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Baneful Herbs

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Baneful Herbs

Presented by Coby Michael Ward

Author of The Poisoner's Pocket Guide
Series

Blogger at The Poisoner's Apothecary

Poisoner's Vocabulary

- **The Poison Path-** a term coined by Dale Pendell, author of the influential series *Pharmako Poeia*, *Pharmako Dynamis* and *Pharmako Gnosis*; to describe the study of sacred herbs known as entheogens, their chemistry and ritual use in spiritual practices.
- **Entheogens-** plants that have been used by humans to connect with the spiritual realms and the divine; having profound effects on human physiology and perception (Hallucinogens and Psychedelics having a more negative connotation)
 - Depressants, stimulants, soporific (sleep inducing) herbs
- **Baneful Herbs-** plants that have a dramatic effect on human physiology, often poisonous in nature, producing altered states. Often historically associated with witchcraft and the spirit world.

Poison in History

- **Veneficium**- originally a Latin word for the practice and crime of poisoning that was made illegal in Ancient Rome due to its prevalence. Cases of private poisoning frequently occurred under Roman Emperors.
- *Venenum*: derived from the name of the goddess Venus to indicate a poison or love potion.
- *Venefici, Veneficus, Veneficia*: titles for those well versed in the art of poisoning. Those who excelled in this art were in great demand.
 - Locusta- was one of the most celebrated Veneficia known for the poisoning of Claudius and Britannicus.
 - The emperor Nero placed others under her instruction
- Laws were passed against the purchase and sale of poisons for poisoning because of its frequency

Poison in History



Accusations of poisoning were frequently brought against individuals, particularly females

The first public instance of condemnation for *Veneficium*, occurred in 350 BCE when plague and pestilence were blamed on Roman matrons. The testimony of a slave girl led to the condemnation of 170 women.

Veneficium and *Maleficium* were closely related and often seen as one and the same. Where one was found it was likely to find the other. *Veneficus* was a term that often meant both *poisoner* and *sorcerer*.

In the ancient world, organic chemistry was not understood and a plant's properties were attributed to arcane influences

Poison In History

▶ The view of poisons and antidotes in the ancient world were much different than they are today.

For example the historian Pliny identifies the Salamander as one of the most poisonous reptiles capable of wiping out entire nations.

- Via Contagion, if the creature climbed up a tree the entire tree and its fruits would become poisonous, killing those who would eat from it.

Viper's blood and Bull's Blood was also thought to be poisonous.

Pliny also warned against mushrooms, which fascinated numerous ancient cultures, stating the difficulty in distinguishing certain varieties

- It was thought that those growing near hobnails, rusted iron, rotten cloth, the hole of a serpent, or those breathed upon by serpents were poisoned

Ancient Antidotes

A number of interesting antidotes and prophylactic measures were taken in the ancient world to counter the effects of poisons.

- Mulled wine was often suggested as a common antidote for numerous botanical poisons.
- Special cups made of certain materials were thought to change color, or neutralize the effects of poisoned beverages. Just like chalices made of amethyst were thought to counter the effects of alcohol.
- Mithradates Eupator was known for his botanical knowledge and created the well known prophylactic Mythradata, which was used to prevent numerous illnesses, and acted as an antidote to many toxins. Recipes for the quasi-mythical preparation contain upwards of 65 different ingredients.
- *Agrimonia eupatoria*- Was named after him for its employment against poisons administered by enemies

Archebuse Water- Originally made by monks in St. Antoine in 1500s, still available today

Arquebusade Water

- Was used to treat soldiers' wounds, and had an unrivaled reputation for its healing properties and benefits to the skin.
- It traditionally contains 75 herbs
 - 39- with wound-healing properties
 - 43- anti-inflammatory properties
 - 12- with hemostatic, pain-relieving, and anti-aging properties



Le monastère Saint-Antoine dans le Vercors

Classic herbs of the Poison Path

- Numerous plant based traditions all over the world that utilize chemically active plants as part of their spiritual practice.
- Plants Native to Europe, the Mediterranean and North America
- Historically associated with magic, shamanism, witchcraft, and the spirit world.
- The Poison Path utilizes mythology, folklore, chemistry, alchemy, and botany to achieve "phytognosis"



Solanaceae

- This group of plants became associated with witchcraft and the devil in the Middle Ages, however these plants have a long history connecting them to magic and myth
- Commonly known as Nightshades, these are the plants of traditional witchcraft
- Deadly Nightshade, Mandrake, Datura, and Henbane are the most well known plants within this category, each plant having its own unique history and lore



