

# Ivan-da-marja

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The aim of the article is to analyse the process of giving some semiotic status to a plant on the basis of its features; to demonstrate the casual relationship between its appearance on the one hand and the phytonyms, superstitions, and rites on the other hand; to observe the ways of reflecting and semiotization of their features (color, smell, form) in traditional thought and creation. In this way it is possible to find some cognitive principles of including natural objects into the cultural sphere, their place in cultural and language models of different traditions and, finally, ethnocultural features by analysing the difference in such models. Here I would like to examine the ideas about several plants which are rather popular in traditional Slavonic culture and are named *ivan-da-marja*.

With equal frequency, two plants may be associated with this phytonym – blue cow-wheat *Melampyrum nemorosum* (Scrophularineae) and violet trichromatic *Viola tricolor* (Violaceae). Both plants are notable for the unusual color of their parts: petals of a violet have different colors, and blue cow-wheat's bracts are violet, unlike the green lower leaves, so they are perceived as flowers alongside real flowers, which are yellow. This feature allows us to analyse both plants within the limits of one article.<sup>1</sup>

This very feature has obviously served the reason for etiological legends surprisingly similar in their plot all the over East-Slavonic territory. For example, in Kholm'skaya Russia (Litinskiy *uyezd*) they said that a brother

<sup>1</sup> The same principle was applied for identification of mythological characters: «It is exactly in this sense that the names *rusalka*, *boginka*, *samodiva*, *vila* are used in the article. They should be taken as conventional terms; a certain set of characteristic features corresponds to each of them. Many of these features show significant variability which, however, does not destroy the integrity of a mythological character's image. Each set of this kind (with possible variants) is subordinated to its special logic, i.e. separate features or blocks of features within the limits of each set are connected by a certain dependence...» (Vinogradova, Tol'staya 1994: 20).

and a sister, not having recognized each other after long wanderings, got married; having learned the truth, the brother said: «Well, my sister, let's go to a field and sow ourselves: you will blow in violet color, and I – in yellow». This plant got the name *bratki* [brothers] (Chubinskij 1872 (I, 1): 82); compare also: «This is the grass which is a sister with a brother!» (Chubinskij 1874 (5): 201). According to a Belorussian legend, a brother and a sister have also turned into a flower *brat-sestra* [brother-sister] with blue and yellow flowers (Kotaw 1927: 213).

This plot exists also as a song; its variants are recorded, for example, in Belorussia (Vilno province) (Shejn 1887: 233–234. No. 247), and in Ukraine (Markevich 1860: 87–88).

Similar stories can be collected today as well. So, in the village of Radutino (Trubchevsk area of Bryansk region) it is said that when a brother and a sister were led to the altar, «during the church wedding ceremony their wedding crowns disappeared. They were on the church dome. The brother and the sister became flowers. People say: this is the grass which is a brother and a sister». And one specifies: «blue is the brother, and yellow is the sister» (PA, XXI 10 e.). A song from Polesye tells that the origin of *bratyky* is the marriage between a brother and a sister (Smirnov 1978: 244. No. 30; 1986: 261. No. 30; 253. No. 9). The same story existed also in a form of a prosaic story – having gone to the forest, a brother and a sister went and turned into flowers: «people found the place, where they were standing and then separated/went apart: and the flowers went there, this way and that... And now there are such flowers, they grow – *bratyky* [brothers]» (Smirnov 1986: 261).

The theme of forbidden love is not the only one that gave rise to the plot of a flower arising from a brother and a sister: «In the Gomel region there exists a legend about a brother and a sister who were taken to the forest by their father. With grief «they turned into a plant, so that people would pick it, and think of the brother and the sister: two florets [on a stalk]: white and blue, *bratki* [brothers]»» (Usacheva 2000: 282). In a Ukrainian variant «a brother became angry with a sister, ran after her, and strangled her: she turned yellow, and he, having been frightened, turned blue» (Rogovich 1874: 33).

