

Ritual botanicals against the evil-eye in Tuscany, Italy.—In ethnopharmacological research, the evaluation of field data using anthropological and social science methods and concepts forms the basis of all further analytical work. In the idiom of western medical research, it is important to understand the uses of biological materials utilized in popular pharmacopoeias. During the last decades in Italy, field studies related to ritual species rarely have been carried out with the exception of a few comprehensive ethnobotanical surveys (1, 2). As part of an ethnobotanical field study carried out in Tuscany, central Italy, we recorded data for botanicals that, as part of local ritual knowledge, are used in the prevention and diagnosis of the evil-eye.

The evil-eye (*malocchio*) represents an example of a complex anthropological-medical system, which refers to the ability of the human eye to cause, or at least to project, harm when it is directed by certain individuals towards others (3, 4). The evil eye has had a long history within the circum-Mediterranean regions (5, 6, 7), from where it may have been taken to Latin America (8, 9).

In central Italy, the cause of the evil eye is represented by the glance of a person toward an other person (*maldocchiato*); this can also be involuntary, and is different from the phenomenon of the charm (10). In northwestern Tuscany the evil eye can also arise from the glance of an animal and be given to an animal. The effect is a generalized disease, which seems to be not perceived in the studied area by special symptoms but by a generalized continued sequence of little banal troubles and accidents in daily life. Only animals seem to become asthenic and babies are said to cry continuously. All can be prevented by botanical amulets and good omens and healed by ritual prayers (Fig. 1).

Amulets and Good Omens in Preventing the Evil-Eye. Botanicals that are reputed to be active in preventing the evil eye are generally represented by wild species (Table 1). Most of them seem to have also played a central role in local medicinal practices (11).

During Christmas eve, for example, branches of *Juniperus communis* L., *Helichrysum italicum* Roth. G. Don, and *Spartium junceum* L. are burned to prevent the evil eye. This use is common in other Italian regions (1, 2). Another possibility is to place *Foeniculum vulgare* Miller ssp. *vulgare* fruits and *Olea europaea* L. dried

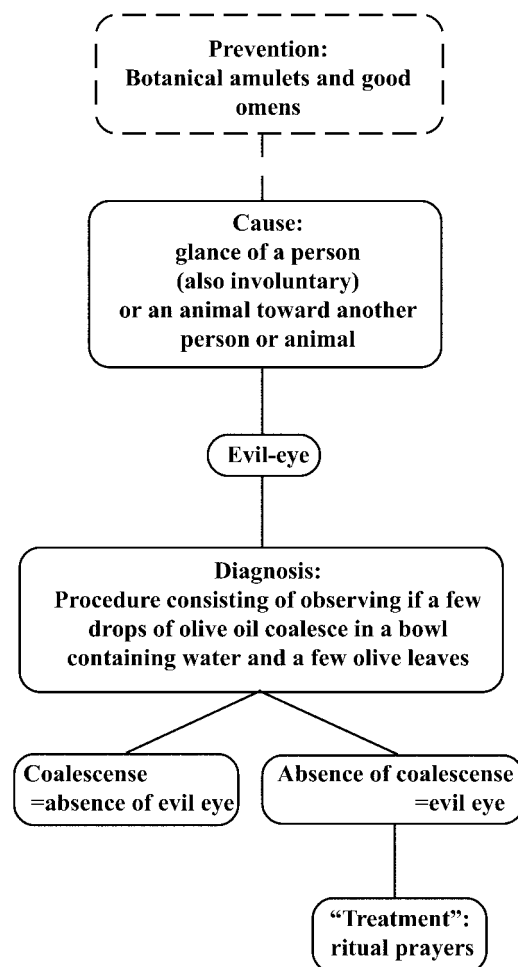


Fig. 1. The evil eye system.

leaves (these last previously blessed during the ceremony on the Catholic Palm Sunday) in the *breo*, a small bag constituted by cloth (generally red), and to attach it to men's clothes or cows' horns as an amulet.

A protective function against the evil eye is ascribed also to *Allium sativum* L. bulbs, *Buxus sempervirens* L. and *Satureja montana* L. branches, and, more rarely, decoctions of *Clematis vitalba* L. shoots.

In particular, *Buxus* sp. represents the central element of the different rituals during the Catholic Lent and the Holy Week and is said to be a good omen in a few local folktales. Similarly, locals attributed apotropaic properties to predict the future to *Sedum reflexum* L. This species is pulled up by the roots and grown in the house

TABLE 1. RITUAL BOTANICALS RELATED TO THE EVIL-EYE IN TUSCANY.

