



BALŪṬ

BALŪṬ (Middle Persian *balūt* and Arabic *ballūt* from Aram. *bāloṭ/belūṭā*; see Mashkour, p. 82), common designation in New Persian both for acorn and oak, *Quercus* L.

Geobotany. Botanists-pharmacologists of the Islamic era (in Persia and in Arab lands), like their Greek predecessors Dioscorides and Galen, display scant, if any, information about the great variety of oaks and their habitats, though they know much about the medicinal virtues of oaks and “oak-apples” (see below). Ebn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) even deals with the oak and the chestnut tree under one and the same heading, *ballūt* (*Qānūn* II [Pers. tr.], pp. 99-100). The most comprehensive overall description is to be found in Tonokābonī’s *Toḥfat al-mo’menīn* (written in Persian in the reign of the Safavid Solaymān I, 1078-1105/1667-94), pp. 177-79, where, after indicating that *balūt* is called *dār-māzī* in the vernacular of Ṭabarestān and *bālūt* in Persian, he comments on a threefold distinction based on the form of the fruits, which he quotes from Ebn al-Kabīr’s *Mā lā yasa’ al-ṭabīb jahlah* (compiled in 711/1311-12): “one kind with roundish fruits, and that is *šāh-balūt* [chestnut]; two kinds with oblong fruits one with sweet edible acorns, and the other with bitter inedible ones, as observed in Daylam and Ṭabarestān.”

Only in the past few decades have a number of botanists endeavored to clear up the confused mass of imperfect data about the genus *Quercus* L. in Iran. Ḥ. Ṭābetī (1976, pp. 573-603), availing himself mainly of the findings of A. Camus (1936-39), M. Zohary (1961-63), K. Djavanshir (1967), and K. Browicz and G. L. Menitsky (1971), and employing the latest terminology, presents the following



species, subspecies, or varieties:

1. *Quercus atropatana* Schwarz. General habitat: Caspian forests from Arasbārān and Ṭavāleš to Gorgān and Katūl. Local names: *pālīt/pālet* (in Arasbārān), *kar-māzū* (in Rāmsar, Kalārdašt, Kojūr, Katūl).

2. *Q. brantii* Lindl. General habitat: Zagros highlands in W. Azarbaijan, Kermānšāh, Kurdistan, Lorestān, Baḳtīārī, and Fārs. Local names: *balūt* or *palīt* (in Kermānšāhān, Baḳtīārī, Fārs, etc.), *māzū* (in Lorestān, etc.), *balū/balī/barū*, *barū-dār* or *māzī* (in Sardašt, Kurdistan). There are three varieties: a) *Q. brantii* Lindl. var. *belangeri* (DC.) Zohary = *Q. persica* J. & Sp. var. *belangeri* DC.; b) *Q. brantii* Lindl. var. *brantii* Browicz; c) *Q. brantii* Lindl. var. *persica* (J. & Sp.) Zohary = *Q. persica* J. & Sp. (this last synonym, now discarded, is the source of designations such as *balūt-e īrānī* “Iranian oak,” or *balūt-e ġarb* “western oak,” by which *Q. brantii* is usually referred to in current Persian literature on the subject).

3. *Q. carduchorun* C. Koch. Habitat: Mīrābād (in Sardašt).

4. *Q. castaneaefolia* C.A.M. ssp. *castaneaefolia* Browicz & Menitsky. General habitat: Caspian and Caucasian forests; in Iran, from Āstārā to Golidāġ and Golestān (easternmost points in the so-called Hyrcanian floristic region). Local names: *boland-māzū* (in ‘Ammārlū, Lāhījān, Daylamān), *māzū/mūzī/meyzī* (in Gīlān, Māzandarān, Gorgān), *pālūt* (in Āstārā), *māyzū* (in Ṭavāleš), *ešpar/išbar* (around Rašt), *sīā(h)-māzū* (in Kojūr).

5. *Q. cedrorum* Ky. (= *Q. sessiliflora* Ky. = *Q. iberica* Stev.). Habitat: Pesān Valley (in Urmia), Sardašt, Kurdistan.

6. *Q. infectoria* Oliv. Three subspecies: a) ssp. *boissieri* (Reut.) Schwarz; habitat: Kurdistan and Sardašt; b) ssp. *latifolia* Schwarz; habitat: Kurdistan and Sardašt; c) ssp. *petiolaris* Schwarz; habitat: Kurdistan and Sardašt. Local names: *dār-māzū*, *māzū-dār*, *māzū*.

7. *Q. komarovii* A. Camus. Habitat: Ḳoy, Sardašt. Local name: *āq-pālīt*.

8. *Q. libani* Oliv. Habitat: Urmia, Sardašt, Kurdistan. Local names: *yavol/vovol*, and for var. *pinnata* Hd.-Mz.: *vayval/vahval*.

9. *Q. longipes* Stev. Habitat: Ḳoy and Oskū (in Azarbaijan). Local names: *pālīt*, *oskūpālītī*.



