

# MISTLETOE

*'Under the mistletoe, pearly and green,  
Meet the kind lips of the young and the old;  
Under the mistletoe hearts may be seen  
Glowing as though  
they had never been cold...'*

Poem, Eliza Cook (1818-1889)<sup>1</sup>

Latin: *Viscum album* L.

English: Mistletoe; All-heal, European Mistletoe<sup>2</sup>, Masslinn, Misceldin, Mistle, Misceltine, Myscelto, White Mistletoe.

French: Gui Blanc; Bois de la Sainte Croix (when growing on an Oak), Bouchon, Brou, Gui Commun, Haumustai, Herbe de la Croix (Brittany), Herbe du Serpent, Lignum Sanctae Crucis (Brittany), Verguet, Vide Pommier.

German: Mistel; Donnerbesen, Hexe(n)besen, Kluster, Kreuzholz, Leimmistel, Mistel, Vogel-leim, Weisse Mistel, Wintergrün.

Dutch: Maretak; Boomkruid, Duivelsgras, Duivelsnest, Haamspeen, Hamschel, Hamspoen, Heksennest, Holster, Hulster, Kersterhout, Lijmkruid, Mattekruid, Mistel(tak), Priemst, Raam, Slangentong, Vogellijm.

## HABITAT

Mistletoe is found throughout Europe (except the north<sup>3</sup>) and as far as North-West Africa, the Middle East, the Himalayas, Burma, Vietnam, China, Korea and Japan. It is a half-parasitic<sup>4</sup> plant that grows mainly on the branches of Apple Trees (which explains its popular French name *Vide Pommier*: 'emptier of Apple Trees') and Poplars, but also Hawthorns, Pears, Robinias, Rowans and, very rarely<sup>5</sup>, Oaks too.

The Oak Mistletoe (*Loranthus europaeus* Jacq.), with its yellow berries and falling leaves, appears in South-Eastern Europe: as far as Italy in the west, Eastern Germany<sup>6</sup> in the north and in Asia Minor. So the ancient Greeks and Ro-

mans were familiar with both species of Mistletoe. However, common Mistletoe was by far the most important ritual plant in Antiquity.

## DESCRIPTION

The Mistletoe is a woody, evergreen bush, living as a half-parasite on a host-tree. The tall, green stem has thickly crowded, forking branches with thick and leathery yellowish-green, oval to lance-shaped, very shortly petiolate leaves (c. 5 cm) which are arranged in pairs, each opposite the other on the branch. The very inconspicuous, almost sessile flowers (the four petals are similar to the sepals) are more yellowy than the leaves; they appear in the late winter and soon give rise to white berries (6-10 mm), which when ripe are filled with a sticky, semitransparent pulp. It used to be thought that the seeds would only germinate after they had passed through a bird's stomach. However, they do germinate if they are first really well attached to their host tree. Height: 0.2-1.1 m. (Fig. 77; Pls. 99-101)

## MISTLETOE IN RITUALS, MYTHOLOGY AND WORSHIP

Mistletoe played an important part in the rituals of Celtic tribes. In his 37-volume encyclopaedia, Pliny the Elder (77 AD) wrote the following about the Mistletoe cult among the Gauls (translation): '*The Druids – that is what they call their magicians – hold nothing more sacred than mistletoe and a tree on which it is growing, provided it is a Valonia Oak. Groves of Valonias are chosen even for their own sake, and the magicians perform no rites without using foliage of those trees, so that it may be supposed that it is from this custom that they get their name Druids, from the Greek word meaning 'oak'; but, further, anything growing on oak trees they think to have been sent down from heaven, and to be a sign that the particular tree has been chosen by God himself. Mistletoe is, however,*

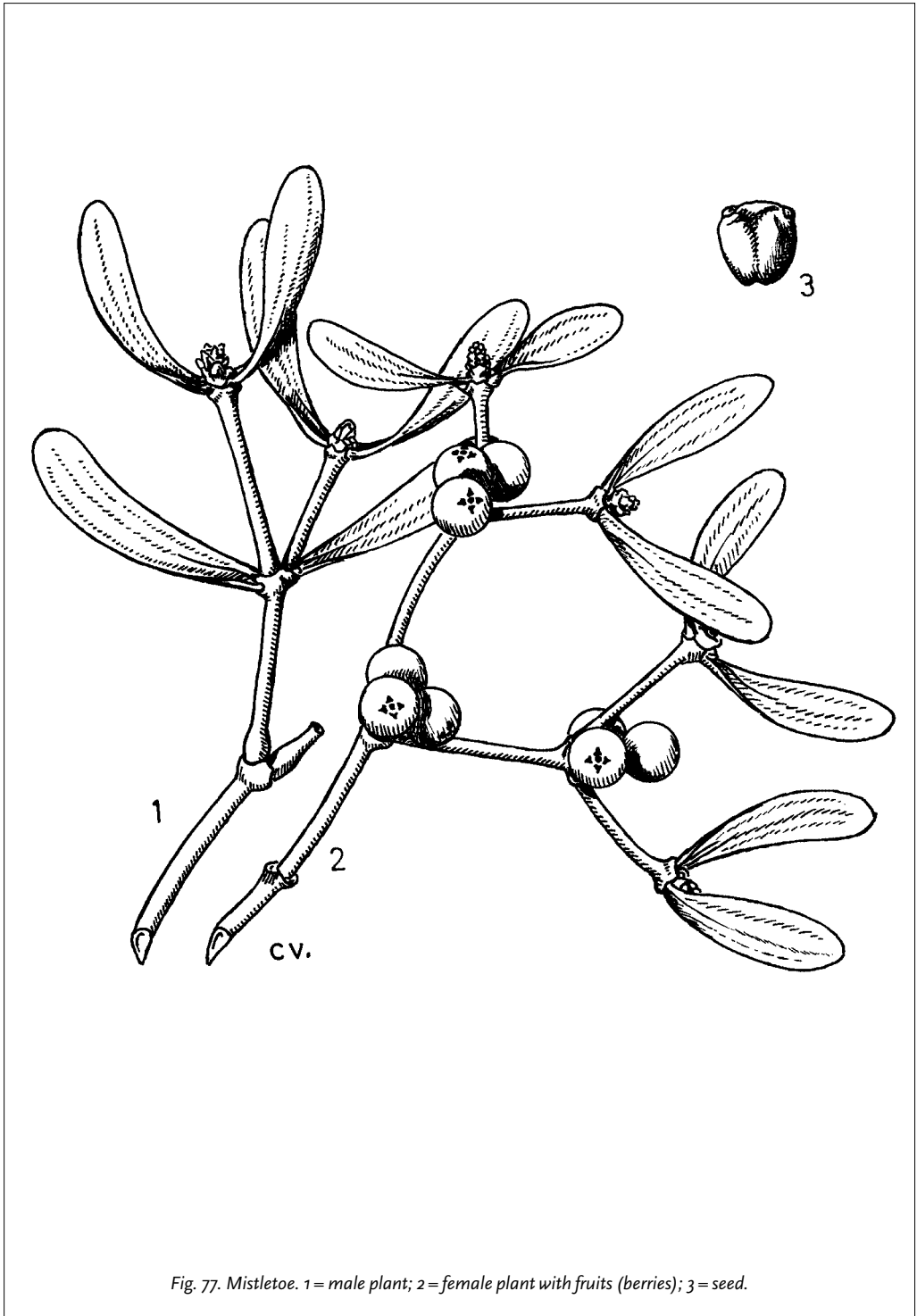


Fig. 77. Mistletoe. 1 = male plant; 2 = female plant with fruits (berries); 3 = seed.