In a reduced form, these ideas are reflected in a group of phytonyms, many of which are the same for both plants. Thus, violet trichromatic *Viola tricolor* L. is called *Ivan-da-Marja* [Ivan-and-Maria] (Kostrom.) (Toren 1996: 42), *bratki* [brothers] (Bejlina 1968: 417), Bel. dial. *bratachki* [brothers], *brat z syastroju* [a brother with a sister], *bratki* [brothers] (Minsk province), *brat z syastroj* [a brother with a sister] (Smol., Mogil.),

*bratki lyasnyja* [forest brothers] (Grodno province), *bratki* [brothers] (Gancharyk 1927a: 202), Ukr. *bratki* [brothers], *bratyky* [little brothers], *Ivan-da-Marja* [Ivan-and-Maria] (Rogovich 1874: 33). The plant blue cow-wheat *Melampyrum nemorosum* L. also has similar names: *vanja-da-marja* [Ivan-and-Maria] (Don.) (SRNG 4: 38), *brat i sestra* [a brother and a sister] (Western Russia), *brat s sestroj* [a brother with a sister] (Tamb.), *Ivan da Marja* [Ivan-and-Maria] (Russia), *ioakim and anna* [Ioakim and Anna] (Nizhegor.), *adrian i maria* [Adrian and Maria], *bratyky* [little brothers], *bratok* [little brother] (South Russia), Bel. *brat-sestra* [brother-sister], *bratovka* (Mogil.) (Annenkov 1876: 211), Bel. *bratsits-syastrytsa* [brother-sister] (Smol.), *brat-syastra* [brother-sister] (Mogil.), *bratowka* (Mogil.) (Gancharyk 1927b: 228), Ukr. *brat s sestroju* [a brother with a sister] (Sobotka 1879: 317).<sup>2</sup>

In this context, one should pay attention to one more lexical construction: «... in dialects, a complex construction *Sidor-Marja* is known for designating an androgyne... As a result, folk ideas about androgyny, in particular, of marriage between a brother and a sister refer to the images of Ivan Kupala's Day<sup>3</sup> – a brother and a sister, Ivan and Maria, who committed incest and were turned into a one-in-two flower *ivan-da-marja*... to this one should add that incest in folk ideas is exactly associated with the maximal fertility» (Toporov 1978: 430).

It would be logical to suggest that these particular ideas may explain the use of both plants mentioned for certain magical purposes. For instance,

<sup>2</sup> The motive of a brother and a sister, typical for midsummer rites, was analyzed in Vyach. Vs. Ivanov and V. N. Toporov's book «Researches in the area of Slavonic antiquities». In their opinion, the interdiction of marriage and its violation should be compared to stories about removal of interdictions on sexual relations between all men and women during midsummer night (Ivanov, Toporov 1974: 226). The sister is the source of maliciousness in these stories, and as such plays an active role. The authors of the book put forward the assumption that "the prototype of death (and water/sea), expressed in the corresponding form of (\**mer-*, \**mōr-*) is reflected in the song of Maria and other Slavic songs of St. John's Day, whereas John is the prototype of a twin, connected with life and fire... Element *Marja*, as the name of the two major beginnings may be connected to the afore mentioned *Mara*, preserved only as a survival in certain rites of St. John's Day" (ibid., 230–231). Deriving the pair of *Ivan-and-Maria* from a more ancient pair like *Kupala-and-Maria*, the authors of the book attempt to reconstruct the motif of matrimonial combat of fire and water, reflected in the rite and the song. Referring to byel. dial. *kupalo* 'fire', they put forward an assumption that the root *kup-* contains semantics of both fire and water (ibid., 224).

<sup>3</sup> John the Baptist's Day, Midsummer Day.

blue cow-wheat was used by sorcerers «to establish harmony between spouses» (Annenkov 1876: 211), and a violet – «for treating love illnesses» (Arandarenko 1848: 47). Ideas about love magic are possibly connected with such phytonyms as *lipnyak* [sticky grass] (Olon.) ‘cow-wheat *Melampyrum nemorosum* L.’ (Annenkov 1876: 211) and Srbc. *milovanka* [Srbc. *mil* ‘nice’] ‘violet trichromatic *Viola tricolor* L.’ (Čajkanović 1985: 84).

Duality being associated with this plant, it also served as an original amulet. Having picked it up on St. John’s Day before sunrise, some people put it in the corners of a log hut so that a thief could not approach the hut: «brother will talk to sister; the thief will think, that the master of the house is talking to the mistress» (Makarenko 1913: 86). This flower was used as a magic plant as well: «who wants to gallop away from pursuit or to ride fast on a jade, must carry an *ivan-da-marja* flower on him» (Tereshchenko 1848: 93).

