



BEH II. THE TREE

ii. The Tree

The quince tree, *Cydonia vulgaris* Pers. (= *C. cydonia* Pers., *Pyrus cydonia* L., etc.), a native of Iran, Asia Minor, and probably also of Greece and the Crimea (see *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* IX, 1985, s.v. “quince”), is, in its wild state, still widespread in middle-altitude mountainous Caspian woods from Āstārā to Katūl (in Gorgān); it has also been reported from Jahrom (in central Fārs Province). Local names are: *heyvā/hīvā/āyvā* (in Āstāra), *šāl-bē* (in Gīlān), *tūč/tüč/toč* (in Lāhijān, Deylamān, Rūdsar), *sangah/sengeh* (in Rāmsar, Šahsavār), *šāl(-e) beh* (in Māzandarān, Rāmīān, Katūl; lit., “jackal quince”), etc. (cf. beh, i).

As the first synonym above indicates, this fruit-tree occurs only in one genus and in one species, but several edible cultivars do exist in Iran, which have been obtained by grafting on wild quince stocks or, sometimes, on pear-trees etc., and which have been propagated in Iran wherever climate and soil quality are favorable to their cultivation. In our times, reputedly the best quinces are from Isfahan, but Bīrūnī (362-440/973-1048; *Ketāb at-šaydana fī'l-ṭebb*, ed. H. M. Said, Karachi, 1973, Arabic text, p. 222, s.v. *safarjal*) reports that “the esteemed ones thereof are from Rīvand in Nīšāpūr, where one finds fragrant large quinces, a single one of which often exceeds 1 1/4 *man* (sic).”

Although numerous officinal virtues and uses are indicated for quince both in religious (Islamic) works (e.g., Ebn Qayyem al-Jawzīya, *al-Ṭebb al-nabawī*, ed. 'A. Amīn Qaḷ'ajī, 2nd ed., Cairo, 1982, pp. 369-70) and in laic ones (e.g., in



Arabic, Dā'ūd Anṭākī, *Tadkeratūli'l-albāb wa'l-jāme' le'l-'ajab al-'ojāb*, Cairo, 1308/1890-91, p. 165, and, in Persian, Moḥammad Mo'men Ḥosaynī Tonokābonī, *Toḥfat al-mo'menīn*, Tehran, 1360 Š./1981-82, pp. 485-86), nowadays in Iran the only part of quince used therapeutically is its mucilaginous seeds, *beh-dāna*, employed in infusion either by themselves or in the popular traditional compound *čārtoḵm(a)* ("the four seeds," i.e., those of *beh*, *bārhang* or *Plantago major* L., *qoddūma* or *Sisymbrium alliaria* Scop., and *sepestān* or *Cordia mixa* L.), administered as a demulcent and expectorant in pulmonary affections. Quince seeds are also exported to some foreign countries, where its mucilage is used mainly in perfumery or for dressing cotton fabrics.

Botanically related to *beh*, the *beh-e žāponī* (Japanese quince), *Chaenomeles lagenaria* (formerly classified as *Cydonia japonica* Pers.), has been widely naturalized and cultivated in Iran during the past few decades as a favorite early-blooming ornamental shrub.

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