

215. *MANDRAGORA OFFICINARUM* L. (SOLANACEAE) — Mandrake, Loveapple

As indicated in the biblical story of Leah and Rachel, mandrake was once thought to induce fertility. Arabs called it "devil's apples" because of its supposed powers to excite voluptuousness. The yellow plum-like fruits, ripe in Israel during wheat harvest, are sickeningly sweet, otherwise, rather insipid. Eaten in quantity, fruits produce dizziness and may even stimulate to insanity. Thought to stimulate conception, they have long been used in love potions and incantations. As late as 1630 in Hamburg, Germany, three women were executed for possession of mandrake root, supposed "evidence" that they were practicing witchcraft. From early times, the large man-shaped root has been an object of superstition. Jews considered the mandrake a charm against evil spirits. Others believed that mischief-making elves would find it unbearable. Once esteemed for its medicinal and narcotic properties, mandrake still may have orgiastic and magical applications among cults.^{11 38}

Mandrake is regarded as anesthetic, aphrodisiac, cathartic, cholagogue, emetic, hypnotic, mydriatic, narcotic, nervine, POISON, purgative, refrigerant, sedative, and stimulant. Fresh roots were once used for procuring sleep in continued pain, convulsions, rheumatic pain, and scrofulous tumors. Crushed leaves and boiled roots used to treat tumors.⁴ Boiled in milk, the roots were poulticed onto indolent ulcers. Mixed with brandy, the root is used for chronic rheumatism. Used for asthma, arthritis, colic, coughs, hayfever, hepatitis, schizophrenia, and sclerosis.

Reported to contain several alkaloids, among them apoatropine, atropine, belladonine, cuscohygrine, hyoscyamine, mandragorine, norhyoscyamine, scopine, and scopolamine. Total alkaloids run around 0.4% with hyoscyamine, scopolamine, and atropine in a 36:5:2 ratio.⁵⁸ Fatty oils contain oleic and linoleic acid, scopoline, scopoletine, hyoscine, 3-alpha-tigloyloxytropine, 3,6-ditigloyloxytropine, as well as "chrysatroposaure" and "tropas-saure".³³ Dry seeds contain 22.1% protein and 22.6% fat.²¹

Toxicity — "The fruit has been accounted poisonous, but without cause . . ." According to most authors, the plant is toxic, as the list of alkaloids would suggest. Atropine is anticholinergic, both central and peripheral. It tends to reduce secretions (gastric, intestinal, nasal, saliva, sweat, tears), decrease gastric and intestinal motility, and increase heart rate. It also causes pupil dilation, increase in intraocular pressure, and photophobia; 1-hyoscyamine and 1-scopolamine have essentially the same activities except that scopolamine is a powerful hypnotic and usually slows the heart rate.²⁹ Scopolamine-containing plants have been used as anesthetics for centuries in traditional Chinese medicine.