Unguentum Lamiarum: Witches' Ointments

- In the Middle Ages, medicine was in its infancy, and ointments or unguents were common ways of treating a number of ailments. Botanical ingredients were infused into animal fat as their base, they were applied to the skin to deliver their ingredients
- Witches' Flying Ointments were a combination of medieval superstition, plant lore and remnants of older shamanic practices
- During a time when religion and science were at odds with one another the possession of these ointments made accusations of heresy easily provable
- The majority of the plants associated with witchcraft show up in recipes for flying ointments, although uses of their pain relieving properties were known to the ancient world.

Alkaloids

- Compounds with diverse and important physiological effects on humans and other mammals
 - Morphine, strychnine, ephedrine, nicotine, tropanes
- Basic alkalis on the pH scale
- Primarily found in plants
 - Papaver (poppy) Solanaceae (nightshade) Ranunculaceae (buttercup)
Amaryllidaceae (Amaryllis)
- 3,000 types of alkaloids have been identified, although their role is not completely understood

Alkaloids: Tropanes

- Both organic and inorganic alkaloids, react with acids to form salts, which can be extracted using solvents
- The alkaloids in the Solanaceae family are Atropine, Hyoscyamine, Hyoscine/Scopolamine, Solanine and others.
- These alkaloids are anticholinergic, and effect the autonomic nervous system by blocking messages in the brain



▶ The Importance of Anticholinergics

- Atropine, one of the alkaloids found in *Atropa belladonna*, played an important role in the study of the nervous system and the discovery of the neurotransmitter acetylcholine
- Atropine, an anticholinergic blocks acetylcholine in the central and peripheral nervous system
- The peripheral nervous system is responsible for smooth muscles, gastrointestinal tract, urinary tract and lungs
- Used to treat dizziness, GI disorders, short term insomnia, and respiratory disorders
- Atropine is on the World Health Organization's list of essential medicines

Anticholinergic Toxicity

- Anticholinergics such as Atropine and Scopolamine are considered deliriants
- The effects on the central nervous system resemble delirium including confusion, disorientation, euphoria, dysphoria
- Memory problems, loss of concentration
- Visual disturbances such as visual, auditory and sensory disturbances
- Warping surfaces, dancing lines, lifelike objects indistinguishable from reality
- Phantom smoke and the feeling of presences



Alkaloid Extraction and Spagyric Tinctures

- Shamanic Plant Based Alchemy: Spagyria (Greek): *Spao* (to draw out), *Ageiro* (to gather, bind) *Solve et Coagula, et habebis magisterium*.
- Recognizes the completeness of the natural compound when the altered parts are recombined
- Creates an energetically whole entity and opens the plant, releasing stronger curative properties
- *Psychedelic Shamanism: The Cultivation, Preparation and Shamanic Use of Psychotropic Plants* by Jim DeKorne. Describes the chemical and alchemical extraction process of psychoactive plants.

Medicinal Preparations:

- Tinctures
 - Tropane alkaloids are readily absorbable through skin and mucous membranes
 - They are soluble in organic solvents and fats
 - Acids extract alkaloids and transform them into their salts, Vinegars and Alcohols have an acidic pH
 - Tinctures can be used medicinally at lower concentrations 1:10 and entheogens at higher concentrations 1:5
 - *Atropa belladonna*, 1 pt. Herb: 10 pt. Solvent, 70% (alcohol and water mixture) 2.5-10 ml/week
 - *Hyoscyamus niger*, 1pt. Herb: 10 pt. Solvent, 70% (alcohol and water mixture) 5-20 ml/week
 - *Datura stramonium*, 1 pt. Herb: 10 pt. Solvent, 45% (alcohol and water mixture) 5-10 ml/week



➤ Medicinal Preparations:

- Ointments can be used topically as medicinal concentrations for their pain relieving properties, at higher concentrations they are utilized as powerful trance inducing tools
- Ointments can be made by infusing the dried plant material into an oil or fat and adding beeswax for consistency
- Traditional ointments were made of bear grease, pig's fat and allegedly the fat of unbaptised children (thanks to the Dark Ages) animal fat allows for quick absorption through the skin (esp. Pig fat)
- Soot was also a traditional ingredient, thought to give an indication of how much of the ointment was applied, however wood ashes serve as an alkaline base which facilitate extraction and absorption of alkaloids

The Witches' Ointment

- Used for rites of astral flight to retrieve information from the spirit world, and to attend the Witches' Sabbat, flying ointments are a component of traditional witchcraft
- The acidic tincture extracts the alkaloids, converting them to salts, the solvent is allowed to evaporate, leaving behind the salts which are added to the fat base, when mixed with ash the salts are more easily absorbed through the skin.



