



(REVIEW ARTICLE)



## Names of botanical genera inspired by mythology

Iliana Ilieva \*

*University of Forestry, Sofia, Bulgaria.*

GSC Biological and Pharmaceutical Sciences, 2021, 14(03), 008–018

Publication history: Received on 16 January 2021; revised on 15 February 2021; accepted on 17 February 2021

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/gscbps.2021.14.3.0050>

### Abstract

The present article is a part of the project "Linguistic structure of binomial botanical denominations". It explores the denominations of botanical genera that originate from the names of different mythological characters – deities, heroes as well as some gods' attributes. The examined names are picked based on "Conspectus of the Bulgarian vascular flora", Sofia, 2012. The names of the plants are arranged in alphabetical order. Beside each Latin name is indicated its English common name and the family that the particular genus belongs to. The article examines the etymology of each name, adding a short account of the myth based on which the name itself is created. An index of ancient authors at the end of the article includes the writers whose works have been used to clarify the etymology of botanical genera names.

**Keywords:** Botanical genera names; Etymology; Mythology

### 1. Introduction

The present research is a part of the larger project "Linguistic structure of binomial botanical denominations", based on "Conspectus of the Bulgarian vascular flora", Sofia, 2012 [1]. The article deals with the botanical genera appellations that originate from the names of different mythological figures – deities, heroes as well as some gods' attributes.

According to ICBN (International Code of Botanical Nomenclature), "The name of a genus is a noun in the nominative singular, or a word treated as such, and is written with an initial capital letter (see Art. 60.2). It may be taken from any source whatever, and may even be composed in an absolutely arbitrary manner, but it must not end in -virus" (Division II, Chapter III, Section 3, Article 20,1) [2].

"The name of a genus may not coincide with a Latin technical term in use in morphology at the time of publication unless it was published before 1 January 1912 and accompanied by a specific name published in accordance with the binary system of Linnaeus (Division II, Chapter III, Section 3, Article 20, 2) [2].

The names of the plants are arranged in alphabetical order. Beside each Latin name is indicated its English common name and the family that the particular genus belongs to. The family names are presented according to TPL (The Plant List) [3].

The genus names discussed in this research are comparatively few. They are based on popular legends, retrieved mainly from Ancient Greek and sometimes Roman mythology, on the information of ancient and medieval authors regarding the peculiarities of the plants, their healing properties, proximity or similarity of some external features with a particular mythological character. The fascinating narrations of ancient writers, the romantic stories derived from mythology, are the basis and the first step in a long way towards the knowledge and revelation of the secrets of the

\* Corresponding author: Iliana Ilieva  
University of Forestry, Sofia, Bulgaria.

world around us. Beyond the direct perception of the legend is the desire of man to understand the world, giving names to the objects in it and making them closer to his own human microcosmos.

The vast majority of these names were created by Carl Linnaeus, much less common are the names with another author (Centaurium - J. Hill, 1756; Circaea - Tourn. ex L; Hyacinthella - Schur; Jovibarba - Opiz; Nymphoides - Ség. 1754; Opopanax - W.D.J. Koch; Romulea - Maratti; Tyrimnus - Cass.; Valerianella - Mill.).

Some names derive directly from the name of a deity (Asclepias, Osyris, Serapias, Silene) or mythological hero (Acanthus, Achillea, Atropa, Circaea, Heracleum, Hyacinthella, Iris, Najas, Narcissus, Nymphaea, Paeonia, Syringa). Another names whose interpretation could be ambiguous have to be also noted (Artemisia, Centaurea, Jasione, Mercurialis, Romulea) – in addition to a mythological character, they could also be associated with a real person or object.

Besides the names, given in honour of ancient deities, there are a couple of names related to the Christian religion – Angelica, Gratiola, Veronica.

The names that are semantically related to a certain legend, but meaning a different botanical genus, also deserve special attention – for example, the story of nymph Daphne, transformed into a laurel tree (Laurus), despite the laurel is different from the plant called daphne. Or the legend of Adonis where originates the plant name Adonis from, but also another genus – anemone.

The article includes as well some names, related indirectly to mythology like Ambrosia, considered as miraculous food of the Olympian gods, or Cypripedium with the literal meaning "Venus' sandal", or Jovibarba "Jupiter's beard", or Parnassia, named for the sacred mountain of Apollo and the muses and others.