10. *Q. macranthera* Fisch. & Mey. Habitat: high Caspian forests from Arasbārān to Gorgān. Local names: *pālet* (in Arasbārān), *ūrī* (in Dorfak, Java-herdašt, Rāmsar), *kūrī* (in Rāmsar), *pāča-māzū* (in Lāhījān), *dambel-mūzī* (in Savādkūh), *torš-e māzū* (in Katūl).
11. *Q. magnosquamata* Djav. Habitat: Sardašt, Kurdistan. Local names: *vahel*, *vovol*.
12. *Q. mannifera* Lindl. Habitat: Sardašt, Kurdistan. Common name: (*derakt-e*) *gaz-e 'alaḡī*.
13. *Q. ovicarpa* Djav. Habitat: west Azarbaijan, Sardašt, Kurdistan.
14. *Q. petraea* L. ssp. *iberica* (Stev.) Krasslin (= *Q. iberica* Stev.). Habitat: Caspian forests from Gilān to Gorgān, especially in Tālār, Čālūs, and Harzevīl valleys. Local names: *kar-māzū*, *seḡīd-māzū*, *seḡīd-balūt*.
15. *Q. polynervata* Djav. Habitat: Sardašt, Kurdistan. Local name: *yovol*.
16. *Q. robur* L. Habitat: Azarbaijan, Kurdistan. The ssp. *pedunculiflora* (C. Koch) Menitsky is found in west Azarbaijan and, reportedly, in Mašhad.
17. *Q. vesca* Ky. Habitat: Sardašt (from Zamzīrān to Pīrānšahr) and probably, Kurdistan.

Note that cork oak, *balūt-e čūb-pamba(ī)*, *Quercus suber* L., first introduced into Iran in 1957-58, has been naturalized at some points along the Caspian littoral.

Area. In west and southwest Iran, where well-defined stands of oak exist, their total surface area has been estimated at 3,448,000 hectares, divided into two main areas: a *Q. infectoria* and *Q. libani* association, ca. 598,000 hectares, in west Kurdistan and in the Sardašt region, and a *Q. brantii* var. *persica* association, ca. 2,850,000 hectares, mainly on southwestern slopes of the Zagros (M. Moḡammadī, on the authority of V. Tregubov, 1970).

Uses. Eating acorns, either roasted whole or ground and baked into bread, is probably the oldest use of oaks in Iran. Bīrūnī, *Ketāb al-šaydana*, pp. 97-98 (Ar. text), quotes from Rāzī the following appreciation, which, he suspects, is related by the latter from the Greek physician Oribasios (ca. 325-ca. 400 a.d.): “*Ballūt*’s nutritional value is superior to that of [other] fruits, and even approximates that of the grains with which bread is made; and in the past,



people used to live on *balūṭ* alone.” But Anṭākī (d. 1008/1599), *Taḍkera* I, remarks that “the acorn bread, made in time of famine, is coarse, difficult to digest, and produces black bile.” Even in our times, “in years of distress and food shortage, Lurs and Kurds feed on *balūṭ*” (Nāẓem-al-Aṭebbā’ ‘A.-A. Nafīsī, *Farhang-e Nafīsī*, Tehran, 1318 Š./1940, s.v.). Normally the principal consumers of acorns are domestic and wild animals in the area.

Oak timber, especially that from *Q. castaneaefolia* and *Q. libani*, being hard, durable, and waterproof, is used in Iran for making boats, casks, outdoor rice depots, slabs and planks for rural houses (in the rainy Caspian region), furniture, doors, windows, agricultural implements, etc. *Q. castaneaefolia* timber is also an export article. Oak wood is valued as firewood and for making charcoal. The bark, with its considerable tannin (*māzūj*) content, is used in tannery.

Gall-nuts from *Q. brantii* var. *persica* or from *Q. infectoria*, variously called *barā-māzī*/*māzū*, *māzūj*, *māzū-rūskā*, *qolqāf/golgāv*, *zešga*, *ḵarnūk*, *qeča*, *sečak* etc., rich in tannin, are used in tannery and dyeing; they are exported, too (see also their medicinal use below). A persistent belief about the origin of “oak-apples” (Arabic *‘afṣ*) in Islamic medico-botanical works—a belief that goes back to Theophrastos according to Bīrūnī (loc. cit.), or to Galen according to Ebn al-Telmīḍ (d. 560/1165; as related by Tonokābonī, loc. cit.)—is that they are also the fruits of the oak, which produces alternatively acorns one year and galls the next (see also another explanation of galls in Bīrūnī, loc. cit., and in ‘Aqīlī Ḵorāsānī, *Maḵzan al-adwīa*, p. 124).

The sweetish manna commonly called *gaz-e ‘alafī* (or sometimes erroneously, *gaz-angabīn*, which, properly, is tamarisk manna; see Schlimmer, *Terminologie*, p. 358), resulting from the sting of a certain small insect on the young leaves and twigs of *Q. mannifera*, is used in confectionery (especially in making the sweetmeat *bāsloq* or as a cheaper substitute for *gaz-angabīn* in making the delicacy called *gaz*).

Medicinal uses. Early in the Islamic era, all parts of the oak (and above all, *joft-e balūṭ*, i.e., the exocarp of acorn kernels) were acknowledged as astringent and dessicative, and consequently various preparations thereof have been prescribed for checking different morbid discharges of blood, etc. (e.g. hemoptysis, dysentery, intestinal ulcers, menorrhagia, spermatorrhea), or for dressing various sores and wounds (for further information about these and other uses of the oak, see Tonokābonī and ‘Aqīlī Ḵorāsānī, loc. cit., who reflect



and embody mainly the traditional Greco-Islamic medicinal botany). The *gaz-e 'alafti* manna, however, should be dealt with apart, because, although it is an oak product, it is free of the astringent tannin and is used in popular medicine in the same cases as tamarisk manna, i.e., as an aperient (especially for children, who are enticed by its taste) and as an expectorant and demulcent.

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