

MANDRAGORA*

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BOTANICS

Mandragora officinarum (*M. Vernalis*, *M. Officinarum* Berthold) or *Atropa mandragora* L. is a plant known since antiquity; its name comes from the Greek and means „poisonous to cattle”.(2) Other names in Western languages: „root of the witches”, „herbs of the witches”, „crazy herb”.(1)

It is a Mediterranean plant, originary from Calabria, Sicily, the South of Spain and the North of Africa; from the family of the Solanaceae, discovered by the botanist Bulliard. Its root is tuberous and bifurcated, covered by subtle threads, with the aspect of hair; large leaves, oval or lanceolate, at times undulate or indented, forming a rosette dense in whose middle grow white or violet flowers.(4) The odor of the fresh juice when squeezed may provoke nausea and it is similar to snakes` (sic) (2). This odor is sweetish and has a soporific effect, already known in antiquity.

It contains many alkaloids, the most important of which are hyoscine, hyosciamine, atropine and mandragorine, some of them are toxic, with parasympatholytic effects, as all the important alkaloids of Solanaceae.

It is an antispasmodic and external analgesic, employed in the treatment of scrofulous tumors.

The plant is almost stemless, as a whole, it seems oriented to the root; the aerial part is meager, both in its manifestation as in its pharmacological principles.

Its use as a medicinal plant is very ancient. Hippocrates indicated it as a remedy for anxiety and depression, in low doses. Larger doses provoke atropinic effects: midriasis and spasmolysis. Among the remarkable pharmacological effects, besides the anticholinergic: restlessness and sensorial superexcitation, flushes on the head. Larger doses have a sedative and soporific effect, which increases until deep sleepness. External applications cause a decrease in the sensitiveness to pain, until anesthesia. Besides the physical symptoms, also psychological symptoms may appear, with hallucinations and eventually, delirium.

The spasmolytic action of the native preparation is remarkable: colics, hemorrhoidal tenesmus, as well as the bronchial spasms of asthmatic crises have been indications of mandragora in the course of time.

SYMBOLISM

As its tuberous root evokes the human shape, it appears as a magical plant in all the Mediterranean

cultures. Contrary to the other Solanaceae, the root predominates in its structure, as if its formative forces concentrate there. Symbolically, it is equivalent to the “root” of the human being, sexuality, and further, to fertility. The powerful “root” represents vitality, and vitality is the ground for prosperity. These symbolic equivalents explain in part the legends of its virtue as an afrodisiac and to assure fertility.

Roots of mandragora, probably used in magic, were found in pharaonic graves from ca. 1700 BCE.

(5) In the Bible it is represented as a plant with sexual meaning (Gen. 30:14-16) and associated to fertility, as with its help Leah became pregnant of Jacob’s fifth son. In Song of Songs 7:14, “The mandrakes give forth fragrance, and at our doors are all manner of precious fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved”, with a soft erotic tone and references to fertility and prosperity.

The plant was familiar to the ancient Greeks, Pythagoras held it as magic plant, naming it due to its „anthropomorphic” shape and Dioscorides mentioned its afrodisiac virtues and its usefulness in cases of female sterility.

The symbolic equivalence between the human being and the „homunculus” (the image of the root of mandragora) made that in the Middle Ages to be used by witches as well as in countless popular superstitions. From the root of mandragora, human shapes were sculpted with magic purposes, to exorcize or protect from misfortunes. It was used as a talisman or amulet against disease, it was supposed to bring luck in litigations, female fertility and easy deliveries. It reached high prices. (10) Mandragora became a magic instrument to convey the human image.

Shakespeare mentioned it in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*.

From a linguistic point of view, there is some proximity – even confusion – between mandragora and belladonna, which reflects their botanical proximity.(10) In Linne’s classification, both are species of the genus *Atropa* (*Atropa belladonna* and *Atropa mandragora*), so they could be mistaken by popular healers. Similarly, popular names of belladonna in Romanian and Hungarian derive from mandragora, as it can be easily seen when splitted into syllables:

Man-dra-go-ra (Latin) Mă-tră-gu-nă (Romanian) Na-dra-ga-lya (Hungarian)

Showing that a distinction between both was not systematic.

PATHOGENESY

The history of the pathogenesis of *Mandragora* began with HC Allen (1), a very short earlier proving by LC Dufresne (1834), through the smelling of the fresh juice of the leaves, and by BW

Richardson, in 1874, with a mother tincture prepared from the aerial part of the plant, without the root. Clarke (2) draws significantly from these sources. A new series of provings was performed in the middle of the 20th century by Metzger (1951) in Stuttgart, on 30 provers, all doctors, employing dilutions 2, 4 and 6, and by Raeside (7), who performed in 1963-1964 three provings that verified the symptoms reported by Metzger and added others on pain in the limbs.