An important source for the impact and features of different plants, as well as the origin of their names, are the works of ancient authors. From the writings of Pliny, Dioscorides, Theophrastus and else we draw highly varied information – e. g. the genus name Euphorbia, originating from Euphorbus, the court physician of Numidian king Juba II; or the genus name Lysimachia, named after Lysimachus, a Macedonian general and diadochus of Alexander the Great; or the genus Gentiana in honour of the last Illyrian king Gentius, etc. Often mentioned are the healing properties of many plants as well as details about their practical application. The ancient authors mentioned in the research are listed with brief information at the end of the article.

---

## 2. Names of genera

### 2.1. Acanthus

Acanthus, bear's breech: a genus of *flowering* plants in the family Acanthaceae. The name derives from Greek *ἄκανθα* (thorn, prickle; spine). The literal meaning "prickly flower" refers to the pointed leaves and capsules that enclose the seeds.

Acantha has been a nymph loved by Apollo. She has not responded to his love, and when the deity wanted to kidnap her, she has pushed him away and scratched his face with her fingernails. To punish her, Apollo has transformed her into a prickly acanthus flower [4, 5].

### 2.2. Achillea

Yarrow: a genus of flowering plants in the family Asteraceae. The genus was named after Achilles (Greek *Αχιλλεύς*), a mythical Greek hero of the Trojan War, the greatest of all Greek warriors, famed for his knowledge of healing herbs, revealed to him by his mentor, the wise centaur Chiron. Achilles was thought had known the healing properties of the yarrow and used some species of this genus to heal the wounds of his soldiers during the siege of Troy [6]

Achillea was described as a genus within Asteraceae family by Linnaeus in 1753.

### 2.3. Adonis

Pheasant's-eye: a genus of roughly 30 species of flowering plants of the buttercup family Ranunculaceae. Adonis is considered as a deity of dying and reviscent nature. According to the legend, Adonis was a son of King of Cyprus Cynir and his daughter Mira who was turned into a myrtle tree as a punishment for having an incestuous relationship with

his father. Adonis grew up as a remarkably handsome young man, beloved of Aphrodite. Torn by boar while hunting. The goddess sprinkled Adonis' blood with nectar and turned him into a scarlet flower - anemone: perishable and bearing its name from the winds that swayed it (*ἄνεμος* wind).

Moved by the grief of his daughter, Zeus ordered his brother Hades, the god of the dead and the king of the underworld, to let Adonis return to earth every six months of the year to be with Aphrodite. During this season, nature wakes up because Aphrodite is enjoying her lover.

According to another legend, Adonis was loved not only by Aphrodite but also by Persephone. To have peace between the goddesses, Zeus ordered Adonis to spend half a year on earth and the other half in the realm of the dead – one more reference to the seasons change [6].

#### **2.4. Ambrosia**

Ragweed: flower plant in the aster family Asteraceae. Ambrosia was the miraculous food more delicious than honey, donating eternal youth and immortality to the Olympian gods. It was used also as food for the horses of the god of the sun Helios. Ambrosia was carried to the gods in Olympus by doves. Hebe, the goddess of youth, or the cup-bearer Ganymede served ambrosia to the Olympian gods during the feasts [6].

The literal meaning "immortality" of the Greek word *ἀμβροσία* seems a bit strange since this genus includes highly allergenic plants. The name is applied to certain herbs by Pliny and Dioscorides [5]. Linnaeus has chosen the name probably because the ancient authors recommended the use of some Ambrosia species as a remedy for different stomach problems.

#### **2.5. Anemone**

Anemone: a genus of flowering plants in the buttercup family Ranunculaceae, commonly called windflower. The name derives from the Greek *ανεμώνη* (relating to *ἄνεμος* "wind"), due to the easiness with which the stems move in the wind or for the anemophilous dissemination typical of this genus [5].

According to a Greek legend, this plant originates from the drops of blood of Naaman (the Semitic name for Adonis), torn apart by a boar during hunting. The Roman poet Ovid tells in *Metamorphoses* (X, v. 503 – 739) that this plant was created by the goddess Venus (Greek Aphrodite), when she sprinkled nectar on the blood of her dead lover Adonis and a scarlet flower emerged from the blood [6].

The plant was named by Carl Linnaeus in 1753.