rather seldom found on Valonia Oak, and when it is discovered it is gathered with great ceremony, and particularly on the sixth day of the moon (which for these tribes constitutes the beginning of the months and the years), and after every thirty years of a new generation, because it is then rising in strength and not one half of its full size. Hailing the moon in a native word means 'healing all things', they prepare a ritual sacrifice and banquet beneath a tree and bring up two white bulls, whose horns are bound for the first time on this occasion. A priest arrayed in white vestments climbs the tree and with a golden sickle cuts down the mistletoe, which is caught in a white cloak. Then finally they kill the victims, praying to God to render his gift propitious to those on whom he had bestowed it. They believe that mistletoe given in drink will impart fertility to any animal that is barren, and that it is an antidote for all poisons. So powerful is the superstition in regard to trifling matters that frequently prevails among the races of mankind.<sup>7</sup> (Fig. 78)

Despite the fact that knowledge of this Druidic ritual is extremely sketchy, it has led to imaginative views which are reproduced as evident in numerous books. Many authors<sup>8</sup> claim, for example, that this was a typical winter solstice or New Year ritual<sup>9</sup>, and believe they can prove this by pointing to the ancient tradition of hanging up Mistletoe round Christmas and New Year<sup>10</sup> (though this has only recently<sup>11</sup> become the first day of the year). However, one can just as easily say that Mistletoe is a typically mid-summer plant which is ritually cut (1950) on the eve of St John the Baptist (24<sup>th</sup> June), especially in the originally Celtic and Scandinavian regions. In Wales, Sweden and France, special properties were for a long time attributed to Mistletoe cut on that day. In Scandinavia in particular, the legend of Balder still survives in the form of picking this plant and lighting fires of joy on the longest day of the year. Some authors therefore make the connection with the Druids' midsummer festival.<sup>12</sup> In any case, Pliny the Elder does not mention any particular period of the year, nor does he write that the Mistletoe the Druids cut down bore berries, which would of



Fig. 78. Romantic picture of Gallic druids chopping Mistletoe off an Oak, on which it rarely grows.

course point to the winter. There are thus no clear arguments for the Celtic ritual of picking the Mistletoe being part of a winter solstice festival. The origin of the old custom of hanging up sprigs of Mistletoe round Christmas and New Year may therefore equally well originate from other traditions (see below) in connection with this plant. It is also quite possible that the ritual took place during every lunar cycle. Pliny does not describe what else the Druids did with the picked plant<sup>13</sup> in their rituals. It is known that it was usual to sacrifice bulls for the enthronement of kings. This seems to indicate that picking the plant was not a ritual in its own right, but only a part of a larger rite still unknown to us. Pliny's story of the cutting of the Mistletoe was probably so special and was so widely accepted among the Greeks and Romans that it was probably taken out of its context.<sup>14</sup> The presence of Mistletoe in the stomach of 'Lindow Man', a body from the third century BC preserved in peat, may point to the ritual use of the plant.<sup>15</sup>

The mythology involving Mistletoe also existed in Germanic regions.<sup>16</sup> In Scandinavian and Germanic mythology, Mistletoe was dedicated to Balder's mother, Frigg<sup>17</sup>, and to Donar<sup>18</sup>/Thor, the Norse god of thunder. The bush ap-

pears in the Balder myth (see below), whose main source is the Snorra-Edda<sup>19</sup> and which should be seen as a myth from the Viking era.<sup>20</sup> However, some authors<sup>21</sup> think that the veneration of Mistletoe is a typically Celtic custom and that the part it plays in Germanic mythology ought to be seen as a reflection of the Celtic tradition. Others<sup>22</sup> are of the opinion that it was not only the Celts that believed in the plant's exceptional powers, but that this was very widespread and probably linked to the area in which Mistletoe grew. But among the Slavs the belief in Mistletoe did not appear at all, or only sporadically.<sup>23</sup>

It appears that Mistletoe was not important to the ancient Greeks and Romans, as can be deduced from the writings of Theophrastus (c. 370-285 BC) and Dioscorides (c. 50 AD).<sup>24</sup> In both Greek and Roman mythological tales, Mistletoe is the means by which one enters Hell, but more especially by means of which one can depart the Underworld.<sup>25</sup> Persephone/Proserpina, for example, used Mistletoe to open the gates of Hell. For nine months she lived on earth beside her mother, Demeter/Ceres. In the winter she lived in the Underworld with her uncle and husband, Hades/Pluto. So Persephone was able to open the gates of the Underworld in order to be reborn in this world.<sup>26</sup> The 'golden twig'<sup>27</sup> which Aeneas used as a protective token for a safe journey when he descended into the Underworld to look for his father Anchises, was poetically described as Mistletoe. The writer, Virgil<sup>28</sup> (70-19 BC), may have meant an Oak Mistletoe<sup>29</sup> with its yellow leaves, or perhaps common Mistletoe with young, yellow<sup>30</sup> shoots.<sup>31</sup>

After Christianization, Mistletoe was gradually replaced in some European regions by the Box Shrub (box sprig), a Christianized, heathen-magical plant, which took over the role of protector against all manner of evil and replaced the true Palm Tree (see under: Date Palm) in Christian ritual.<sup>32</sup> Mistletoe appears not to have been

used in churches on the European continent, not even during the Christmas period.<sup>33</sup> It was not even allowed inside some English churches, as in Bath (Somerset, 1813), Teddington (Middlesex) and Otterbourne (Hampshire, 1892) but this was certainly not common in Great Britain (1909).<sup>34</sup>

### MISTLETOE IN SYMBOLISM

In winter this golden-green<sup>35</sup> plant appears from between the leafless branches of its host tree as a triumphant green, spherical bush with white berries. It is as if this half-parasite united all the life between heaven and earth. This phenomenon probably made a deep impression on ancient cultures. It therefore comes as no surprise that among the Celts and Germans, Mistletoe was heavily charged with the symbolism of the triumph of life over death, of the life force and rebirth (Pl. 101).<sup>36</sup>

The plant's symbolism is enhanced even more when it is associated with that of the Oak, monarch of the vegetable kingdom and symbol of 'strength'. The alliance of Mistletoe and Oak thereby became a symbol<sup>37</sup> of 'wisdom, knowledge, light and strength'. This symbolic alliance is aptly rendered in the name of the Celts' priests: 'Druids'<sup>38</sup> (wisdom/oak or wisdom/strength).

