



'ANBAR

'ANBAR (ambergris), a waxy, aromatic substance produced in the intestines of stomach of the sperm whale and used in perfumery. It is often mentioned in Persian literary and medical sources. In the *Bundahišn* (24.21), ambergris (Pahl. *ambar*) is considered the dung of the three-legged ass, whose urine purifies the seas. Medieval medical texts describe the best ambergris as yellowish-grey and unstreaked; inferior varieties, excreted by the whale and found floating in the water, were black and streaked. Amber (*kahrobā*), a brittle, yellowish gum secreted by a tree of the pine genus, was thought to be a variety of ambergris. Ambergris was melted, refined, compressed into pellets (*šamāma*), and burned on a fire to sweeten and purify the air; it was also compounded in wax candles with aloe and musk. An aromatic powder called '*anbar-e mortafe*' (rising ambergris), made from ambergris, tree moss, rose water, aloe leaves, and aloe wood, was kept in clothing or in locketts (*'anbarča* or *'anbarīna*). Ambergris was used in the treatment of catarrhal colds, chest diseases, and mental illness; it was compounded with musk in the preparation of *gālīa*, and was used to reinforce *haštš* and opium and to prepare antidotes to poison. Small doses of fresh ambergris, which was scarce and expensive, were thought to enhance body temperature and sexual potency and to help one gain weight (Abu'l-Qāsem Kāšānī, *'Arā'es al-ĵawāher wa nafā'es al-aṭā'eb*, ed. Ī. Afšār, Tehran, 1345 Š./1966, pp. 254, 309; Mīr Moḥammad Ḥosayn Korāsānī, *Maḵzan al-adwīa* [lithograph], Bombay, 1273/1856, p. 402). Royal scribes perfumed letters by mixing powdered ambergris or musk with ink or by affixing an ambergris-smearred seal (*Šāh-nāma* [Moscow] II, p. 125; III, pp. 44, 74, 244), and ambergris was thrown to the



crowd in ceremonies of royal largesse, together with gold dinars and other valuables (ibid., III, p. 11).

In Persian lyric poetry, powdered ambergris is strewn before the beloved, whose hair is called *‘anbar-e larzān* (quivering ambergris) or *arzān* (precious ambergris); and her breath, words, sighs and physical features are “ambergris-like” (*‘anbarīn*). Breezes are called *‘anbar-sūz*, *‘anbar-fešān*, or *‘anbar-ġobār* for their fragrance; the gardens of springtime exhale the “ambergris-like perfume of the beloved’s street,” and the blossoming of the “ambergris-strewing” flowers and boughs is the envy of “ambergris-natured” paradise. Negro slaves were often called ‘Anbar for their dark complexion, and one of the ancestors of the Arab tribe of the Banū Tamīm bore the name.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

See also Ḥājj Moḥammad Karīm Khan Kermānī, *Maǧma‘ al-rasā‘el*, Kermān, n.d., pp. 38, 41-77.

Dehḡodā, s.v. ‘Anbar.