Special power was attributed to *ivan-da-marja*, collected on St. John’s Day: among other plants, it was one of the flowers picked up to be used against evil spirits: «Fern, then blue cow-wheat and mugwort – all these herbs, they say, are against sorcerers» (*Ryazanskaya...* 2001: 187). Phytonym *besoprogonnaya trava* [the herb driving away demons] speaks about endowing of a violet by apotropaic properties (Arch.) (Toren 1996: 42). This plant was thought to be able to provide good health: «Among Russians, if somebody wants to be healthy during the whole year, he/she, having bathed at St. John’s night, rubs all his/her body with a flower of *ivan-da-marja*» (Sobotka 1879: 318). This flower was a component of a bath *besom* as well: «In some places of the Novgorod province, near Old and New Ladoga and Tikhvin, on St. John’s Day one heats a bath and, having stuck the herb *ivan-da-marja* into brooms, takes a steam bath on this holiday with the purpose to receive health /.../ In Moscow there also existed a custom of steaming by *besoms* with *ivan-da-marja*...» (Zabylin 1996: 83). In St. Petersburg *ivan-da-marja* along with buttercup, nettle, fern, camomile, mint and wormwood was a part of a midsummer birch *besom* on the eve of St. Agrafena’s Day (Tereshchenko 1848: 72).

On that day, one did not forget about cattle either. In Sennensky *uyezd* «in the evening before St. John’s Day girls used to go for the herb «brother-and-sister». Such a habit comes from the old people, for a long time». The grass collected was carried home with songs; when the herd came back, one part of the herb was given to cows, another one left for the morning, the rest was scattered over the cattle-shed (Romanov 1912: 208–209). In Belorussia the song about a brother and a sister turned into a flower had to

be sung during the gathering of this very plant (Petropavlovskij 1908: 164). One may suggest that the custom of collecting *ivan-da-marja* and giving it to cows on the holiday was also based on ideas about increased fertility as a result of incest.

In folk medicine, *ivan-da-marja* is mostly applied against children's diseases. In Belorussia, for example, sick children were usually bathed in its concoction (Chubinskij 1872 (I, 1): 82). In Polesye *bratki* [brothers] – 'violet trichromatic *Viola tricolor* L.' – was given to children to drink so that they slept well (Bejlina 1968: 417). Both these plants (blue cow-wheat and violet trichromatic) were especially used against scrofula and tetter in children in forms of tea and baths (Annenkov 1876: 211) – in Kazan province (Krylov 1882: 32), in Ukraine (Arandarenko 1848: 47; Avgustinovich 1853: 84). Such phytonyms as *zolutushnaya trava* [scrofula grass] (Tver.) 'Melampyrum nemorosum L.' (Annenkov 1876: 211), Bel. *zalatuha* [scrofula] (Mogil.) 'Viola tricolor L.' (Gancharyk 1927a: 202) are very characteristic in this sense.

Among other diseases «stomach illnesses» are mentioned in connection with these plants (Tula province) (Toren 1996: 68); «it is drunk against stomach pain, when someone overstrains oneself» (Markovich 1891: 424); and also applied to the body «against chest illnesses, itch, and as powder against wounds and cuts» (Annenkov 1876: 211).

However, the coloring of petals produced other associations as well. One of the most common binary oppositions "day / night" is reflected in such phytonyms as: Bel. *den' i noch* [day and night] (Grodn.) 'blue cow-wheat *Melampyrum nemorosum* L.' (Gancharyk 1927b: 228), Srbc. *daninoć* [day and night] (Čajkanović 1985: 84) 'violet trichromatic *Viola tricolor* L.', *diviji daninoć* [wild day and night], *divlji daninoć* [wild day and night] 'Viola arvensis Murr.' (Špis-Ćulum 1995: 418 (22)), Pol. *dzień i noc* [day and night], *nocydzień* [night and day], Cz. *den a noc lesnie* [forest day and night], Luzh. *noc a zeń* [day and night] 'cow-wheat *Melampyrum nemorosum* L.' (Annenkov 1876: 211). Finally, the concept of duality and "halfness" is expressed by such phytonyms as *dvutsvetnik* [two-flowers] (Novg.) 'Melampyrum nemorosum L.' (Annenkov 1876: 211), Ukr. *polutsvetki* [half-flowers] (op. cit.: 382), *polutsvit* [half-flower] 'Viola tricolor L.' (Rogovich 1874: 33).