Although the Greek/Roman tradition was unfamiliar with the symbolism of Mistletoe, the typically Celtic theme of Oak/Mistletoe was Latinized<sup>39</sup> under the influence of the Celts who lived in the Po Valley for several centuries. Both Persephone and Aeneas were able to go in and out of the Underworld thanks to the Mistletoe, the symbol of light and rebirth.<sup>40</sup>

### Mistletoe as an emblem

Together with the Pine, Spruce and Holly, the evergreen Mistletoe is one of the best-known emblems of Christmas and winter.<sup>41</sup>

### Mistletoe in heraldry

Mistletoe appears only rarely in heraldry (in the Walbert family arms, for example).<sup>42</sup>

### Mistletoe in the language of flowers

As a consequence of the Balder myth, in the language of flowers, Mistletoe means: 'I overcome all obstacles.'<sup>43</sup> Mistletoe is also given as a present in its meaning of sweet kisses: 'I send you a flood of kisses.'<sup>44</sup>

## MISTLETOE IN MAGIC AND POPULAR BELIEFS

### Mistletoe as a plant of witches and devils

Since Mistletoe was so closely associated with heathen beliefs, it was not Christianized, but put in a bad light: it evolved from a sacred plant to a witch's plant.<sup>45</sup> This negative aspect is in fact still present in the Flemish/Dutch names for the plant, including *Maretak*. This name refers to *mare*<sup>46</sup>, originally a white elf of the air, a she-elf, whose magical power was later transferred to the devil and his female assistants, the witches. The *mare* was imagined as a living being, usually a woman, who was able to appear in all manner of forms (cat, wolf, goblin, etc.). In Flanders, Germany, Austria and elsewhere, these she-elves were able to jump onto people's chests, or failing that, ride on plants<sup>47</sup> and animals too. This explains the saying 'to be ridden by the mare.'<sup>48</sup> In 1930 this sort of story was still believed in Europe. People also believed that Mistletoe arose on those parts of the tree where a *mare* or elf had sat; this explains the reference, in Germany, to *die Mahr* and *den Alp des Baumes*, *Hexenbesen* (witches' broom) and *Alfranken*, and in Flanders and the Netherlands to *Duivelsgras* (devil's grass), *Duivelsnest* (devil's nest) and *Heksennest* (witches' nest).<sup>49</sup> People were convinced that it was possible to hold off the she-elves or keep them out of the stables by means of a branch of Mistletoe. In some regions, this heathen use of the plant was replaced by the Box (see under: Box).<sup>50</sup>

So all manner of magical properties are attributed to Mistletoe. In Holstein, Germany, for example, the country-people called this plant (translation) 'ghost stick': anyone who held it could see and talk to ghosts.<sup>51</sup> In remote parts of France it was believed that if one hung Mistletoe

on a tree together with a swallow's wing, all the birds from within a radius of two and a half miles would gather in the tree.<sup>52</sup>

### Mistletoe as a preventive measure

In Antiquity, an infusion of Mistletoe in wine was poured into cattle's nostrils.<sup>53</sup> Pliny the Elder (77 AD)<sup>54</sup> wrote that the Celtic Druids believed that Mistletoe could make infertile animals pregnant if it was given to them as a drink. This old Celtic belief apparently continued to make an impression on many farmers for a long time. In Worcestershire, Yorkshire and Wales (1909), for example, it was the custom to pluck Mistletoe and give it to the first cow to calve after New Year. This was believed to bring good health to the herd. 'No Mistletoe, no luck' was the dairyman's view.<sup>55</sup> In Flanders too, the plant was seen as an excellent means of keeping the indoor-fed cattle pure, or free from witchcraft.<sup>56</sup> The German popular name for Mistletoe, *Hexenbesen* (witches' broom), also refers to this.

A sprig of the plant was also hung in the house or stable to keep out the she-elves, or else it was stuck under the roof to prevent misfortune. This sort of popular belief was found in Germany (Pomerania, Bavaria), England<sup>57</sup>, Sweden<sup>58</sup>, France<sup>59</sup> (Brittany, mainly Morbihan) and Belgium, in the areas round, among other places, Aalst and Ninove<sup>60</sup>, Veurne-Ambacht<sup>61</sup> and Wallonia.<sup>62</sup> In England this custom was in fact still noted in Addingham Moorside at the end of the twentieth century (1993). It tells us that a sprig was kept hanging on the beam until next Christmas to keep the witches out.<sup>63</sup>

In the Tyrol (1930), Mistletoe was a protection against witches, especially when it grew on an Oak on which a crucifix hung.<sup>64</sup> This is a fine example of the convergence of heathen and Christian beliefs. It is interesting to note here that a bewitched plant<sup>65</sup> was used to combat witches or their evil deeds. In 1909, for example, Mistletoe was used to prevent 'nightmares'. In seventeenth and eighteenth-century England and Germany, young children wore Mistletoe as an amulet to protect them from witchcraft.<sup>66</sup>

Farmers in the Ozarks<sup>67</sup> (USA) hung Mistletoe in their smoke houses to keep the witches off the meat. In Normandy it defleaded feather beds. A sprig in a cradle protected the infant from the dangers of being snatched by fairies.<sup>68</sup> Rosaries were also made out of mistletoe wood and the berries were kept in silver boxes that were then carried on the person.<sup>69</sup> In seventeenth-century herbals this custom was labelled as a popular belief.<sup>70</sup>

#### **Mistletoe as a protector from lightning and fire**

Pliny the Elder (77 AD) wrote that Mistletoe, eggs and vinegar were used to put out fire.<sup>71</sup> In Sweden<sup>72</sup>, Norway<sup>73</sup>, France, England and Germany<sup>74</sup>, this ancient Italian custom survived until the end of the nineteenth century. German farmers hung Oak-mistletoe from the ceilings of their rooms to prevent disaster and especially fire. In France (*Département de la Nièvre*<sup>75</sup>) people threw mistletoe berries in the fire when it thundered.<sup>76</sup> In Germany (rarely) and Switzerland there was also the belief that trees on which Mistletoe grew were not struck by lightning. Since the plant itself was seen as the product of lightning (the consequence of arguments between witches or evil spirits), they were also able to keep lightning away.<sup>77</sup> It is also believed around Chudleigh district, Devon, that Mistletoe will protect the house from lightning if it is kept hanging till the next Christmas.<sup>78</sup>

#### **Mistletoe as a plant of good fortune**

The belief that Mistletoe brings good fortune to the house is popular in Germany (the Palatinate) but more especially in England, Wales<sup>79</sup> and France. Sometimes the Mistletoe with its white berries was allowed to hang in the house until it was replaced by a similar sprig the following Christmas. This was still done until 1968 at the brewery of W.H. Brakspear and Sons Ltd. in Henley-on-Thames. Italian<sup>80</sup> women carried a twig of Mistletoe to induce conception. In Upper Brittany<sup>81</sup>, a piece of the plant was stuck onto a Hawthorn the night before a drawing of lots in order to ensure a winning

number. One finds the Mistletoe as a plant of good fortune in all manner of marriage customs (Siebenbürgen = Transilvania, Romania; Switzerland), in which it probably also functioned as a rod of life. This aspect also includes the old English<sup>82</sup> custom that at Christmas a girl allows herself to be kissed (indoors) by a man under a sprig of Mistletoe.<sup>83</sup> In Conisborough (Doncaster), a belief had been noticed in 1963 that a piece of Mistletoe must be kept from one year to the next, because while Mistletoe stays in the house love also stays.<sup>84</sup>

