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CASSIA
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CASSIA, a genus of shrubs and trees of the family Leguminosae (or Caesalpiniaceae in some classifications). This article deals only with the fruit of the species *C. fistula* L. (= *Cathartocarpus fistula* Pers.), variously called drumstick tree, Indian laburnum, purging cassia, etc.

The fruit of this tree (also called cassia fistula) is a long (30-60 cm) cylindrical pod (2-3 cm in diameter) with a blackish brown pericarp, internally divided into numerous compartments (25-100) by thin woody transverse partitions (in Arabic, called *folūs*, plur. of *fals* "fish scale, disc"). Each compartment contains a soft black viscid pulp with a mawkish sweet taste and enclosing a single seed (Dymock et al., I, pp. 511-15: Zargarī, II, pp. 111-13). The principal part used medicinally is the pulp.

The elongated pod is called *ḵīār(-e) šanbar* in classical medico-pharmacological Arabic texts of the Islamic period—a name arabicized from Persian *ḵīār(-e) čanbar*, lit. "hoop[-like] cucumber," which originally designates a kind of cucumber (*ḵīār*) or, more precisely, a kind of melon (*Cucumis melo* var. *flexuosus*, "snake/serpent cucumber") which has a flexuous body looking like a *čanbar* "hoop, clavicle" (see Ṭabāṭabāʾī, I, pp. 913, 925; see also cucumber). The name *ḵīār(-e) čanbar* is no longer used for the cassia fistula in Persia; it has been replaced by *folūs*, standing for *folūs-e ḵīār(-e) čanbar* "the septa of the cassia fistula" and then, by metonymy, for the fruit itself (the earliest mention of *folūs* alone for the purging cassia in our sources is by Schlimmer [1874], who records *folūs* for the pod [p. 113], and *maḡz-e folūs* "the pith of *folūs*" for its pulp [p. 476]). Other, less commonly used, Arabic names for this pod are

qeṭṭāʾ hendī “Indian cucumber” and *ḵornūb/ḵarrūb hendī* “Indian carob” (e.g., in Ebn Maymūn, Ar. text, p. 41, no. 387). Bīrūnī also reports (*Ṣaydana* I, p. 280) the arabicized form *ḵīār ṣanbar* and the Sejzī (i.e., Sīstānī) name *ney*[*-e*] *hendū* “Indian reed.” Another name, of uncertain form and origin, is *bakbar*, recorded, e.g., in the *Borhān-e qāṭeʿ* (ed. Moʿīn, I, s.v.) where, however, an Indian origin of the word is not excluded. Tonokābonī (pp. 176, 369) has *bakīr* (?) as the Indian name of the *ḵīār-šanbar*, and Anṭākī (I, p. 129) provides the Arabic synonym *al-baktar* [?] *al-hendī* for it.

Cassia fistula grows wild in Malay Archipelago, India (where it is cultivated, too), Ceylon, Egypt, and tropical Africa. It does not occur in Persia (Zargarī, loc. cit., is wrong on this point), where the genus is represented only by the native *C. oboyata* Coll., the senna (tree), called *kowsen* in Bandar-e ʿAbbās, and styled *sanā*(*-ye*) *makkī* “Meccan senna” in classical sources (see Ṭābetī, pp. 202-03). However, the linguistic evidence (cf. the Persian and Arabic names above) would indicate that, at least in the earliest times, the purging cassia in Islamic countries was of Indian provenience. The statement by Ebn Māsūya (d. 243/857) that, “of the two kinds of *ḵīār-šanbar*, one is imported from Kabul and the other from Basra region” (apud Bīrūnī, *Ketāb al-ṣaydana*, Ar. text, p. 173) indicates two points on the westward export routes of the Indian or Malayan product. Therefore, Laufer’s statements (pp. 422-23) that “the Persians received [this] fruit from the Arabs on the one hand, and from northwestern India on the other,” and that “they adopted the Arabic word *xiyār-šanbar* [*sic*] in the form *xiyār-čambar* (compare also Armenian *xiar-šamb . . .*)” are not plausible. Further, his tentative restoration of a Middle Persian prototype for the New Persian *ḵīār*(*-e*) *čanbar*, i.e., **xaryadẓambax* [*sic*], runs counter to his assertion that *ḵīār-čanbar* is persianized from Arabic.

The earliest comprehensive description in Persian of the medicinal properties of the cassia fistula pulp is by Mowaffaq Heravī (4th/10th cent.; pp. 132-33): “The *ḵīār-šanbar* [also recorded as *ḵīār*(*-e*) *čanbar* on pp. 234 and 333] is moderate as to hotness, coldness, dryness, and moistness. The best is the one with a thinner peel, and a thicker, darker, and glossier pod. It purges gently, cleanses the stomach and bowels from bile, black bile, and humor, and evacuates dried feces. Taken with turbith it enhances the effectiveness of the latter in evacuating the bilious humor. Taken with chicory water or with nightshade (*ʿenab al-ṯaʿlab*) it is beneficial for fever [of choleric origin], arthralgia, hepatitis, and jaundice, especially if dodder water is added to [the mixture]. Gargling with *ḵīār-šanbar*, coriander water, or nightshade water will

cure the *āmās-e galū* (“swelling in the throat”; laryngitis, angina). [Taken internally] it will heal abdominal *dobayla* ([suppurating] abscess/tumor), deobstruate the colic, brighten the complexion, and increase the discharge of urine. Before use it should be kept in its capsule.” Jorjānī (d. 531/1136) had hardly anything new to add to Heravī’s account, except that “the *ḵ̲īār*(*-e*) *čanbaṛ . . .* with badian is a proven remedy for articular inflammation and pains” (pp. 635-36). As in the case of most other Galenic drugs, the use of the purging cassia has narrowed with time. In 1865 the Austrian Dr. J. E. Polak, a one-time chief physician to the Qajar shah Nāṣer-al-Dīn, reported only that the *fūlūs* (*Cassia fistulosa* [*sic*]) was used by native physicians as a drastic adjuvant to the ingredients of purgative enemas (e.g., castor oil, “Meccan senna,” *šīrḵešt* manna)—an admixture that could cause great harm, even death, if used inopportunely (II, p. 218; Pers. tr., p. 413)—and that it was prescribed indiscriminately in all gastric and intestinal ailments “maybe because of its bowel-like appearance” (II, p. 220; Pers. tr., p. 414). Nowadays in Persia, the *folūs* is sometimes used only as a laxative with antibilious action, and suitable to all “temperamental” conditions.

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