#### **2.6. Angelica**

Angelica: a genus of herbaceous plants of the family Apiaceae. The name comes from the medieval Latin term "herba angelica" (angelic herb), as it was believed that the plant protects against evil spirits, magic and plague [5].

One legend says that the healing properties of this herb were revealed to a monk during sleeping. An angel appeared to him and told him that there was a plant to cure the plague. This plant was named Angelica. Paracelsus (1493-1541), an alchemist and physician, who lived during the plague epidemic of 1510 in Milan, mentioned Angelica as a wonderful medicine for treating the illness.

Due to its powerful healing effect, Angelica is also called the "Root of the Holy Spirit".

Angelica was also thought to be under the protection of Archangel Michael because it blooms on his feast day, May 8th, according to the old Julian calendar.

#### **2.7. Artemisia**

Mugwort, wormwood: a large genus of herbaceous plants containing between 200 and 400 species belonging to the daisy family Asteraceae.

The name derives from Ancient Greek name Artemis (*Ἄρτεμις*), in turn deriving from *árktos* (*ἄρκτος* bear) so the literal meaning of the name is "strong as a bear". Artemis is one of the most widely venerated Ancient Greek deities, the goddess of forests and hunting (Diana in the Roman pantheon).

Another possible reference may be to Artemisia II of Caria, a botanist and medical researcher (a sister and wife of Mausol) who died in 350 BC [7].

## 2.8. Asclepias

Milkweed: a genus of herbaceous, perennial, flowering plants in the family Apocynaceae. The plant is cited by Dioscorides and Galen, considered effective against poisoning.

Carl Linnaeus named the plant after Asclepius (*Ἀσκληπιός*), or Latin Aesculapius - in ancient Greek mythology he is represented as the son of Apollo and the nymph Coronis. Asclepius was instructed in the medical art by the centaur Chiron and was later worshiped as the god of medicine. The wand of Asclepius - a stick around which a snake is twisted, remains a symbol of medicine today.

Legend has it that Zeus killed Asclepius with his thunder when he learned that he was reviving the dead [6].

## 2.9. Atropa

Atropa: a genus of flowering plants in the family Solanaceae. The plant was named after Atropos (*Ἄτροπος*) the oldest of three Fates, or Latin Parcae - the goddesses of the destiny who ruled the lives and deaths of humans controlling the thread of life of everyone from birth to the death. According to the legend, Clotho spins the thread of life on her spindle, Lachesis measures the thread of life, Atropos cuts the thread of life and determines the manner of a person's death. The name "Atropos" literally means "she who cannot be turned or changed" thence "the inflexible" or "the implacable" - a reference to the strongly poisonous properties of the plant [5, 6].

## 2.10. Centaurea

Centaurea genus contains roughly 600 species of herbaceous flowering plants in the family Asteraceae. Common names for this genus are starthistle, knapweed, centaurea. The common name "centaury" is sometimes used, although this also refers to the plant genus *Centaureum*.

A possible name interpretation refers to the Greek *κέντρον* (sting, thorn; spur) due to the shape of the bud.

Another hypothesis connects it with the Greek *κένταυρος*, mythological figure of half-man and half-horse (the upper body of a human, the lower body and legs of a horse). It is believed that the plant is dedicated especially to the centaur Chiron, the wisest of all the centaurs, who was notable for his knowledge and skill with medicine, knowledge of herbs and pharmacy, and was considered a tutor of Aesculapius, Achilles and other heroes [4, 5, 6].

## 2.11. Centaurium

Centaurium: a genus of 20 species in the family Gentianaceae. The name *Centaureum* is derived from the Greek *κένταυρος*, the mythological creature half-man and half-horse. The centaurs were considered masters of healing. According to Pliny, the centaur Chiron discovered the medicinal properties of this plant and used it to heal an arrow wound in his foot. The plant is mentioned also by Hippocrates and Theophrastus. The Romans called this bitter-tasting plant "Herba fellis terrae", which means Gall of the Earth. Dioscorides recommended it as a purgative and for healing eyes and wounds [4, 5, 6].

## 2.12. Circaea

Enchanter's nightshade: a genus, containing about 10 species of flowering plants in the willowherb family Onagraceae. The plant is named after marine nymph Circe, daughter of the sun god Helios and either Oceanid nymph Perse or the goddess Hecate (Greek mythology). Circe was famous for her vast knowledge of potions and herbs as well as her magical arts. She was supposed to have used enchanter's nightshade in her practice. Through herbs and incantations, the nymph could transform her enemies or those who offended her, into different beasts.