The earlier provings are far from complete, the major symptoms are those related to parasympatholysis, almost identical to those of *Atropinum* and some of the major symptoms of *Belladonna*:

- feeling of congestion of the brain vessels
- dilatation of pupils and a feeling of confusion and enlargement of the visual field
- hyperacusia and high sensitiveness to noises
- dryness of mucosa, severe dryness of the mouth, atonic constipation with dry and hard stools.

It must be mentioned that these symptoms appeared with provings employing the aerial part of the plant, without the roots, while the modern provings (after 1950) were performed starting from the tincture prepared exclusively from the root. This is the preparation described in all modern pharmacopoea.

SYMPTOMS

There are many discordances between the materia medica and the repertory regarding this remedy. I have highlighted, following Julian (4), the symptoms that appeared more repeated in the provings. These may be considered the true characteristics of the remedy, to be taken into account when evaluating clinical cases. They are written in *italics*. Some of them are very important – they are written in **negrito** and lead to a more thorough study of the remedy when they appear in a patient.

GENERALS

- Depressive conditions with nervousness, hypersensitiveness to noises and odors, ameliorates urinating. Compared to other Solanaceae, it is to be remarked the sensitiveness to odors – which appears also in *Colchicum*, another root rich in alkaloid, together with the general amelioration by urination.
- Tiredness, weakness.
- Photophobia, although less strong than in *Belladonna*.
- The symptoms reflecting food desires and aversions are clear, well defined and appeared constantly in the provers: desire of spicy, pungent food; meat; cheese and sweets. Aversion to alcohol; fatty food; smell of fried food. Aggravation by coffee and fatty food.

These rubrics must be taken into account, especially when they appear in the same patient or the tastes of the patient change into this direction, after the appearance of the other symptoms.

MENTAL SYMPTOMS

The most constant characteristic of the remedy is the alternation of the psychological states and conditions: euphoria – depression; initially well disposed, wanted to embrace the whole world, but suddenly becomes sad, displeased, feels benumbed, concentration becomes weak. When nervous and irritable, does not bear noises and odors, urination ameliorated the psychological condition.

As *Belladonna* (the common symptoms are marked with an asterisk), it presents kinds of congestive headache, with vertigo and feeling of mental confusion (*). Headache may be pulsating, the cranium seems larger, and as if in a mist (*). Headache may also appear in the morning, caused by poor digestion. Headaches aggravated by: bending forwards (*), sun (*), after physical exertion, after tobacco and alcohol (*), upon the least touch, hunger; ameliorates by pressure, cold and fresh air, after a storm, after eating.

Sleep may be disturbed by disagreeable or terrible (*) dreams, or muscular pains. Although sleep was good in the night, wakes up tired, as if he had taken a somnifer (appears splitted in the repertory). Insomnia between 3:30 and 5 a.m. Dreams of falling, accidents.

Sensorial disturbs. Hyper-(*) or hypoaesthesia. Lack of sensitiveness, or strange sensations in the limbs and mucosa. Impression that the hands do not belong to him/her. Cannot identify the objects he/she holds in the hands. Feeling that the deeper sensitiveness is equally disturbed. Feeling of local burning in certain parts of the body. Eyes are painful, irritated, photophobia (*). Ocular neuralgia with spots in front of the eyes and confusion of sight as if the objects were blurred. Tinnitus as a buzz.

As a whole, the psychological and neurological symptoms are „milder” than in the rest of the Solanaceae, the suddenness, violence, obsessive themes, delirium and convulsions are missing.

SKIN

The most significant symptoms are seborrhea (*) on the face, the face looks dirty, and on the nape, underwear and sheets become easily dirty.

Oily perspiration on the palm of the hands, forehead and hairline. Nightly perspiration with penetrating odor. Cold perspiration, weariness in the trunk in the middle of the night, followed by a feeling of ease.

Hepatic vesicles on the face. Urticaria exantema on the back of the left hand and the edge of the left jaw. Burning pains on the skin, after exantema and furuncles. Furuncles on the face.

DIGESTIVE

In the first place, dryness felt in the mouth, tongue and pharynx, appearing in the provings with both the aerial part and the root. As other atropine-like remedies, the dryness of the mucosa is associated to a painful feeling, roughness as after hot water. Due to this, swallowing is difficult, painful or, on the contrary, the throat seems unsensitive, as if anesthetized.

Tongue covered by a white coat. Aphthas on the tongue or internal side of the cheeks.

Disagreeable odor from the mouth that only he/she notices.

Inflammation of the roots of the teeth; hemorrhagic gums, very sensitive to touch.

There are many abdominal symptoms that remind more *Colchicum* than the Solanaceae, first, the striking intolerance to odors.

Cramp pain in the stomach, ameliorated by eating, drinking and lying down. Hiccup with eructation, salivation and nausea. Feeling of fullness in the upper part of the abdomen, with dyspnea and palpitations (*Lycopodium*), ameliorated by motion, rising and expulsion of air (eructation, flats).

