



BĀDENJĀN I. THE PLANT

i. The Plant

Bādenjān (or bādemjān), the eggplant or aubergine, *Solanum melongena* L. of the Solanaceae family. Persian terms which perhaps denote particular varieties of the eggplant, e.g., *kahparak* (*Borhān-e qāṭeʿ*; *Farhang-e Nafīsī*), *kahlam* (*Borhān-e qāṭeʿ*; Steingass), and some borrowed Arabic terms, e.g., *ʿanab* (Vullers; *Farhang-e Nafīsī*; Steingass), *majd* (Steingass; ʿĪsā Bey) which in both Persian and Arabic also means mandrake, *wajd* (Abū Ḥanīfa; Steingass; ʿĪsā Bey), and *ḥadaq* (Bīrūnī, p. 69; Abū Ḥanīfa, pp. 21, 66) from the Arabic root *ḥdq* signifying “to be round.” *Bādenjān-e barrī* (wild eggplant) is the name given to the Indian plant, *Solanum xanthocarpum* Schradl. and Wendl.

Botanical aspects. The species *Solanum melongena* L. has numerous varieties, and is capable of being crossed with other Indian species of *Solanum*, particularly *Solanum incanum* L. to which it is closely related, and also, in certain conditions, with *Solanum indicum* L. and *Solanum xanthocarpum* Schradl. and Wendl., with which it produces fertile hybrids (Choudhury in Simmonds). This raises the question whether all the species are really distinct.

History and geography of eggplant use. The plant is native to South Asia and was domesticated in India. It was brought to the Iranian lands at a very early but indeterminable date. In ancient times Iranian and Arab sailors carried it to East Africa, as shown by the presence of a number of specific terms for it in Ethiopia. It did not reach the Eastern Mediterranean lands, however, until a relatively late period, probably after the Arab conquest of Iran (Chodury,



ibid.). The conquering Turks got to know the plant in Iran. The spread of the word *bādenjān* can be traced in the Eastern Turkish *patingen*, Turkish and Russian *patinjan*, Georgian *badnjan*, Astrakhan Tatar *badarjan* or *badijan*, and westward in some European languages. In Christian western Europe, however, with the exception of parts of Spain and southern Italy which had once been under Moslem rule, the eggplant only became known after the Renaissance.

Cultivation. Though native to tropical regions where it is perennial, the eggplant can accommodate itself to colder climates where it becomes annual. This facility explains why so many varieties of the species *Solanum melongena* L. are found in Iran. These have fruit which ranges in color from a more or less deep purple to a bright yellow almost like egg yolk, which may be long, round, or ovoid in shape and from ca. 10 to ca. 40 cm long. Although the medieval Iranian botanists have left little information on these matters, it may be taken for certain that the dark purple eggplant was widely cultivated in the 3rd/9th century because Rāzī uses its color as a reference in the chapter on dental diseases in his *Ketāb al-ḥāwī fi'l-ṭebb* (III, pp. 94, 137).

Writing at the end of the 6th/12th century, the Andalusian botanist Ebn al-'Awwām states in his *Ketāb al-felāḥa*, on the authority of Abu'l-Ḳayr Ešbīlī, that four varieties were cultivated: the Egyptian with white fruit, the Syrian with purple fruit, a dark red variety found at Seville, and a more brown-colored variety found at Cordoba. He then quotes a passage from Ebn Waḥšīya's book on Nabataean agriculture (written or compiled probably in the 3rd/9th century) in which six varieties are noted, but he gives no further particulars. He mentions spring fruit and autumn fruit, but only with the qualification that they ought not to be eaten, presumably because they would not be fully ripe; it may therefore be surmised that in warm temperate regions planting or flowering took place twice a year, in January-February and in August. Ebn al-'Awwām explains in detail the method of cultivation, which required plenty of water to make the fruit more juicy and less bitter, though the plant could tolerate poor soils. This description tallies with the forms of eggplant cultivation found in Iran. Its importance in Iran is confirmed by Abu'l-Faḏl 'Allāmī, who states in his work the *Ā'in-e akbarī* (I, p. 72) that "this vegetable is on sale in the markets in Iran all the year round and in such abundance that it is sold for 1.5 *dām* per *sīr*" (75 grams—a low price for those days).

Health aspects. All the leading medieval Iranian writers on medicine and botany urge caution in use of the eggplant. Special steps must be taken to avert harmful effects of its acidity and bitterness. It must only be eaten when ripe



and cooked (Rāzī, *De simplicibus*; Māsargūya, cited by Ebn Sīnā, *Qānūn* II; Bīrūnī, *Ketāb al-ṣaydana fi'l-ṭebb*; Ebn al-Bayṭār, *Ketāb al-jāme' le'l-mofradāt*). These writers consider the eggplant to be a cause of heat and dryness of the second degree. Its harmful effects are not only internal but also external; it makes the complexion swarthy or sallow, gives rise to pimples on the face, causes ophthalmia, ulcers, impetigo, leprosy, and elephantiasis, aggravates hemorrhoids, etc. Internally it causes constriction and blockage, making the blood become thick and black, and giving rise to insomnia, epilepsy, enlargement of the liver, and excess of black bile with resultant depression. But if the salt in it is removed or if it is cooked with oil or vinegar, it acquires beneficial qualities, as it then neutralizes the bile and is useful in the treatment of ear diseases (Edrīsī, cited by Ebn al-Bayṭār, Ar. ed., I, p. 80; tr., I, p. 191), hemorrhoids, and nausea. Eggplant seeds are still used at Tehran as an expectorant for relief of asthma and catarrh (Hooper, p. 173).

In popular belief likewise, the eggplant is considered rather dangerous. When washing a fruit to remove the salt, a cook in Tehran will say that the poison must be taken out. From Ebn Waḥṣīya (quoted by Ebn al-'Awwām) we have an amusing account of notions held about this plant at the time when it first became known in the Eastern Mediterranean lands. Fantastic tales were then told to the effect that it would vanish and reappear 3,000 years later under the influence of the moon and the stars.

Etymology of bādenjān. Persian *bādenjān* is an early loan from the Pali *vātingana* (Turner), as evidenced by the numerous dialect forms of the word, e.g., *bādenjān* (Golius in Mesgnien-Meninski), *bādengān*, *bādeljān*, *bādlejān*, and popular *pātlejān* (Mesgnien-Meninski), *badenjūn* in Yarani (Christensen, 1930, p. 286), *pātešgā*, *pāteṅgā* (*Farhang-e Nafīsī*; Steingass), *vāyæmjūn* Farīzandi (Christensen, 1930, p. 286), *vāṅgūn* in Semnāni, and *vaṅgum* in Sangesari (Christensen, 1935, p. 182).

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