In his epic poem "Odyssey", Homer tells the story of the Greek hero Odysseus who visited her island Aeaea on the way back after Trojan war. Circe transformed some of his companions into swine but Odysseus persuaded her to return them to their original shape. He lived with her for one year before resuming his journey toward home.

Another legend connects Circe with Picus, an Italian king whom she turns into a colourful woodpecker because he refused her advances.

There is also a story of her falling in love with the sea-god Glaucus, who preferred the nymph Scylla to her. In revenge, Circe poisoned the water where Scylla bathed and turned the beautiful girl into a dreadful monster [6].

### 2.13. *Cypripedium*

A genus of more than 50 species of orchids in the family Orchidaceae, commonly known as slipper orchids or lady's slipper orchids.

The name literally means "sandal of Venus" – from Ancient Greek *Κύπρις* nickname of Aphrodite (Roman Venus), and *πέδιλον* sandal. It refers to the shape of the flower petals, the lowermost of which has a striking slipper-shaped lip.

### 2.14. *Daphne*

A genus of between 70 and 95 species of deciduous and evergreen shrubs in the family Thymeleaceae. The plant is named for Daphne - a beautiful nymph in Greek mythology, the daughter of Gaia and the river god Penaeus.

According to the legend, Apollo, the god of the Sun and light, the arts and poetry, fell in love with Daphne, but she did not share his feelings. Pursued by Apollo, just before being kissed by him, Daphne pleaded to her father for help, who transformed her into a laurel tree. Since then, the laurel tree has become a sacred tree for Apollo - with laurel branches he has been adorning his hair, the quiver and lyre; laurel wreaths were given as a prize to the winners at the Pythian Games in Delphi in Apollo's honour [6].

The laurel, however, is not related to the plant called daphne. Probably Linnaeus, naming this plant daphne kept in mind the resemblance of the leaves to those of the laurel tree.

### 2.15. *Dianthus*

Pink, carnation, sweet william: a large genus of roughly 300 species of flowering plants in the family Caryophyllaceae. The literal name meaning is "flower dedicated to Zeus, heavenly flower" (from the Greek *Διός* genitive of *Ζεύς*, in Roman mythology – Jupiter, and from *άνθος* flower). The plant was cited by Theophrastus [4, 5].

The common name "carnation" derives from the Latin word "incarnatio," meaning the incarnation of God; "incarnatio" in its turn derives from "caro" flesh – a reference to the colour of the first carnations. *Dianthus* is considered the flower of the gods, a divine flower. It is used as a symbol of admiration, passion, love and gratitude.

### 2.16. *Euphorbia*

Spurge: a large genus of flowering plants in the family Euphorbiaceae. The name comes from Euphorbus, the Greek physician of Juba II, king of Numidia (52-50 BC - 23 AD). According to Pliny, Euphorbus described the healing properties of a succulent plant (now called *Euphorbia obtusifolia* ssp. *regis-jubae*) as a strong laxative. In 12 BC, Juba named this plant after his physician Euphorbus.

The name itself comes from the Greek *εὖ* good and from *φέρβω* to nourish: well-fed.

The name "euphorbia" was given by Carl Linnaeus in 1753 to the entire genus in honour of Euphorbus [5, 7].

### 2.17. *Gentiana*

Gentian: a large genus of flowering plants in the family Gentianaceae. According to Pliny, the name comes from Gentius (Greek *Γέντιος*), the last king of ancient Illyria (181-168 BC), who discovered the healing properties of the roots of gentian (*Gentiana lutea*) against malaria [5, 7].

There exist also the genus *Gentianella*, which is the diminutive form of *Gentiana* and *Gentianopsis* (literally: similar to gentian).

### 2.18. *Gratiola*

Gratiola: a genus of plants in the family Plantaginaceae. Most species are known by the common name "hedge-hyssop". The name is a diminutive form of Latin noun *gratia* "grace, pleasantness" and originates from Latin expression *Gratia Dei* "grace of God" – an ancient name of the plant, revered for its supposed medicinal properties [5].