Pain in stomach, ameliorated by bending and rest (*Colocynthis*, *Magnesia phosphoricum*), with sensation as if sore, sensitive to pressure and motion. Each step provokes nettling pain.

Pain on the right hypocondrium. Abdominal distension, worse on the right side, which is tensed, painful, irradiating to the right shoulder (*Chelidonium*), which appears in the middle of the night and forces to urgent evacuation of stools.

Morning stools are yellow, with small ashy particles.

Recurrent pain, every half hour, in the lower abdomen, ameliorated by lying on the back (*Dioscorea*). Stools loose color, white or yellow, fetid, hard to evacuate, with urgency.

Crampy pains in lower abdomen. (*Podophyllum*)

Diarrhea appears suddenly, cannot reach fast enough the toilet.

Febrile summer diarrhea, with tenesmus and voracious hunger.

Stools with blood and clots, due to hemorrhoids.

Burning in anus after evacuation.

Its ameliorating effects on hepatic cirrhosis have been mentioned.

CIRCULATION

Palpitations, feeling of constriction in the heart, with a feeling as if the heart was constricted, ameliorated by the warmth of bed and rest.

Anginous pain, for one hour, with cold perspiration on the forehead. Awakes at 5 a.m. with angina pain.

Pain in the heart, aggravates in the morning, before a storm, by motion; ameliorates in bed, by rest and in fresh air. At times, ameliorates upon evacuation of diarrheic stools or standing up.

Sudden paleness of the face, with a feeling as if the fingers are dead.

Febrile feeling with pain in the bladder.

Febrile feeling with hot head(*), chills on the back and persistent subfebrile condition.

RESPIRATORY SYSTEM

Irritation of the nasal mucosa, with secretion and sneezing. Nasal crusts in the morning.

Intense dryness of the larynx(*), with irritative cough. Hoarse voice. Dense secretion in larynx and trachea.

GENITOURINARY SYSTEM

Extreme atonia of the bladder in spite of a feeling of pressure and urgency to urinate. Micturition difficult, needs exertion to eliminate the last drops. (*Causticum*)

Nocturnal enuresis.

Abundant urine, milky, with deposits of phosphate or beer color, with strong odor, associated to conjunctival jaundice.

Decrease of libido in men.

In women: menstruation a few days earlier or later. 1 ½ day before menstruation, leucorrhoea yellow brown, with lombar and pelvic pain, ameliorate by rest and in bed.

Sterility.

LOCOMOTOR SYSTEM

Pain as if needles in the upper part of the upper limbs, extending to the hands with a feeling of numbness. Severe pain on the right shoulder, aggravated by motion. Pain in the right shoulderblade and hand. Similar pain in the left shoulder. Feeling of numbness and cold in the arms.

Cramps in the hands with difficulty to write.

Pain in the right arm and left leg.

Heavy, cold legs, walking is painful in the morning upon rising. Muscular pains in the hips, thighs and calves, aggravating in the evening in rest. Cracking joints, especially in the hips, knees and elbow.

Pain as if cramps in all the joints, with feeling of weight and numbness.

Sciatic pain, more intense morning on rising from bed, ameliorate by heat, walking or pressure.

Rigidity and feeling of weight in the limbs, with articular and muscular pains.

Neuralgia and parestesia, especially unsensitiveness.

MODALITIES

Aggravation:

- on beginning to move
- cold – except the head congestion, which ameliorates by cold
- between 3 and 5 a.m.
- in change of weather, storms
- after fatty food
- touch

Amelioration:

- heat
- resting in bed
- lying on the back
- continuous motion
- after excretions (urine, menstruation)

Laterality:

Right

DILUTIONS

Mezger recommends dilutions between 12-30D. In antroposophic medicine (6), it is employed from the mother tincture to 30D, oral or parenteral. In the experience of the author, *Mandragora* 3D subcutaneous, periarticular proved effective in rheumatic affections.

MAJOR INDICATIONS

From the symptomatology, it may be observed that *Mandragora* acts as a mild *Belladonna* in cardiovascular and neurological affections, but more deeply on the osteoarticular system. The most significant clinical characteristic, that in our opinion represents the peculiarity of the remedy, is the concomitance of minor signs of sympaticotonia (dryness of mucosa, midriasis, etc.) with osteoarticular, hepatic and muscular disturbs.

Among the major indications:

- Alternating states of euphoria and depression (eventually, with intense sleepiness).
- Disturbs of the sensitiveness, parestesia, hyper or hypoaesthesia, cutaneous or sensorial (especially, photophobia with midriasis and blurred vision).
- Spasmodic and/or congestive cardiovascular and digestive disturbs.
- Polyarthritic or arthrosis complaints, with muscular pain and numbness.
- Herpetic eruptions on the face, with oily perspiration, eritematous lupus.
- Hepatic congestion with portal stasis and hemorrhoids.

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