Unguentum Populeum

- An ointment of the medieval period, created by Alexandrian physician Nicholas Myrepsos Alexandrinus, 13th century.
- Used as a pain relieving anodyne, also employed to stop evil gossip
- The ratio 1:10 may be increased to 1:4 to create a trance inducing Witch's Ointment
- 1 part dried white or black poppy leaves, 1 part belladonna, 1 part henbane, 1 part black nightshade and 40 parts fat (usually pig lard) or high quality oil jojoba or coconut
- Leaves are bruised and covered with 4 parts 95% alcohol, allowed to sit 24 hours
- Fat is then added and simmered on low heat for 3 hrs, stirring frequently. 8 parts of bruised poplar buds are added as a preservative and simmered 10 hrs. Then Strained

The Spiritual Characteristics of the Nightshades

- Some plants help with connecting to the Divine, celestial beings, and our higher selves.
- The Nightshades are used to connect with the dead, dark goddesses and gods, spirits of witchcraft, and the Shadow
- Mandrake, Datura, Belladonna and Henbane are some of the most well-known members of this family, all with connections to sorcery, divination, and the dead
- Five-petaled plants, characteristic of the Nightshade family, are used as gateway herbs used to open us to spiritual experiences, astral travel, and divination
- As herbs of traditional witchcraft, they act as magical catalysts, empowering ritual tools, thinning the veil, spirit flight and necromancy

Deadly Nightshade, *Atropa belladonna*

- A patron plant ally of witches and spirit workers
- Connections to Circe (Odyssey), Hecate and Medea, a sacred plant of dark goddesses of war, rebirth, and sexuality. Associated with the Norse goddess Hela.
- *Atropa*, named after the Fate who cut the cord of life, was originally the name of Mandrake, which caused confusion. It was also later known as *Solanum somniferum*, Sleepy Nightshade, and called *Solanum lethale* until 1788 until it was reintroduced as *Belladonna folia* in 1809.
- In magical practice it can be used to open up the gates to the Underworld, the realm of the ancestors and shadow. It gives us access to the powers of fate, the knowledge of the dead, and spirits of the otherworld.
- As a Saturnian plant it is used to keep things hidden and protect secrets from being discovered. It can be utilized to create illusions in rituals of deception

Belladonna, Witch's Berry

- The berries can be made into a ritual ink for workings of banishing, cursing, and drawing sigils
- Small amounts of berry tincture may be ingested for their hypnotic quality to induce deep trance prior to ritual
- 1-2 berries can cause minor perceptual changes
- The juice is used to empower ritual tools, especially those used in working with spirits, divination, and spirit flight



Black Henbane, *Hyoscyamus niger*

- This plant is particularly connected to the Dead and the realms they inhabit
- The seeds are employed as offerings to the dead, and utilized as an incense for necromantic rites
- In ancient lore, the Henbane has connections with the Underworld, sacred to Persephone, worn by the dead to forget their lives, and by Hercules to show his ability to travel to Hades. It is associated with the River Lethe, the River of Forgetfulness.
- In Norse mythology, Henbane is connected to the god Thor, the god of thunder, and was used by Germanic witches in weather spells.

Stinking Nightshade, Henbane

- A Recipe for Conjuring Spirits of the Dead
- 1 pt. Fennel root/seeds (*Foeniculum vulgare*)
- 1 pt. Olibanum (*Boswellia scara*)
- 4 pt. Henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*)
- 1 pt. Coriander (*Coriandrum sativum*)
- 1 pt. Cassia Bark (*Cinnamomum cassis*)
- With a candle to light the way, this incense was taken to the forest, burned on a tree stump, and when the candle burned out spirits would manifest.
- *A Folk Herbal*, By Jon Hyslop and Paul Ratcliffe, 1989.



