



BĀQELĀ

BĀQELĀ (also pronounced *bāqālā* or *bāqālī*; in Arabic texts, *bāqellā*['], broad beans, i.e., the grains of *Vicia faba* L. Older Iranian dialectal names recorded by Abū Bakr b. 'Alī Kāsānī in his Persian version of Bīrūnī's *Ṣaydana* (1st half of the 8th/15th century), I, p. 116: Sajzī (= Sīstanī) *kālūsak* and Bostī *kūsak*.

One of the oldest crops in the Old World, *bāqelā* seems to have always been grown in the Near and Middle East wherever climatic conditions are favorable to its cultivation. In Iran, it is grown rather extensively in the Caspian provinces (especially in Gīlān and Māzandarān) and, to a lesser extent, in the south and southwest. Qāsem Abūnaṣrī Heravī, *Eršād*, pp. 91-92, mentions the cultivation of two varieties of it (namely, *rasmī* "standard" and *mīrzā'ī* also called *baḡdādī* "from Baghdad") in the Herat area in 921/1515-16. Nowadays two main indigenous varieties are grown in Iran: the common one (sometimes referred to as *māzandarānī* "native of Māzandarān"), in varying sizes according to cultivars, and the local variety called *pāčā bāqlā* in Gīlān, with slender seedpods looking like French beans (*lūbīā*) and containing small tender grains, which are never eaten raw or cooked by themselves, but as the main ingredient of the popular Gīlānī dish *bāqlā-qātoq* (see below).

Eating fresh raw *māzandarānī* broad beans is common in Gīlān and Māzandarān, either alone or (as in Gīlān) with cooled *kata* (undrained boiled rice), salted fish eggs, etc.; but selling and enjoying (especially by people of the lower classes) of hot cooked broad beans (*bāqelā-garmak*) sprinkled with salt and powdered Persian marjoram (*golpar*) are not an uncommon street scene in cold weather almost everywhere in Iran. Broad beans, either fresh or (when



out of season) dried, form the specific ingredient of a number of dishes: *bāqelā-polow* (pilaf cooked with green beans and dill and customarily eaten with meat or chicken, *kʷoreš-e bāqelā* (a kind of stew with *bāqelā*, meat, dill, and, occasionally, scrambled eggs), *kūfta bāqelā* (ground meat balls with green *bāqelā*), *dampoktak* or *damī* (*kata*, yellow dried *bāqelā*, fried onion, turmeric), the Gīlāni dish *bāqlā-qātoq* (*pāča bāqlā* cooked with dill, garlic, and turmeric, into which eggs are emptied at the end), etc. After the harvest *bāqelā* pods and plants are used as cattle fodder.

The popularity of *bāqelā* in Iran is only marred by the eventuality of favism, many severe and even fatal cases of which are annually reported from Gīlān and Māzandarān in some predisposed individuals who have ingested fresh raw Māzandarānī broad beans (the variety *pāča bāqlā* reportedly does not cause favism) or who have just inhaled the pollen from *bāqelā* flowers in or near *bāqelā* fields (for statistics on favism in Iran, see Jalāl Jamālīān, *Fāvism o rābeṭa-ye ān bā bāqelā*, Shiraz, 1355 Š./1976-77). Although classical authors of Arabic materia medica in the Islamic era (see bibliography) have noted some harmful side effects of ingesting raw fresh *bāqelā* (e.g., it produces a lot of winds, i.e. flatulence, noxious thick “humors,” flabby flesh, debilitates the mind, causes headache, vertigo, sadness, and depression, prevents one from having “divinatory dreams”), Abūnaṣrī Heravī seems to be the first Islamic author to refer to this mysterious favism when he says (ibid.): “If someone goes into a place where broad beans are in bloom, he runs the risk of falling sick, because blooming broad beans, infectious as they are, will affect [him] deeply.”

The numerous medicinal virtues and uses indicated for *bāqelā* (also called *fūl* in Arabic) by “laic” physicians and pharmacologists of the Islamic era (as found, e.g., in Ebn al-Bayṭār’s *Jāmeʿ* I, pp. 76-78, and Ebn Sīnā’s *Qānūn* II [Persian tr.], pp. 101-02) are derived mainly from Dioscorides and Galen (an exhaustive inventory in Persian is found in M.-Ḥ. ʿAqīlī Kōrāsānī, *Makẓan al-adwīa*, compiled in 1183/1769-70, p. 106); but the earliest genuinely Islamic references to the virtues of broad beans are to be found in religious (Shīʿite) sources, namely those references transmitted by Aḥmad b. Moḥammad Barqī Qomī (d. 274/887?), *Ketāb al-maḥāsen*, p. 506, from Imam Jaʿfar al-Šādeq (d. 148/765) as having said: “Broad beans increase the marrow in shinbones, and the brain; they produce fresh blood and, if eaten with their husks, they “tan” the stomach.”



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