### 2.19. Heracleum

Hogweed, cow parsnip: a genus of herbaceous plants in the family Apiaceae. The genus name Heracleum was created by Carl Linnaeus in 1753 in honour of Hercules – divine hero, the greatest in Greek mythology, the son of Zeus and Alcmena, famous for "The Twelve Labours of Heracles" [6].

The form Ἡρακλέους is the genitive of Ἡρακλῆς (Latin Hercules). Theophrastus cited the plant as "panacea of Hercules" pointing the healing properties of this plant [5].

### 2.20. Hyacinthella

A genus of flowering plants in the family Asparagaceae. A name is a diminutive form from Hyacinthus and refers to the Greek mythological hero Ἰάκινθος – handsome Laconian young man, beloved by the god Apollo, unintentionally struck and killed with a disc by him. A scarlet flower sprouted from his blood, and on his petals, the ancient ones distinguished the letters AI AI, the grieving moan of the god Apollo.

In the same flower was transformed the famous Greek hero Ajax after his death. The petal lines, in this case, were interpreted as the first letters of his name (AIAX) [6].

### 2.21. Iris

Iris: a genus of multi-coloured flowering plants in the family Iridaceae. The genus is dedicated to Iris (in Greek mythology Ἴρις), the swift-footed messenger of the gods, attached especially to Hera. She was considered a personification of the rainbow (Ἴρις), depicted with multi-coloured wings and often represented with the attributes of Hermes — the talaria (winged sandals) and caduceus (two snakes winding around a staff).

Iris is also thought as one of the goddesses of the sea and the sky, a mediator between gods and humans, hence sometimes used for any messenger [6].

### 2.22. Jasione

Sheep's bit: a genus of flowering plants in the family Campanulaceae. The name is not quoted by Carl Linnaeus and several hypotheses are possible: a derivative form from *Ιασώ* (Iaso, a Greek goddess of healing, daughter of Aesculapius); a derivative form from the Greek ἴον violet (a reference to the blue-violet flower colouration); a derivative form from *Ιασίων* (Iasion, in Greek mythology: a young Cretan who was a companion of the goddess of agriculture Demeter) [5].

### 2.23. Jovibarba

A genus of succulent flowering plants in the family Crassulaceae. The name means literally "Jupiter's beard" (a contraction of Jovis barba) due to the fringed and hairy petals [4, 5].

Jupiter or Jove: the god of the sky and thunder, the king of the gods in Roman mythology.

### 2.24. Juglans

Walnut-tree: a genus of deciduous trees in the family Juglandaceae. The name Juglans is commonly considered to be a contraction of "Jovis glans" - acorn of Jupiter (the chief deity of Roman mythology) [4, 5].

### 2.25. Lysimachia

Loosestrife: a genus of flowering plants in the family Primulaceae. The genus is named after Lysimachus Λυσίμαχος (c.360 – 281 BC), a Macedonian general and diadochus of Alexander the Great, King of Thrace, Asia Minor and Macedonia [4], [7]. A legend tells that Lysimachus, when was chased by a bull used a plant of this genus to calm the mad animal.

According to Linnaeus however, the name could derive from Lysimachus, king of Sicily, of which Pliny also writes.

Etymologically "Λυσίμαχος" derives from Greek λύσις and μάχη (that ends the battle), the same meaning as "loosestrife", a common English name of this genus [5].

### 2.26. Mercurialis

Mercury: a genus of herbaceous plants in the family Euphorbiaceae. The genus is named after Mercury (Roman god of commerce, financial gain, communication, travellers, swindlers and thieves) to whom the discovery of the healing properties of the plant was attributed [5, 6].

There exists also the hypothesis that the name could be dedicated to Hieronymus Mercurialis (1530 – 1606), Italian physician and philologist [7].

### 2.27. Najas

Water-nymph, naiad: a genus of aquatic plants in the family Najadaceae. The name derives from the Greek *Ναϊάς* (Naiad), a nymph of the springs, fountains, wells, and brooks of fresh water. The Naiads were portrayed as beautiful young girls-demigods, patrons of benevolent natural forces. They had a prophetic and healing gift [5, 6].

### 2.28. Narcissus

Daffodil, narcissus: a genus of spring-flowering plants in the family Amaryllidaceae. In Greek mythology, Narcissus was the son of the river god Cephissus and the nymph Liriope. He was famous for his beauty but cold and proud, loved only himself and disdained those who loved him.

