitie/%C8%9Bilidonie>, Website visit: 18.07.2022.

²⁰ Regional name found in the ontological universe of the Romanian village in certain ethnographic areas.

²¹ See Borza 1968, p. 45.

²² Euphemistic appellations appear with poignancy in the incantations and are meant to embellish the anthropomorphised plant. It is believed that belladonna is anthropomorphised for several reasons: some say it looks like a devil, others like a human. We also notice euphemistic appellations, attributes, human qualities. Other anthropomorphised and unusual plant symbols are both elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*) and white swallow-wort (*Cynanchum vincetoxicum*). See details in Răchișan 2022, pp. 93-117; in Răchișan 2018, pp. 148-162; in Răchișan 2017a, pp. 1-5.

d. Microtoponym: *Grădina Dânselor*²³.

e. Anthroponym (family name): *Mătrăguna*²⁴.

f. Therapeutic role (folk medicine):

If the dosage is appropriate, rheumatism, coughs, inflammations as well as childbirth pains and toothache are combated. The decoction also facilitates procreation. At the same time, the potion made from belladonna mixed with wine or brandy is addictive. If the dosage is incorrect, madness, delirium and even death can occur²⁵.

The Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*). The binary scientific name - regional names

The Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*). The scientific name

a_{ii} On the one hand, the term *Achillea* brings to our mind the legendary Greek hero Achilles. It is believed that he treated his wounded soldiers, i.e. those suffering from wounds or cuts: “the term *Achillea* is derived from the Greek name Achilles and denotes the plant with which the great hero healed Telephos, son of Hercules, in exchange for the promise that the latter would show the Achaeans the way to Troy”²⁶.

a_{iii} On the other hand, we find the term *Achillea* in various plant species: *Achillea cartilaginea*, *Achillea collina*, *Achillea crithmifolia*, *Achillea distans*, *Achillea neilreichii*, *Achillea pannonica*, *Achillea ptarmica*, *Achillea shurii*, *Achillea setacea*²⁷.

a₂ The term *millefolium* < “a thousand leaves” is of Latin origin.

The Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*). Regional names

The yarrow²⁸ knows a lot of regional names spread in all ethnographic areas of our country.

b₁ Dendromorphic isotopy: *Alunele*, *Brădățel*;

b₂ Zoomorphic isotopy: *Coadă-șoarecii*, *Coadă hârcelului*, *Coadă-hârțului*, *Șorecie*;

b₃ Phytomorphic + zoomorphic isotopy: *Iarba-oilor*, *Iarba șoarecelui*;

²³ The place where belladonna grows has a special status, it is beyond the boundaries of the village: “belladonna was brought from the forest, from the place where it grows called, locally, Grădina Dânselor”. (Ghinoiu 2013, p. 187).

²⁴ In Bessarabia, there are many families with the name of the homonymous plant, <https://nume.casata.md/index.php?action=viewnume&id=41138>, Website visit: 20.07.2022.

²⁵ See details in Răchișan 2022, pp. 49-51.

²⁶ Ioan Milică, <https://limbaromana.md/index.php?go=articole&n=1077>, Website visit: 18.07.2022.

²⁷ Borza 1968, pp. 9-10.

²⁸ See also other medicinal plants analyzed through the prism of the sacred - profane binary in Răchișan 2017b: 989-1004. See also other regional names in Borza 1968, p. 10.

- b₄** Medical isotopy: *Strănutătoare*;
- b₅** Chromatic isotopy²⁹: *Rotățele albe*.
- c.** Anthroponyms (family names): *Șoricel, Șoricică, Șoricuț*³⁰.
- d.** Therapeutic role (folk medicine): stomachaches, wounds, cuts³¹.

4. Conclusions

The scientific (scholarly) denominative model and the folk (naive) model emphasize the scientific name–regional names binary. The scholarly thinking–empirical thinking dichotomy reveals the captivating universe of phytomorphic symbols (belladonna, yarrow) deciphered from a linguistic perspective. The scientific name eliminates any confusion when two plants happen to have equivalent names. Regional names, spread throughout the ethnographic areas of our country, based on empirical thinking, become linguistically important. At the same time, isotopies (anthropomorphic, avimorphic, phytomorphic, zoomorphic, etc.), microtoponyms, anthroponyms, euphemistic names, the shift from linguistics to ethnology, folklore, mythology and folk medicine reveal the complexity of the healing herbs subject to analysis (belladonna, yarrow).

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²⁹ Note that the flowers are not only white, but also pinkish, red.

³⁰ https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/List%C4%83_de_numere_rom%C3%A2ne%C8%99ti_-_litera_%C8%98, Website visit: 20.07.2022.

³¹ Borza 1968, p. 10.

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