#### **Kissing under the Mistletoe**

In the age of chivalry in England, Mistletoe was already ceremoniously gathered on Christmas Eve and hung from the ceiling of the great hall; every girl who passed underneath it could be kissed. In Great Britain the plant is still used as a Christmas and New Year decoration, from the ceiling, the ceiling lamp and on the front door. The custom of kissing beneath hanging Mistletoe is said to be unique in Britain, or at least, to have originated in Britain, but in France too<sup>85</sup>, wishes are exchanged under a bunch of Mistletoe at midnight. There is a great deal of popular belief concerning this custom. For example, for each kiss the man picked off one berry (Derbyshire). This tradition was described by Charles Dickens (1812-1870) in his *Pickwick Papers* (XXVIII) in 1837. The Mistletoe had to be burnt (1932)<sup>86</sup>, otherwise all the couples who had kissed under it would become enemies by the end of the year, or would never get married. Anyone who is not kissed will not get married in the coming year; so it is the men's duty to safeguard the girls from this danger by kissing them.<sup>87</sup> 'Kissing under the Mistletoe', a lively survival, was once a fertility rite. Sometimes a girl must steal a berry, swallow it, then prick her lover's initials on a leaf and stitch it to her clothes near the heart. While the leaf remains in place, the lover will remain 'attached'. In Worcestershire, kissing bunches swung from the ceiling all year round until replaced by new ones, when the old were burned. Then a steady

flame indicated a faithful husband, spluttering an irritable one. In Austria, a sprig at the bedroom door gave a couple sweet dreams.<sup>88</sup>

### **Mistletoe as a bringer of misfortune**

In Great Britain there are certain periods when one must not have any Christmas greenery (see also under: Holly and Ivy) in the house. It is believed there that if one keeps it in the house longer than Twelfth Night, it will bring misfortune or death (19<sup>th</sup> century, 1923). So to avoid misery, one must burn the Christmas greenery on Twelfth Night. This belief was noted as late as 1982 from a teenager in Yorkshire and in 1986 from a sixty-three year old woman in Chichester (Sussex). Sometimes this greenery was burnt (1883) on another day, such as Candlemas Eve (1<sup>st</sup> February), e.g. in Little Wenlock<sup>89</sup>.

It is perfectly possible that this popular belief is a consequence of the negative reputation built up with regard to Mistletoe and other heathen plants such as Holly and Ivy during Christianization. Since it was difficult to completely eliminate an old custom entirely, the pre-Christian sacred plants were still 'tolerated' during the 'Christian' festive periods (which were themselves once heathen feasts!), but after that they once again became plants of evil.

### **Mistletoe in predictions**

Predictions were made about whom a girl would marry, using the leaves and berries of the Mistletoe under which she had been kissed (1898). If an unmarried woman put a sprig of the plant taken from the parish church under her pillow (1909), she would dream of her future husband. It was believed that one could deduce the temperament of the future husband from the flames of a burning Christmas Mistletoe.<sup>90</sup> It was also thought that treasures could be found and locks opened using Mistletoe.<sup>91</sup> This popular belief probably derives from the classical saga of Aeneas, to which in the Middle Ages had been added that a twig of the plant was not

only the gateway to Hell, but also opened any door.<sup>92</sup>

### **Mistletoe as a divining rod**

A divining rod made from a twig of Mistletoe shaped like a two-pronged fork could be used to search for hidden treasures. In Sweden, the evening before midsummer night (the summer solstice, 21<sup>st</sup> June) was the best time to acquire this sort of rod (*slag ruta*). The seeker of fortune then went out to find hidden treasure at sunset. The divining rod was laid on the ground in absolute silence; if it started to jump, it lay over a treasure. In the Tyrol, Mistletoe that had grown on a Hazel (*Corylus* sp.) was used for this purpose.<sup>93</sup>

### **Mistletoe in magical healing**

According to Pliny the Elder (77 AD), the Druids called Mistletoe 'that which cures everything.'<sup>94</sup> One of the English popular names for the plant is still 'All-Heal'. Pliny wrote that according to some superstitious people the Mistletoe would have a more powerful effect if it was picked from an Oak at full moon, without using iron and without touching the ground; gathered in this way, the plant was said to cure epilepsy and help women to become pregnant if they wore an amulet made from the plant. Mistletoe like this, chewed, was said to heal wounds very quickly.<sup>95</sup> It was believed that anyone who consumed the plant also absorbed the strength of the tree on which it had grown, because it was assumed that all the tree's life juices also flowed through the Mistletoe. If the host tree was an Oak, its Mistletoe was considered exceptionally powerful.<sup>96</sup> Virgil (70-19 BC) and Ovid (43-18 BC) two other classical writers, also refer to the magical properties of Mistletoe.<sup>97</sup> In the 'modern' Celtic of Wales, Ireland, Scotland and Brittany, the plant is in fact still known as 'All-Heal' (it once had a similar name in the South of France too). The old custom of creating fertility<sup>98</sup> using Mistletoe still existed in England in 1950. Pliny the Elder<sup>99</sup> wrote that for the Celts the plant was a remedy against all poisons; a belief which in

Flanders (Belgium)<sup>100</sup>, for example, was still noted as late as 1930. It was also used against other illnesses, such as chest complaints<sup>101</sup>, cramps, shingles, etc. But the most important was its use as a remedy against epilepsy and apparently related problems, such as convulsions, fainting and dizziness. The plant's supposed medicinal powers were based largely on its mythological Celtic and Old Italian past: just as Mistletoe cannot (and must not) fall to the ground, nor will the epileptic fall as long as he carries a twig of Mistletoe with him or has drunk an infusion of the plant.<sup>102</sup> Mistletoe (sometimes from the Oak) is mentioned as a remedy against epilepsy in numerous herbals.<sup>103</sup> This belief survived in one form or another in many European countries including Sweden, Germany, England, the Netherlands and France. In the Netherlands the plant was until recently (1949) used in an infusion in red wine.<sup>104</sup> In 1912 it was still said of an epileptic boy in Herefordshire in England: '*What a pity his mother did not give him any Mistletoe tea.*'

It is mainly the Mistletoe that grows on Oaks<sup>105</sup>, and often that on Apple, Pear and Hazel Trees, to which exceptional curative powers are attributed. The healing method is always interwoven with acts of magic. For example, the Mistletoe has to be shot off (Switzerland) or knocked off with a stone (Wales) in order to remain effective, or must be gathered at Christmas. Near Isigny-le-Buat (Manche<sup>106</sup>) in France is a renowned 'Mistletoe-Oak' to which epileptics went (1935) to be cured of their disease.<sup>107</sup> Mistletoe was used to prepare a drink that was effective against every ailment, poison or magic. Bewitched people were cured using an ointment made from Hazel-mistletoe.<sup>108</sup> Mistletoe is likewise an aphrodisiac and a plant of fertility, hence perhaps the Welsh Border custom of kissing beneath Mistletoe boughs decked with ribbons, nuts and apples (both symbols of fertility!). After each kiss, the lady concerned should pluck a berry and throw it over her left shoulder; and when the berries come to an end, so should the kissing (see above, under 'Kissing under the

Mistletoe').<sup>109</sup> In Yeovil in Somerset, Mistletoe from a Hawthorn Bush was used (1975) against measles; it was made into tea for the purpose.<sup>110</sup>

A small bag of Christmas Mistletoe round an infant's neck, or a berry necklace, was believed to be a certain remedy for every childish complaint, the *Midlands Weekly News Supplement* of 30<sup>th</sup> December 1893 was pleased to emphasize.<sup>111</sup>