The Roman poet Ovid tells in "Metamorphoses" Book III, that he repelled the mountain nymph Echo, and thus attracted the wrath of Aphrodite. Angered, the goddess punished him to fall in love with his own reflection, which he saw in the clear waters of a mountain stream. The young man, obsessed with unbridled longing, died on the green lawn, and a white flower, the beautiful and cold daffodil, sprang up where he dropped. Because the flower was bent downwards, the ancients believed that Narcissus was still being looked at in the water.

The Greek author Pausanias, in "Description of Greece", Book IX, proposed a different story: Narcissus, to console himself for the death of his beloved twin sister, sat gazing into the stream to recall her features [6].

According to Pliny, the name Narcissus derives from Greek *νάρκη* (torpor) referring to the intensive odour of the plant and narcotic effect if eaten [5]

The term "narcissism" denotes an excessive degree of self-esteem, selfishness, a fixation on oneself and one's physical features, lack of empathy, and a need for admiration

### 2.29. Nymphaea

Water lily: a genus of aquatic plants in the family Nymphaeaceae. The name is derived from the Greek *νύμφη* (nymph), a minor deity of Greek mythology, regarded as personifications of nature. Nymphs are depicted as beautiful young girls, connect with the air, seas, forests, water or certain places. They are seen as divine spirits who sustain nature [6].

### 2.30. Nymphoides

Floating heart: a genus of aquatic flowering plants in the family Menyanthaceae. The name is used for genus similar to the genus Nymphaea (Nymphaea + *εἶδος* resemblance).

### 2.31. Opopanax

A genus in the family Apiaceae. The name literally means "panacea juice", from the Greek *ὀπός* juice (obtained from plants) and from *πάναξ* panacea (a mythical plant capable of healing all ills, named after *Πανάκεια*, the goddess of universal remedy and the daughter of god Aesculapius) [6]. It is a kind of resin obtained from a plant called *πάνακες*, traditionally considered to have medicinal properties and described by ancient authors as Pliny and Dioscorides. The name "opopanax" was cited by Celsus as a medicament used to treat certain diseases [7].

### 2.32. Osmunda

A genus of ferns in the family Osmundaceae. The etymology of the genus name is uncertain. There exist several hypotheses:

- from the Anglo-Saxon Osmunder, another name for Norse Thor, the god of thunder, lightning and storms, son of Odin, to whom the plant was dedicated [4, 5];

- from an English folk tale about a boatman named Osmund hiding his wife and children in a patch of royal fern during the Danish invasion.

### 2.33. Osyris

A genus of plants in the family Santalaceae. The name derives from the Greek Ὀσύρις Osiris, the god of fertility, agriculture, the afterlife, the death and resurrection, spouse of Isis in ancient Egyptian mythology, to whom the genus is dedicated. With this name, the ancients indicated shrubs with long and flexible branches [6].

Dioscorides used the name for a black little bush, according to William Turner (d. 1568), naturalist and religious controversialist.

### 2.34. Paeonia

Peony or paeony: a flowering plant in the genus Paeonia, the only genus in the family Paeoniaceae. The name derives from the Greek word *παιώνιος* healing, saving, which has given to him by Theophrastus in honour of Paeon (Παίων), a mythical physician of the Greek gods. Paeon (also spelt Paeon) was a student of Asclepius, the god of medicine and healing and is said to have discovered the uses of the peony root. Pluto saved Paeon from the wrath of Asclepius, who became jealous of his pupil, by turning him into the peony flower.

Pliny the Elder also provides the same etymology [4, 5].

### 2.35. Parnassia

Grass of Parnassus, bog-stars: a genus in the family Celastraceae. The name derives from the Greek *Παρνασσός* Parnassus, a limestone mountain in central Greece considered by Greek mythology sacred to Apollo and seat of the Muses, symbol of poetry and music: a reference to the pleasant aspect of this plant and its mountain environment [5].

Pedanius Dioscorides mentioned “Parnassos Agrostis” in his encyclopedic book “De materia medica”.

### 2.36. Romulea

A genus of flowering plants in the family Iridaceae. The genus Romulea in the Iridaceae was published in 1772 by Italian botanist Giovanni Francesco Maratti. The name is dedicated to Romulus, son of god Mars and Vestal Virgin Rhea Sylvia, twin brother of Remus. Romulus is one of the mythical founders and first king of Rome, reigned c.753 – c.717 BC [6].