Species	Family	Vernacular name(s)	Wild: W; Cultivated: C; Semi- cultivated: SC	Part used	Modality of use	Prevention of the evil eye	Good omen: + Bad omen: -	Use in the diagnosis of the evil-eye	Other uses of the species in the studied area: Food: F; Medicine: M
<i>Allium sativum</i> L.	Liliaceae	aglio	C	bulbs	necklaces	X			F, M
<i>Brassica oleracea</i> L. susp. <i>robertiana</i> (Gay) Rouy et Fouc.	Brassicaceae	cavolo di San Vi- ano	W	leaves	little pieces eaten raw		+		
<i>Buxus sempervirens</i> L.	Buxaceae	bossolo; bussolo; "verde"	W, SC	branches	keep in the trousers	X	+		
<i>Clematis vitalba</i> L.	Ranunculaceae	vezzadro	W	leaves	decoction: external baths	X			
<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i> ssp. <i>vulgare</i> L.	Apiaceae	finocchio selvati- co	W	fruits ("anacini")	component of the "breo"	X			F, M
<i>Helichrysum italicum</i> (Roth) Don	Asteraceae	canugiulo; canu- gioro	W	aerial parts	burned on Christmas eve		+		M
<i>Juglans regia</i> L.	Juglandaceae	noce	C, SC	whole tree	permanence under its shade		-		F, M
<i>Juniperus communis</i> L.	Cupressaceae	ginevro; ginepro; zinevro	W	branches	burned on Christmas eve	X	+		F, M
<i>Olea europaea</i> L.	Oleaceae	olivo	C (W)	leaves	put in a dish with water and olive oil component of the "breo"		+	X	M
<i>Rosa</i> sp. pl.	Rosaceae	rosa	C	fruits: oil petals	put in a dish with water and olive leaves eaten raw on St. Rita's day	X	+	X	F, M
<i>Satureja montana</i> L.	Lamiaceae	"timo"	W	bunches	hang in the house	X	+		F
<i>Sedum reflexum</i> L.	Crassulaceae	erbo dell'Ascen- sione; parrucca	W	whole plant	hang in the house		+		
<i>Spartium junceum</i> L.	Fabaceae	ginestra	W	stems	burned on Christmas eve		+		

(with or without soil). Its flowering is seen as lucky sign for the future, the contrary as a bad omen.

The sharp form of the leaves is implicated in such species as *Spartium*, *Juniperus*, *Helichrysum*, *Satureja*, and *Clematis* ssp. Historical reasons, on the other hand, might be postulated for *Buxus* and *Juniperus* ssp., traditionally considered in the folklore of Central Europe to have apotropaic properties (12, 13) (no doubt because the studied area has been long dominated by Longobards, and conserve traces derived from the old Germanic world). On the other hand, *Feoniculum vulgare* and *Allium sativum* are both well known for having a ritual significance in old Greece and by Romans (14). The tradition of the ritual eating of pieces of the leaf of the rare wild growing *Brassica oleracea* ssp. *robertiana* (Gay) Rouy et Fouc. and the petals of *Rosa* sp. are seen as good omens related to their religious meanings: the former is reputed to have constituted the only nourishment of the local popular St. Viano, whereas rose petals are only ingested on St. Rita's day (22 May).

Diagnosis of the Evil-Eye. This diagnosis is carried out by people with special knowledge (generally women). The procedure consists of observing in front of the patient if a few drops of olive oil coalesce in a bowl containing water and a few *Olea europaea* leaves in the form of a cross. The coalescence of the oil drops is seen as a sign for health, the contrary as a sign for the occurrence of the evil eye.

Treatment of the Evil-Eye. To heal the evil eye, popular prayers are recited by the same people who diagnose the illness. Some examples: *Gesù, Giuseppe e Maria se c'è il malocchio mandatelo via* (repeated three times); *in nome di Gesù e di Maria il malocchio vada via*; *in nome di tutti i Santi il malocchio non vada avanti*; *in nome di San Marco e di San Pietro il malocchio torni indietro*; *col nome di Gesù di Giuseppe e di Maria se* (name of the person, thought to have been affected by the evil eye) *ha il malocchio vada via*; and *Santissima Trin-*

ità, abbiate voi pietà; Santissima Concezione, questo malocchio vada in perdizione. In some cases the rituals are repeated by pronouncing *Pater, Ave,* and *Gloria* in Latin three times. In other cases, the clothes of the person affected by the evil eye are boiled.

Acknowledgment. Part of this work was presented at the 6th International Congress on Ethnopharmacology, Zurich, Switzerland, September 2000.

Literature Cited. (1) Guarrera, P. 1994. Il patrimonio etnobotanico del Lazio, Regione Lazio, Rome, Italy. (2) Giusti, S. 1995. Le piante magiche. Una ricerca storico-antropologica, Domograf, Rome, Italy. (3) Maloney, C. 1976. The evil eye. New York, Columbia University Press, USA. (4) Migliore, S. 1997. Mal'occhio: ambiguity, evil-eye, and the language of distress. University of Toronto Press. (5) Tripp-Reimer, T. 1983. Nursing Research, 32(2):97–101. (6) Kern-Ulmar, B. 1991. Judaism: a Quarterly Journal. 40(3):344–353. (7) Thomsen, M. L. 1992. Journal of Near Eastern Studies 51(1): 19–32. (8) Benoist, J. 1997. Personal communication. (9) Sturzenegger, O. 1999. Le mauvais oeil de la lune. Ethnomédecine creole en Amérique du sud, Karthala, Paris, France. (10) Pazzini, A. 1980. Storia tradizioni e leggende nella medicina popolare, Recordati editore, Milan, Italy. (11) Pieroni, A. 2000. Journal of Ethnopharmacology 70:235–273. (12) Hoefler, M. 1908. Quelle und Forschungen zur Deutsche Volkskunde. Band V: Volksmedizinische Ethnobotanik der Germanen, Ludwig Verlag, Wien. (13) Hoffmann-Krayer E, and Bachtold-Stäubli, J. 1927–1942. Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens, Berlin/Leipzig, Germany. (14) Lenz, H. O. 1859. Botanik der alten Griechen und Römer, Thienemann Verlag, Gotha, Germany.

—*Andrea Pieroni, Centre for Pharmacognosy and Phytotherapy, The School of Pharmacy, University of London, 29–39 Brunswick Square, London WC1N 1AX, UK, andrea.pieroni@ams1.ulsop.ac.uk; Maria Elena Giusti, Cattedra di Storia delle Tradizioni Popolari, Dipartimento di Italianistica, Università degli Studi di Firenze, Piazza Savonarola 1, I-50132 Firenze, Italy, elenagiusti@tin.it.*