### MISTLETOE IN LEGENDS, SAGAS AND FAIRYTALES

Mistletoe<sup>112</sup> appears in the Balder myth, the main source of which is the Snorra-Edda.<sup>113</sup> According to this story, at a certain moment Frigg<sup>114</sup> wished to protect her son Balder, the helpful, eloquent and radiant, but somewhat naive god of light, by making all the elements, plants and animals swear they would never hurt him. However, Frigg forgot to ask it of the young mistletoe shoot that was growing in the east of Valhalla<sup>115</sup>. Balder's jealous brother Loki discovered this and made subtle play on this forgetfulness: he asked his blind brother Höder to shoot an arrow whose point was made of the wood of this Mistletoe. Höder, who was unaware of any evil intent, did as he was asked and fatally wounded Balder. The gods, struck by perplexity and sorrow, were unable to bring Balder back to life. But they decided to organise a ceremonious funeral for him. They built a pyre on a ship (Hringhorne) and Thor, the god of lightning and consecration, dedicated it with his hammer. Finally, the gods laid Balder's body on the pyre together with that of Nanna, his wife, who died of sorrow, his horse and his ring, and set everything alight. From this time onward, Balder stayed in the Kingdom of the Dead, called 'Hell', and the world no longer experienced any real joy, justice or beauty, but degenerated until the fatal moment of its disintegration. However, after the great burning of the world, Balder would appear once more in a renewed, harmonious world. Loki was later punished for his offence.<sup>116</sup> In the Balder myth, Mistletoe is the symbol of an instrument which

is itself innocent, but which becomes fateful by evil magic, and the same applies to Höder.<sup>117</sup>

In the West of England there is the story that the Cross was made of the wood of the Mistletoe, which in fact until then had been a tree in its own right, but from that moment was doomed to live a parasitic life.<sup>118</sup> Several popular French names for Mistletoe refer to this legend: *Herbe de la Croix* (Cross herb), *Lignum Sanctae Crucis* (wood of the Holy Cross) and *Bois de la Sainte Croix* (wood of the Holy Cross), and also the German *Kreuzholz* (wood of the Cross). The French *Herbe du Serpent* (serpent's herb) and the Flemish *Slangentong* (serpent's tongue) also put the plant in a bad light. All this points to a Christianized version of a heathen story. This legend may explain why Mistletoe is rarely permitted in church decorations in Britain. However, Mistletoe usually finds a ready sale for decorating homes at Christmas. In 1979 Mistletoe was available at greengrocers at Christmas at 10p a sprig. Mr Peter Heyes, of the fruit and vegetable wholesalers 'The House of Heyes', says the best Mistletoe comes from Belgium, where the foliage is deeper green and the berries larger and more numerous.<sup>119</sup> Mistletoe also appears occasionally in sagas about treasures.<sup>120</sup>

Legend stated that the Hay family of Errol (Perthshire) would prosper only as long as the 'Mistletoe-Oak' on their land near the Falcon Stone flourished. It protected the family against witchcraft and its infants from becoming changelings. When the estate finally passed out of the family it was said that the Oak had been felled shortly before.<sup>121</sup>

### MISTLETOE IN HERBALISM AND MEDICINE

Mistletoe was already considered an important medicine in Antiquity. Hippocrates (c. 460-377 BC) valued the plant and Dioscorides (c. 50 AD) recommended it for the treatment of, among other things, old boils and swellings.<sup>122</sup> Pliny the Elder (77 AD) wrote that birdlime made from mistletoe berries had a soothing effect, made tumours disintegrate and dried out gland-

like ulcers; in combination with resin and wax it softened external abscesses.<sup>123</sup>

In 1554, the Flemish herbalist Rembert Doedens (Dodonaeus) wrote extensively in his herbal about the medicinal effect of Mistletoe: especially for ulcers and epilepsy.<sup>124</sup> In John Gerard's *Herball* (1636), Mistletoe was not mentioned, however. In his *Complete Herbal* (1653), Nicholas Culpeper attributes to it the same properties as Dodonaeus. Here is an extract: '... *Both the leaves and the berries of Misselto do heat and dry, and are of subtle parts; the birdlime doth molify hard knots, tumours, and imposthumes; ripens and discusses them, and draws forth thick as well as thin humours from the remote parts of the body, digesting and separating them. And being mixed with equal parts of rozin<sup>125</sup> and wax, doth molify the hardness of the spleen, and helps old ulcers and sores. ... Some have so highly esteemed it for the virtues thereof, that they have called it Lignum Santiae Crucis, wood of the Holy Cross, believing it helps the falling sickness, apoplexy and palsy very speedily, not only to be inwardly taken, but to be hung at their neck...*<sup>126</sup>

Earlier medical notions were based more on myth, inspired by the parasitic life of Mistletoe and by the symbolism of the triumph of life over death (evergreen), than on reality.<sup>127</sup>

Doctors' opinions of the medicinal properties of Mistletoe have in the meantime changed radically. In present-day herbal medicine, Mistletoe is used to ease cramps, lower blood pressure, as a purgative and to expel urine. In large doses the plant becomes poisonous.<sup>128</sup> However, this depends very much on the host tree: for example, Mistletoe growing on a Poplar is more poisonous than one growing on an Apple. The leaves should never be blanched or cooked and the fruit should certainly never be eaten.<sup>129</sup> The anthroposophical medicine<sup>130</sup> sees it as a means of curing cancer.<sup>131</sup>

### MISTLETOE IN INDUSTRY, AGRICULTURE AND CRAFTS

Since time immemorial, Mistletoe has been used to make a sort of glue for catching birds,

which explains the popular Dutch names *Vogel-lijm* (birdlime) and *Lijmkruid* (lime herb), and the German *Leimmistel* (lime mistle) and *Vogelleim* (birdlime) (Fig. 79). Pliny the Elder (77 AD) was already able to note down a recipe for making this lime. The berries of the Mistletoe are picked while they are still unripe; they are dried and crushed and then put in some water. After about twelve days the rotting berries are taken out, crushed and laid in running water. This rids the berries of their skin and they become very viscous. When kneaded with oil, this sticky substance becomes birdlime. According to Pliny, Mistletoe that grows on Oaks makes the best quality.<sup>132</sup> In another recipe one has to dry the unripe green berries and then allow them to ferment for twelve days in water. One then boils the pressed juice to make a sticky pulp; to increase its adhesiveness one adds a little oil or turpentine. Modern birdlime (1918) is made without Mistletoe, however. It is a mixture of seven parts of spruce resin and three parts linseed oil.<sup>133</sup>

## MISTLETOE IN THE HOME, GARDEN AND KITCHEN

These berry-laden plants are offered as Christmas greenery (together with Holly and Ivy) during the Christmas period.<sup>134</sup>

### DID YOU KNOW?

In France (particularly Brittany) it was the custom on New Year's Day for children to ring at the door and shout '*Au gui*<sup>135</sup> *l'an neuf*' or '*Guilané*'.<sup>136</sup> They then usually received a little something. Some people see a link between this and the old Gallic custom of giving presents and handing out consecrated Mistletoe to the people on the first day of the year.<sup>137</sup> Others think this French cry is not linked to Mistletoe.<sup>138</sup>

The name 'Mistletoe' was also given (1949) to a rental token (*godspenning* or 'god's token') in Genk (Belgium). So the name of the plant that had a magical effect when entering into an agreement or contract was transferred to the coin that confirmed the agreement.<sup>139</sup>

Mistletoe that grew on Oaks was highly prized by alchemists; they used it in their experiments.<sup>140</sup>