### 2.37. Serapias

A genus of orchids in the family Orchidaceae. The name of the genus comes from Serapis, a Greco-Egyptian deity based on the worship of the Egyptian Osiris and the bull Apis and possessing attributes of other deities such as the Greek Zeus, Hades and Demeter, Helios and Eros. Thus, a common god of life, death and healing is obtained. The cult of Serapis was widespread in ancient Greece and Rome [6].

The name Serapias is used in Dioscorides for an orchid [4].

### 2.38. Silene

Campion, catchfly: a large genus of flowering plants in the family Caryophyllaceae. The genus is dedicated to *Σειληνός* (Latin Silenus), in Greek mythology a woodland deity, adoptive father and attendant of Bacchus, represented in human form, but sometimes with ears, tail and even horse hooves and dressed in foam, perhaps as an allusion about the sticky secretion that covers many species of this genus (hence the popular name "catchfly") [5]. It is possible the name to derive from Greek *σίαλον*, (Latin saliva), referring to the gummy exudation on the stems.

### 2.39. Syringa

Lilac: a genus of flowering woody plants in the family Oleaceae. The nymph Syrinx (Syringa in late Latin) was a companion of goddess Artemis, famous for her chastity. Pan, the god of the wild, shepherds and flocks, fell in love with her. To escape the unwanted pursuit of the god, Syrinx asked for help from the river nymphs. They turned her into hollow water reeds that made a sad sound when the god's frustrated breath went across them. Pan cut the reeds and made the first set of pipes, which have since been known as syrinx [6].



The name *Syringa* originates from the Ancient Greek *σῦριγξ* pipe or tube: a reference to the hollow branches of the plant; the word means also a type of cane used to make wind instruments.

#### 2.40. Teucrium

Germander: a genus of mostly perennial plants in the family Lamiaceae. The name is given by Linnaeus taking it from the Greek *τεύκριον*, plant cited by Dioscorides and Pliny the Elder (book XXV, chap. 5). It is probable to relate to Teucer (*Τεῦκρος*), the first king of the Troy and the ancestor of the Trojans. According to the legend, he has used plants of this genus to relieve stomach pain and gout [5].

#### 2.41. Thesium

A genus of flowering plants in the family Santalaceae. A plant, named "thesium" is found in Pliny. It is probable the name to derive from *Θησεύς* (Theseus), mythical Greek hero, as this plant is supposed to have been part of the garland donated by Theseus to Ariadne [5].

Another hypothesis connects the name with the Greek word *θής* (hired labourer) – a reference to the simple appearance of these plants.

#### 2.42. Tyrimnus

A genus of plants in the family Asteraceae. The etymology of the name is unclear.

It is probably derived from *Τύριμνος* - a deity of *Θυάτειρα* (Thyateira or Thyatira – an ancient Greek city in Asia Minor, now the modern Turkish city of Akhisar, "white castle"), identified later with Apollo [5]. Another hypothesis refers to the Greek *τυρός* (cheese) because of the leaves coloured with white.

#### 2.43. Valeriana

Valerian: a genus of perennial flowering plants in the family Caprifoliaceae. The name is created by Linnaeus: according to some, he dedicates it to the Roman emperor Publius Aurelius Licinius Valerianus (c. 200 – 260) who is believed to have used this plant as a medicine.

According to others, the name derives from the Latin verb *valeo* (being in good health), regarding its properties as a medicinal plant.

Another hypothesis refers the name to the ancient Roman province of Valeria (for Gledhill and Tilo, in western Hungary, for others in central Italy) where this plant would be common [5, 7].

#### 2.44. Valerianella

Corn-salad: a genus in the family Caprifoliaceae. The name is a diminutive form from *Valeriana* (*see*), perhaps in the sense of a small plant that keeps healthy.

#### 2.45. Veronica

Speedwell: a large genus of flowering plants in the family Plantaginaceae. The generic name *Veronica* was chosen by Carl Linnaeus based on common usage of the name "veronica" in many European languages for plants in this group.

The name probably relates to Saint Veronica, because this flower appears close to Holy Week. The Latin name is actually derived from Ancient Greek *Βερενίκη* (Berenice) [4, 5].

