Ritual botanicals against the evil-eve 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

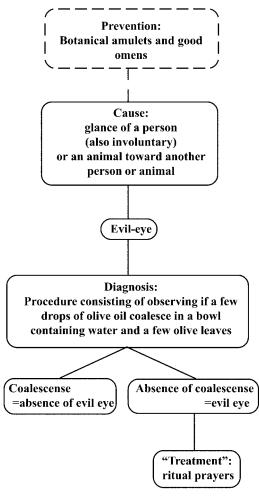


Fig. 1. The evil eye system.

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.

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

(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.

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