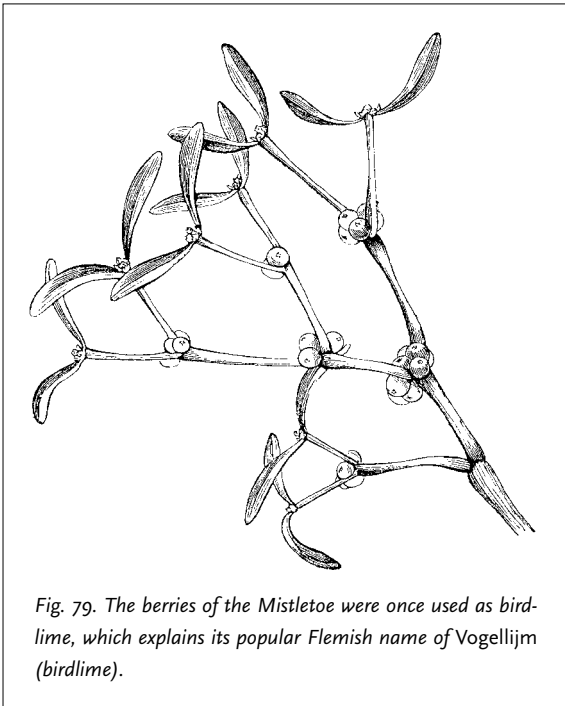


Fig. 79. The berries of the Mistletoe were once used as birdlime, which explains its popular Flemish name of *Vogellijm* (birdlime).

- 1 As mentioned in Ingram (*s.d.*): p. 312.
- 2 In the USA, 'Mistletoe' is any one of several American parasitic shrubs, including *Phoradendron serotinum* (Raf.) M. C. Johnst., that resides on various species of deciduous trees in Pennsylvania woods ([www.cal.nbc.upenn.edu](http://www.cal.nbc.upenn.edu)).
- 3 Between 6500 and 500 BC, the northern boundary of Mistletoe growth in North-Western Europe lay further north than it does now. This is mainly a matter of climate, which was warmer than it is now. In addition, the fact that the soil was less leached and therefore richer in lime will also have played a part (Weeda, E., 1985, p. 133).
- 4 It sucks water and minerals out of the host tree, but no sugars or other products made by the tree; this is why Mistletoe is a half-parasite.
- 5 Among other places in the Bois de Chitré (Vouneuil-sur-Vienne, France), where fifty years ago an enclosed space with several ruins could be found, surrounded by deep ditches (Mineau, R. & L. Racinoux, 1995, pp. 115-116).
- 6 The plant is rarely found in Germany (in Prina, Saxony), but in Austria it grows in several places. Now and again the people consider Mistletoe as an outgrowth of a tree (Lower Rhine, Sankt-Gallen) (VDVV, 1934-1935, vol. VI, pp. 381-382).
- 7 Pliny the Elder (77 AD): *Naturalis historia*, book XVI, chap. XCV.
- 8 Including Ingram, J. (*s.d.*): pp. 310-312; Collin de Plancy, M. (1826): vol. 3, p. 212; De Gubernatis, A. (1882): p. 72; Chevalier, J. & A. Gheerbrant (1973b): p. 397; Pelt, J. (1988): pp. 39-64; Brosse, J. (1990): 234-235; Mineau, R. & L. Racinoux (1995): pp. 115-116.
- 9 The Celtic Samhain festival started on 1<sup>st</sup> November; it was a soul festival, and probably a New Year festival too (James, S., 1993, p. 155).
- 10 Mistletoe can also feature in the New Year tradition of Burning the Bush – the bush is a globe, made usually of Hawthorn, but sometimes also of Mistletoe, which is burned in the fields ([www.web.ukonline.co.uk/conker/archive/christmas-newyear.htm#Christmasfood](http://www.web.ukonline.co.uk/conker/archive/christmas-newyear.htm#Christmasfood)).
- 11 In Catholic countries in Europe mostly associated with the Gregorian calendar reform of 1582.
- 12 Anonymous (1950): pp. 731-732; Frazer, J. (1951): part 7, vol. 2, pp. 86-87.
- 13 Though one does occasionally read such stories as 'God was asked to bless the plant, after which the high priest dipped it in water and blessed it again, and then it was handed out to the people in the form of an amulet.' (Ingram, J., *s.d.*, pp. 310-312; Collin de Plancy, M., 1826, vol. 3, p. 212; De Gubernatis, A., 1882, p. 72). Pliny (77 AD) did describe the fact that the Druids considered Mistletoe to be an all-heal, and regarded the plant as an amulet (see under: Magical healing).
- 14 Markdale, J. (1985): pp. 161-162.
- 15 Green, M. (1997): pp. 28 and 128. This young man was first cut down with an axe, then strangled with a strangling iron, then finally his throat was cut. These acts and the fact that the victim was naked point to a ritual slaughter. The body was found in the foetus position in a shallow pool dug at Lindow Moss (near Wilmslow, Cheshire), possibly to win the favour of water or earth gods. The fact that the man was not from the countryside is suggested by his well-manicured fingernails and his neatly cut moustache (as found in Celtic iconography and literature). Ritual peat burials from the Stone Age are also known elsewhere, including Denmark (Green, M., 1997, p. 128).
- 16 Hovorka, von, D. & U. Kronfeld (1908): p. 306; Anonymous (1970-1975); Anonymous (1989c): pp. 382-383; Brosse, J. (1989): p. 105.
- 17 Ingram, J. (*s.d.*): pp. 310-312. In Southern Germany she is called *Frija*.
- 18 In Germany the plant is called *Donnerbesen* (Donar's berries).
- 19 For more information on the Eddas, see under: Ash; 'Rituals, mythology and worship'.
- 20 VDVV (1934-1935): vol. VI, pp. 382-383.
- 21 Including Hehn.
- 22 Including Neckel.
- 23 VDVV (1934-1935): vol. VI, pp. 384-385.
- 24 Marzell, H. (1938): p. 82.
- 25 Pelt, J. (1988): pp. 39-64.
- 26 Baumann, H. (1986): p. 69; Pelt, J. (1988): pp. 39-64.
- 27 *Virga aurea*.
- 28 Virgil came from the Po Valley, which was for