---

### 3. Index of the ancient authors, mentioned in the research

#### 3.1. Celsus (Aulus Cornelius Celsus, c. 25 BC – c. 50 AD)

A Roman encyclopedist, known by his medical work "De medicine" – very important source concerning medical knowledge in the Roman world. This work is believed to be a part of a much larger encyclopedia including studies on agriculture, law, rhetoric, and military arts.

### 3.2. Dioscorides (Pedanius Dioscorides, c. 40 – 90 AD)

A Greek physician, pharmacologist and botanist. His 5-volumed work “Περὶ ὕλης ἰατρικῆς” about herbal medicine and related medicinal substances was widely known in the Roman empire. Written originally in Greek, it had large spreading in Western Europe more often with its Latin title “De Materia Medica” (“On Medical Material”) and became the precursor to the modern pharmacopoeia.

### 3.3. Galen of Pergamon (Aelius or Claudius Galenus, 129 – c. 200 or 216 AD)

A Greek origin physician, surgeon and philosopher in the Roman empire, had a remarkable influence on the development of various disciplines, including anatomy, physiology, pharmacology as well as philosophy and logic. Author of many specialized works.

### 3.4. Hippocrates of Kos (460 – c. 370 BC)

A Greek physician, commonly considered the father of medicine due to his enormous contribution to medicine and medicinal education. He distinguishes medicine from the philosophy and theology with which it has traditionally been associated and establishes it as a profession. The works of Hippocrates and other scientists are collected in so-called “Corpus Hippocraticum”, containing roughly 70 medical writings.

### 3.5. Ovid (Publius Ovidius Naso, 43 BC – 17 or 18 AD)

A Roman poet living during Augustus’ reign. Ovid together with the older poets Virgil and Horace are considered the three canonical poets of Latin literature. The most famous Ovid's work "Metamorphoses", a mythological poem in fifteen books remains one of the most important sources of classical mythology today.

### 3.6. Pliny the Elder (Gaius Plinius Secundus, 23 – 79 AD)

A Roman writer, natural philosopher, encyclopedist. The most important his work is “Naturalis historia” in 37 books into which is collected much of the knowledge of his time in the field of botany, zoology, geology, mineralogy, astronomy, art. In his work Pliny cites about 20 000 facts, using both personal observations and many ancient authors.

### 3.7. Theophrastus (371 – 287 BC)

A Greek writer, philosopher, a successor to Aristotle in the Peripatetic school. He is often considered the father of the botany due to his botanical works “Historia plantarum” (“Enquiry into Plants”) and “De plantis” (“On the Causes of Plants”), despite his interests were much comprehensive, including biology, physics, ethics and metaphysics.

---

## 4. Conclusion

The study of the origin of the names expands and deepens the knowledge about the particular botanical genera, traces the development of the ideas about them back in the centuries, contributes to the entire knowledge of their essence. Examining the roots of the name widens the horizons of research, adds new details to the established at the moment concepts, provokes the searching creative thinking of future researchers. As Carl Linnaeus has said, "*Nomina si nescis, perit et cognitio rerum*" If you know not the names of things, the knowledge of things themselves perishes [Philosophia Botanica, VII, 210].

---

## References

- [1] Assyov B, Petrova A, Dimitrov D, Vassilev R. Conspectus of the Bulgarian vascular flora: Distribution maps and floristic elements. Fourth revised and enlarged edition. Sofia: BSBCP; 2012.
- [2] International Code of Botanical Nomenclature (ICBN). Electronic version of the original English text. Adopted by the Seventeenth International Botanical Congress, Vienna, Austria, July 2005. Available from <https://www.iapt-taxon.org/icbn/main.htm>
- [3] The Plant List (TPL). Version 1.1. Published on the Internet; 2013. Available from <http://www.theplantlist.org/> (accessed 1st January).
- [4] Gledhill D. The names of plants. Fourth edition. New York: Cambridge University Press; 2008.
- [5] Acta Plantarum, from 2007 on - Etimologia dei nomi botanici e micologici. Available from <https://www.actaplantarum.org/etimologia/etimologia.php>

- [6] Batakliiev G. Antichna mythologia. Sofia: DI Dr. Petar Beron; 1985.
- [7] José A, Mari Mut. Plant genera named after people (1753 – 1853). Aguadilla, Puerto Rico: Ediciones Digitales; 2017 – 2020.