Some groups of phytonyms have a relationship only with violet. A bright spot, "an eye" in the middle of a dark violet flower produced the following names: *sorochji glazki* [magpie's eyes], *veselye glazki* [cheerful eyes] (Volog.), *anyutiny glazki* [Anyuta's eyes] (Kursk.) (Mizger 1869: 242), Srbc. *dikino oko* [wild eye] (Čajkanović 1985: 84), Bulg. dial. *divi ocheta*

[wild eyes] 'violet trichromatic *Viola tricolor* L.'. This flower is also called *tryohtsvetka* [a flower of three colors] (Shenk.), *troetsvetka* [a flower of three colors] (Vyatsk., Perm.) (Annenkov 1876: 382), *troicin cvet* [Trinity flower] (Sobotka 1879: 247), Bel. *trytsvet*, *trajtsvet* [a flower of three colors] (Grodno province), *trava trytsvetnaya* [grass of three colors] (Vilno province) (Gancharyk 1927a: 195, 202), Srbc. *trovrnsna ljubica* [violet of three sorts] (Čajkanović 1985: 84).

Besides, violet has got one more group of names, not typical to the eastern Slavonic area. It is a group of kinship terms: Srbc. *maćahica*, *maćaha*, *maćuha* [step-mother], *sirota*, *sirotica* [orphan], *udovica* [widow] (Čajkanović 1985: 84), Sloven. *mačeha* [step-mother], *sirotica* [orphan] (Sobotka 1879: 247; Machek 1954: 72), Cz. *macoška*, *maceška* [step-mother], *sirotky*, *sirotká* [orphan], Luzh. *macoška*, *macuška* [step-mother], *syrotka* [orphan] (Annenkov 1876: 382). Phytonyms with the meaning 'orphan' are explained by the fact that the violet flowers «in September and October when the harvesting is already over, stands on fields alone, like orphans» (Machek 1954: 71–72).

An etiological legend stands behind this group of phytonyms: «the bottom petal of the flower is a stepmother, the two middle ones are her daughters, and the two upper petals are the stepdaughters. The stepmother is sitting on two chairs, each of her daughters has a chair, and both stepdaughters should sit on one chair» (Čajkanović 1985: 85). The characters were not always placed like this: the evil stepmother (the wide petal) and her daughters (two neighboring petals) were punished for injustice. Prior to this they were situated above and then were moved downwards, whereas the stepdaughters (two small petals drawn together) were shifted to the position above (Sofrić 1990: 80; Bjeletić 1996: 96).

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To sum up, one can assert that comparisons to a brother and a sister, or to day and night, are caused by the color of plants' organs. The fact that in the Gatchina area of Leningrad region the name *ivan-da-marja* is related to lungwort (*Pulmonaria officinalis* L., Borraginaceae), supports this assumption, for the flowers of this plant, pink in beginning, later turn dark blue (compare also *brat i sestra* [brother and sister]) '*Pulmonaria officinalis* L.' (Annenkov 1876: 279). Apart from this, the plant pellitory *Parietaria* is called *denj i noch* [day and night], *Ivan da Marja* [Ivan and Maria], Srbc. *dan-i-nocka*, old-cz. *den a noc*, – through contrast of yellow flowers with blue-violet top leaves (Machek 1954: 92). Among other plants with the

name *ivan-da-marja* there are bugle-weed *Ajuga genevensis* L. with white bracts and blue flowers, and sage *Salvia pratensis* L. with grey-green bracts and dark blue flowers (Brockhaus, Efron 1894: 769).

This feature (more than one color for a flower) influenced not only phytonyms but also the whole complex of folklore texts and uses (medical and ritual) factors for the plants, and, finally, served as a basis for their semiotic status.

Comparing different parts of the Slavonic area, one can observe, that the motive of incest is typical only for the eastern Slavs, while the motive of widowhood and orphanhood – for southern and western Slavs. Finally, the opposition of colors is seen as the contrast of day and night all over the Slavonic area.

## Abbreviations

### Languages:

Bulg. – Bulgarian

Bel. – Belorussian

Cz. – Czech

Dial. – a dialectal word

Luzh. – Serbo-Luzhitian

Pol. – Polish

Sloven. – Slovenian

Srbc. – Serbo-Croatian

Ukr. – Ukrainian

### Geographical areas:

Arch. – Arkhangelsk province

Don. – the river Don area

Grodn. – Grodno province

Kostrom. – Kostroma province

Kursk. – Kursk province

Mogil. – Mogilev province

Nizhegor. – Nizhni Novgorod province

Novg. – Novgorod province

Olon. – Olonets province

Perm. – Perm province

Shenk. – Shenkursk *uyezd*, Arkhangelsk province

Smol. – Smolensk province

Tamb. – Tambov province

Tver. – Tver province

Volog. – Vologda province

Vyatsk. – Vyatka province

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