- several centuries inhabited by Celts (Pelt, J., 1988, pp. 39-64).
- 29 The Oak Mistletoe (*Loranthus europaeus* Jacq.) is deciduous, has yellow berries, and grows mainly on evergreen Oaks. This is the opposite of the common Mistletoe, which is evergreen and grows on deciduous trees (Pelt, J., 1988, pp. 39-64).
- 30 In the winter the Mistletoe sometimes grows small new leaves because the plant receives more light, and this sometimes gives it a golden gleam. In addition, when it is dried, the plant takes on a fine golden-yellow colour, and so becomes a 'golden branch'. Until only a few years ago, the Bretons hung bunches of this plant in their stables (Pelt, J., 1988, pp. 39-64).
- 31 Virgil: *Aeneid* (70-19 BC), vol. 6, p. 136 ff., as mentioned in VDVV (1934-1935): vol. VI, pp. 382-383; Frazer, J. (1951): pt. 7, vol. 2, pp. 280, 292 and 315-320; Pelt, J. (1988): pp. 39-64.
- 32 Celis, G. (1930b): p. 14.
- 33 Pelt, J.M. (1988): pp. 39-64.
- 34 Opie, I. & M. Tatem (1989): p. 255.
- 35 The leaves stay green for a long time after picking, the stems and the wood are green, regardless of their age. The sucking organ and the minute flowers are also green. Like most fruit the berries are green at first; they stay like that for about seven months and inside the embryo is green. With so many green leaves, Mistletoe is essentially a plant with an exceptional capacity to absorb solar and light energy. Jean-Hubert Guéguen observed that the whole plant was permeated with light (Pelt, J.M., 1988, pp. 39-64).
- 36 Peters, H. (1918): pp. 106-109; Cirlot, J. (1962): p. 202; Chevalier, J. & A. Gheerbrant (1974b): pp. 80-81.
- 37 René Guénon pointed to the analogy between this symbol and the Egyptian sphinx with its human head and lion's body, symbols of 'wisdom and strength'.
- 38 Pliny the Elder thought that 'Druid' was derived from the Greek *drus*, meaning 'oak, tree' and the Indo-Germanic *vis/wid/id*, meaning 'wisdom, knowledge'. He apparently did not know that one of the Celtic words for Oak was also *daur* or *dervo* (Frazer, J., 1951, pt. 7, vol. 2, p. 76, note 1; Chevalier J. & A. Gheerbrant, 1973a, p. 348). Others say that 'Druid' is derived from *dru* and *vid*, which mean 'strength' and 'knowledge', as represented by the Oak and Mistletoe. In fact some historians put Druids on the same level as shamans, who also draw their knowledge from a cosmic tree (Brosse, J., 1989, pp. 98-108).
- 39 The Latins adopted much of this belief, but also attributed to the plant the property of being invulnerable to fire (Brosse, J., 1989, p. 105).
- 40 Chevalier, J. & A. Gheerbrant (1974b): pp. 80-81; Pelt, J.M. (1988): pp. 60 ff.
- 41 Vlaanderen, A. (1946): p. 58; Biedermann, H. (1992): pp. 243-244.
- 42 Kenk, V. (1963): *The importance of plants in heraldry*. In: *Econ. Bot.*, p. 175.
- 43 Ingram, J. (s.d.): p. 359; Powell, C. (1977): pp. 101-102.
- 44 Conway, D. (1974): p. 92. This meaning in fact points rather to a connection with the atmosphere of the end of the year.
- 45 Teirlinck, I. (1924): p. 26; Pelt, J. (1988): pp. 39-64.
- 46 cf. the English 'nightmare'.
- 47 This is said of plants whose fruit, stems or branches have grown flat, as if they were pressed between something (De Bo/Samyn, 1888, p. 77).
- 48 'To be ridden by the mare' was said of someone who almost suffocated in his/her sleep, suffers a constriction, or started to sweat heavily. This expression ('*door de mare bereden zijn*') is still used today in East and West Flanders (De Cleene, M. & M. Cl. Lejeune, 1997, personal observation). All kinds of tricks were thought up to keep the she-elf (*mare*) out of the house, such as crossing the shoes at the end of the bed. When grain was damaged by Ergot (a fungus), it was explained as the place where the she-elf had settled.
- 49 De Cock, A. (1909): *Spreekwoorden, zegswijzen en uitdrukkingen op volksgeloof berustend*. In: *Volkskunde* 20, p. 49; *Biekorf*, 1921, as mentioned in Vandenbussche, L. (1955): p. 589; Celis, J., (1930b): pp. 13-14 and 32 (with notes by Prof. De Keyser); VDVV (1934-1935): vol. 6, pp. 385-386.
- 50 Celis, G. (1930b): p. 14.

- 51 Ingram, J. (*s.d.*): p. 311; Vandenbussche, L. (1995): p. 589.
- 52 Collin de Plancy, M. (1826): vol. 3, p. 212.
- 53 Columella: *De re rustica*, vol. 6, 5, as mentioned in VDVV (1934-1935): vol. VI, p. 385.
- 54 Pliny the Elder (77 AD): *Naturalis historia*, book XVI, chap. XCV.
- 55 Thiselton-Dyer, T. (1884): p. 11; Anonymous (1950): p. 732; Opie, I. & M. Tatem (1989): p. 254; Baker, M. (1996): pp. 101.
- 56 Celis, G. (1930b): p. 31.
- 57 Frazer (1951): pt. 7, volume 2, p. 86.
- 58 *Ibid.*
- 59 Sébillot, P. (1906): vol. 3, p. 385; Rolland, E. (1896-1913): vol. 6, p. 235.
- 60 Rolland, E. (1896-1913): vol. 6, p. 235.
- 61 *Biekorf* 13, p. 72 and *Biekorf* 10, p. 330, as mentioned in De Cock, A. (1909): *Spreekwoorden, zegswijzen en uitdrukkingen op volksgeloof berustend*. In: *Volkskunde* 20, p. 49.
- 62 De Cock, A. (1909): *Spreekwoorden, zegswijzen en uitdrukkingen op volksgeloof berustend*. In: *Volkskunde* 20, p. 49.
- 63 Vickery, R. (1997): p. 243.
- 64 Teirlinck, I. (1930): pp. 317-318.
- 65 For example, a branch of Alder that the she-elf has ridden is laid in bed too. In Denderbelle (1909) one finds in many houses and stables a 'ridden' beet root or beet stem (De Cock, A., 1909, *Spreekwoorden, zegswijzen en uitdrukkingen op volksgeloof berustend*. In: *Volkskunde* 20, p. 50).
- 66 De Cock, A. (1909): *Spreekwoorden, zegswijzen en uitdrukkingen op volksgeloof berustend*. In: *Volkskunde* 20, p. 50; VDVV (1934-1935): vol. VI, pp. 385-386; Vlaanderen, A. (1946): p. 58; Opie, I. & M. Tatem (1989): pp. 253-254.
- 67 Heavily forested group of highlands in the South-Central USA, extending south-westward from St Louis, Mo., to the River Arkansas (Anonymous, 1989b).
- 68 Baker, M. (1996): p. 100.
- 69 Dierbach, J. (1833): p. 151.
- 70 Peters, H. (1918): pp. 110-112.
- 71 Pliny the Elder (77 AD): *Naturalis historia*, book XXXIII, chap. XXX.
- 72 The renowned Swedish botanist Linnaeus also wrote that the ordinary man in West Gotland believed that houses in which Mistletoe was present were protected against fire (Linnaeus, 1765, *Reisen durch Westgotland*, p. 39).
- 73 Schübeler, P. (1875): *Pflanzenwelt Norwegens*, p. 288.
- 74 Mistletoe hung up in the living room during the Christmas period protected the house from lightning (Staffordshire).
- 75 Rolland, E. (1896-1913): vol. 6, p. 236; Sébillot, P. (1906): vol. 3, p. 382.
- 76 VDVV (1934-1935): vol. VI, p. 389; Frazer, J. (1951): pt. 7, vol. 2, pp. 84-86.
- 77 Frazer, J. (1951): pt. 7, vol. 2, pp. 84-86.
- 78 Vickery, R. (1997): p. 242.
- 79 'No Mistletoe, no luck' (Frazer, J., 1951, pt. 7, vol. 2, p. 86).
- 80 Baker, M. (1996): p. 101.
- 81 Sébillot, P. (1906): vol. 3, p. 388.
- 82 The use of Mistletoe as a Christmas decoration, which increased in Germany at the end of the last century (mainly in the towns), is not a truly German popular custom, but a fashion imported from England.
- 83 VDVV (1934-1935): vol. VI, pp. 387-388; Baumann, H. (1986): p. 69; Opie, I. & M. Tatem (1989): pp. 253-254.
- 84 Vickery, R. (1997): p. 243.
- 85 Brosse, J. (1989): pp. 98-108.
- 86 In certain parts of England Mistletoe was burnt on Twelfth Night (the eve of Epiphany) for fear that the boys and girls who had not kissed underneath it would not find a marriage partner. In Staffordshire the Christmas bunch of Mistletoe was kept throughout the year and only burnt the next Christmas Day (Anonymous, 1950, p. 732; Baker, M., 1996, pp. 101).
- 87 Ingram, J. (*s.d.*): pp. 310-312; Peters, H. (1918): pp. 110-112; Anonymous (1950): p. 732; Biedermann, H. (1992): pp. 243-244.
- 88 Baker, M. (1996): p. 101.
- 89 Opie, I. & M. Tatem (1989): pp. 75-77.
- 90 Opie, I. & M. Tatem (1989): pp. 255-256.
- 91 Ter Laan, K. (1949): p. 232; Cirlot, J. (1962): p. 202.
- 92 Teirlinck, I. (1904): pp. 56-65.