Thornapple, *Datura stramonium*



- Also known as Devil's Trumpet, Jimson Weed and Devil's Apple; a member of the Nightshade Family, *Datura* is used in both North America and Eurasia as a visionary herb for shamanic purposes
- It contains the same alkaloids as belladonna, in addition it contains high amounts of Scopolamine which results in its amnesiac effects.
- *Datura* can be used to banish nightmares and help us overcome deep rooted fears, Hallucinogenic doses can result in visions that are sinister in nature, reflecting our subconscious fears
- Shares a close affinity with the Moon and Nocturnal workings, it is a plant of the Night, during which time its flowers emit an intoxicating aroma.

Loco Weed, Thornapple

- Although the seeds contain more of the active alkaloids they are difficult to extract, so the leaves are more typically used.
- They are either smoked with tobacco or made into an incense and the fumes are inhaled
- The seeds can be employed as a painrelieving narcotic and are usually extracted by boiling in water or macerating in alcohol



North American Baneful Herbs

- Milkweed: *Asclepias syriaca*, can be used medicinally for skin, lung and stomach issues and snakebites. It is one of the only sources of food for Monarch butterflies.
- Taken incorrectly, in large amounts can be toxic when taken incorrectly
- The fiber inside the pod can be spun into a natural thread
- Freshly uprooted plants are carried over the threshold of a home to keep out unwanted visitors



North American Baneful Herbs



- Pointsettia: *Euphorbia pulcherrima*: This festive yuletide plant hides a toxin in its sap. When it comes into contact with the eyes it can cause temporary blindness.
 - The latex has been used to induce vomiting.
 - Its leaves are used in poultices to relieve pain.
- Pokeweed: *Phytolacca americana*: An impressive looking plant with black berries, and purplish-pink stems. The toxic berries are traditionally taken in the south in small amounts as a preventative medicine.
 - Used to sever the connection between the user and spellwork of others
 - Physically and spiritually purgative

North American Baneful Herbs

- Poke weed is used in uncrossing, breaking hexes, curses, and removing spiritual parasites and malevolent magic
- Helps us move on the the next stage in our endeavors by removing what blocks our progress
- Negates the control and influence of others and helps us recover our personal power



North American Baneful Herbs

- Black Walnut: *Juglans nigra*:
 - Allelopathic: a characteristic of certain plants that are able to kill encroaching species in their vicinity. Juglone is the walnut's toxin that it uses to change the composition of the soil.
 - The area around the tree was said to have a baneful influence, and was a gathering place for witches. It was bad luck to sleep beneath walnut trees, plant them near homes, or plant other things near them.
 - Connected to Jupiter/Thor/Zeus through its Latin name and use in weather magic
 - A sinister tree, associated with Saturn, Persephone and the Underworld
 - It may be used to purge oneself of unwanted influence and astral parasites
 - Its wood can be used to create blasting rods, and tools for acquiring occult knowledge

North American Baneful Herbs

- Walnut trees were said to be the site of Witches gathering for the Sabbat, in particular the witches of Benevento, and is used as a tool of spirit flight
- The wood can be used to work with the dead, dark gods and goddesses, and can be fashioned into tools for directing cthonic powers and containing herbs of a dark disposition
- White Snake Root: *Ageratina altissima*: known as milk fever plant, it caused milk sickness in early settlers when consumed by grazing animals used for milk
 - Gained infamy by being the plant that killed Abraham Lincoln's mother
 - It has small white flowers similar to Boneset, which indicate its Saturnian nature
 - The plant can be dried and used to counteract occult poisons, baneful magic, by being cast over the afflicted.
 - It removes unwanted spirits and can be used in uncrossing incense

Solanum nigrum: Black Nightshade

- A common member of the Solanaceae family, it has the characteristic black berries.
- They contain the alkaloid Solanine, in higher concentrations before they become ripe.
- According to Pliny, it is "used to invoke obscene desires, forms and images"
- Many of the same magical properties as Belladonna; Saturnian and Hecatean sorcery, baneful magic, dark moon workings, and honoring the Crone



North American Baneful Herbs

- Black Nightshade: when boiled, loses its alkaloid content, the infusion can be used to bathe rain making effigies used in weather magic
- Its black berries can be tinctured and made into a Saturnian ink for the creation of sigils and other written charms
- Bittersweet Nightshade: *Solanum dulcamara*: also known as Woody Nightshade this vining plant can be used in spells of binding, and is made into wreaths that are hung in the home for protection.
- It is used against sorcery and the evil eye traditionally, and also in cleansing and healing rituals
- It is connected with Cthonic goddesses like Persephone, and its blood red berries can be used as offerings for the dead

Resources



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