- 93 Anonymous (1950): p. 732; Frazer, J. (1951): pt. 7, vol. 2, p. 69.
- 94 'Omnia sanantem'.
- 95 Pliny the Elder (77 AD): *Naturalis historia*, book XXIV, chap. VI.
- 96 Pliny the Elder (77 AD): *Naturalis historia*, book XVI, chap. XCV.
- 97 Ingram, J. (s.d.): pp. 310-312.
- 98 Pliny the Elder (77 AD): *Naturalis historia*, book XVI, chap. XCV. The explanation for this may be found in a form of analogy between the berries and humans: the slimy content of the berry looks like sperm, the berries take nine months to ripen (like a human foetus) (Pelt, J.M., 1988, p. 61). The syrupy juice of the berries is seen as oak sperm and was considered to be a fluid with considerable powers of rejuvenation (*chulos*) (Biedermann, H., 1992, pp. 243-244).
- 99 Pliny the Elder (77 AD): *Naturalis historia*, book XVI, chap. XCV.
- 100 Celis, G. (1930b): p. 14. Everywhere in Flanders where Mistletoe grows, the decoction made from it is considered to be an excellent means to improve the expulsion of the afterbirth in cows and thereby to 'purify' them (De Cock, A., 1909, *Spreekwoorden, zegswijzen en uitdrukkingen op volksgeloofberustend*. In: *Volkskunde* 20, p. 52).
- 101 Hildegard von Bingen (c. 1150): *Physika*, vol. 3, p. 2, as mentioned in VDVV (1934-1935): vol. VI, p. 391.
- 102 One still (recently) finds analogous views on the medicinal powers of Mistletoe among the Ainus (on the North Japanese island of Hokkaido), the Mabuiai (in the Torres Straits) and the Walos (Senegal & Gambia) (Frazer, J., 1951, pt. 7, vol. 2, pp. 79-80).
- 103 Bock (1551): *Kreuterbuch*, p. 358r, as mentioned in VDVV (1934-1935): vol. 6, p. 391; Dodoens, R. (1554, 1644); Tabernaemontanus, as mentioned in Marzell H. (1938), pp. 83-84.
- 104 Ter Laan, K. (1949): p. 232.
- 105 One almost always finds the *viscum quercinum* (Oak-mistletoe) in the old pharmacopoeias.
- 106 Tubeuf provides an illustration in his *Monographie der Mistel*, p. 719, as mentioned in VDVV (1934-1935): vol. VI, p. 391.
- 107 Hovorka, von, D. & U. Kronfeld (1908): p. 306; Peters, H. (1918): pp. 106-109; VDVV (1934-1935): vol. VI, pp. 389-392; Anonymous (1950): p. 732; Frazer, J. (1951): pt. 7, vol. 2, pp. 80-83; Kleijn, H. (1957): p. 101; Opie, I. & M. Tatem (1989): pp. 254-255.
- 108 Teirlinck, I. (1930): pp. 317-318.
- 109 Kightly, C. (1994): December 14.
- 110 Vickery, R. (1997): p. 242.
- 111 Baker, M. (1996): p. 101.
- 112 Mistletoe is here incorrectly represented as a bush rooted in the ground; an error that can probably be attributed to the fact that the plant does not occur in Iceland.
- 113 VDVV (1934-1935): vol. VI, pp. 382-383.
- 114 She was the wife of the North-German god Odin/Woden.
- 115 The palace of immortality, inhabited by the souls of heroes slain in battle.
- 116 Anonymous (1970-1975); Anonymous (1989c): pp. 382-383.
- 117 Biedermann, H. (1992): pp. 243-244.
- 118 Thiselton-Dyer, T. (1884): p. 34.
- 119 Baker, M. (1996): p. 101; *The Times*, 11<sup>th</sup> December 1979, as mentioned in Vickery, R. (1997): pp. 241-242.
- 120 VDVV (1934-1935): vol. VI, pp. 387-388.
- 121 Baker, M. (1996): p. 100.
- 122 de Lobel, M. (1581): p. 776; Peters, H. (1918): pp. 110-112.
- 123 Pliny the Elder (77 AD): *Naturalis historia*, book XXIV, chap. VI.
- 124 Dodoens, R. (1554).
- 125 = resin.
- 126 Culpeper, N. (1653): p. 168.
- 127 Frazer, J. (1951): pt. 7, vol. 2, p. 84.
- 128 The maximum safe daily dose of leaves and stems is 5 grams.
- 129 Anonymous (1979): p. 179; Launert, E. (1982): p. 88; Pelt, J.M. (1988): pp. 60-61.
- 130 It is mainly because the Austrian doctor Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) recommended the plant as a cancer-inhibitor that there has been such great renewed interest in Mistletoe. Extracts were taken from Mistletoe as from 1917. Each type of Mistletoe (originating from different host trees)

- was thought to be active against a specific form of cancer [Sallé, G., Frochot, H. & S. Andary, 1993, *Le Gui*. In: *La Recherche* 260 (24), pp. 1,334-1,342].
- 131 Anonymous (1950): p. 732; Biedermann, H. (1992): pp. 243-244. The special Swiss mistletoe product Iscador® is said to be useful in treating carcinoma. The tumour hardens, so that the risk of resorptive poisoning is reduced (Van Hellemont, J., 1993, p. 649). The Lektinol preparation is said to improve the quality of life of cancer sufferers (*Mistelpräparat verbessert Lebensqualität von Krebspatienten*. Interview mit Dr. Joachim Beck, Sinsheim, Elsenz. In: *Notfall Medizin*, pp. 15 ff., Sonderdruck aus 7/97).
- 132 Pliny the Elder (77 AD): *Naturalis historia*, book XXIV, chap. VI; Galenus, as mentioned in Munting, A. (1696): p. 250.
- 133 Peters, H. (1918): pp. 110-112.
- 134 De Cleene, M. (1989): p. 40.
- 135 = Mistletoe.
- 136 The call depended on the area, but it always led to presents being given.
- 137 Reinsberg-Düringsfeld, Baron de, O. (1862): p. 8; Harou, A. (1891): *Wonderbare boomen der heidenen*. In: *Ons Volksleven* 3, p. 29; Pelt, J.M. (1988): pp. 39-64.
- 138 De Cock, A. (1909): *Spreekwoorden, zegswijzen en uitdrukkingen op volksgeloof berustend*. In: *Volkskunde* 20, p. 52.
- 139 Ter Laan, K. (1949): p. 232.
- 140 de Lobel, M. (1581): pp. 775-776.