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ČENĀR

ČENĀR, the "Oriental plane (tree)," *Platanus orientalis* L. (fam. Platanaceae).

This species of plane is indigenous from southeastern Europe to the Iranian plateau. In Persia proper, spontaneous planes have been observed by botanists in Azarbaijan (Ḵᵛoy), Kermānšāhān (Harsīn), Hamadān, Luristan (Ḵorramābād, Šahbāzān, etc.), Baḵtīārī (Safīddašt, mountains up to Sardašt), Ḵūzestān (Gatvand), Fārs (near Shiraz, near Ḡār-e Šāpūr, Kāzerūn, Sabzpūšān), Kermān (Mount Naṣr up to 2,600 m above sea level), Khorasan (Bojnūrd, Torbat-e Jām), Qom (Rāhjerd), Gīlān (Rūdbār, highlands between Lošān and ʿAmmārlū), Māzandarān (Kojūr, Harāz valley, Panjāb), and southern Alborz region (including Tehran area); wild plane groves have also been reported between Katūl and Dāmḡān (Sāʿī, I, p. 219; Ṭābetī, pp. 521-23; Qahramān, no. 1221). It is commonly named *čenār* (Mid. Pers. *čenār*; early Pers. also *čenāl*, as recorded, e.g., in Asadī Ṭūsī's *Loḡat-e fors*, ed. ʿA. Eqbāl, p. 332). In Kurdistan, *čenār* also designates the white poplar (a variety of plane is called *jowhardār* in Kurdish; see Hažār, s.vv.).

The popularity and wide distribution of cultivated planes as ornamental or shade trees in Persia, especially in gardens and along city streets, are due to several features of the plane. It grows rapidly, especially when young, and may reach 30 m (and sometimes more) in height, with a spreading crown, large palmate leaves (compared by some Persian poets to spread human hands; see Dehḵodā, s.v. *čenār*), and a lofty, usually upright and slightly tapering trunk the base of which, when advanced in years, develops abnormally into an enormous, often squat mass, which old age hollows out. Its

longevity is also impressive: 2,000 years or longer (*Great Soviet Encyclopedia* XX, pp. 205-06, s.v. *Platanus*). It can be easily multiplied and propagated in various ways: by seeds, cuttings of shoots, or by layering the shoots. Planes grow best in rich, deep, cool, and moist soils (actually they need plenty of moisture at their roots); they survive, but do not thrive, in dry, clay or saline soils. Further, so far as modern Persian cities are concerned, planes are resistant to air pollution and to the polluted irrigating water running in open city water channels, factors that impede their full, fast development, however. Another probable reason for the popularity of the plane in Persia is that people believe that this tree prevents the spread of infectious fever and diseases the germs of which are found in the air (Wilber, p. 10; Pers. tr., p. 33). (This sanitary effect of planes is not recorded anywhere in our early sources. However, the Spanish Arab Aḥmad Gāfeqī [apud Ebn al-Bayṭār, I, pt. 2, p. 94, s.v. *dolb*, which is the most common name for the plane in Arabic], probably commenting on Ebn Sīnā's relevant statement [see below], says that fumigating a house with the fruits and leaves of the plane drives *ḵanāfes* [coleopterans, bugs] away).

Another indication of the importance of the *čenār* in Persia is the large number of localities (mostly hamlets and villages) named with reference to it (e.g., see Dehḵodā, s.v. *čenār* and its compounds), quoting from Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana's *Merʾāt̲al-boldān* and from Razmārā's *Farhang*, has recorded 28 localities named Čenār, 12 named Čenārān (note also Čenārān-e Beyglar Ḵān, a hamlet west of Nehāvand), 45 toponyms consisting of Čenār and a complement (e.g., Čenāron, lit. "plane tree," a village in Lāhījān; Čenār[-e] Ḵātūn, lit. "the lady's plane," a village in Borūjerd; Čenār Ḵoška, lit. "the dried-up plane," a village in Ḵorramābād; Čenār[-e] Sūḵta, lit. "the burnt plane," a village in Ābāda, in Darra Gaz, and in Jahrom; cf. the Čenar[-e] Sūḵta in Tehran, below; Čenar[-e] Šayḵ "the Shaikh's plane" and Čenār-e ʿAbbās Ḵān, villages in Hamadān; and Čenār-e Sayyed Moḥarram, a village in Ardabīl), and 16 cases of Čenār with a suffix (e.g., Čenārak "the little plane," a village in Damāvand; Čenārestān "plane grove," a village in Qazvīn; Čenārī, a village in Nehāvand). There are numerous toponyms that have *čenār* as their second component, e.g., Pā Čenār, lit. "at the foot of/under the plane," a village in Kermān, also old quarters in Tehran and Shiraz.

Čenār is frequently mentioned in classical Persian poetry (see also below) and often referred to in more factual works. It is mentioned in the *Bundahišn* (TD_2, p. 16, l. 10; tr. Anklesaria, p. 147, par. 8) along with the cypress, the white

poplar, the boxtree, etc., as a perennial tree without any nutritional value for man.

Probably the oldest extant agricultural discussion of it in Persian is that by the learned vizier Rašīd-al-Dīn Fażl-Allāh (d. 718/1318; pp. 55-57), who was also an enthusiastic horticulturist. Besides detailed agricultural hints, he has this to say: "The *čenār* is a *mobārak* (blessed, lucky) tree, long-living, growing to huge dimensions . . . Its wood does not rot, and it is not affected by the xylophagous maggot, so it is precious. The plane does not occur everywhere, and so it has to be brought at great pains from remote places for planting in the grandees' houses. Oddly, the plane takes wherever it is planteḍ . . . It did not exist in Tabrīz [the capital]. During the past few years I had a lot [of young planes] brought from the provinces [of Ḡāzān's dominions] and had them planted [in Tabrīz]. Some of them have [already] grown big but some [have remained] smalḷ . . . When grown up, the plane can do without watering or *ʿemārat* (tending, care?), because its largeness and longevity are due to its strong roots, which go down till they reach [underground] wateṛ . . . Many fruit trees and fruitless ones can be grafted on the plane, and the graft mostly takes. Similarly, the plane [can be grafted] on other trees . . ." (concerning this grafting, see also below). References to the popularity of the plane and to the large size of some specimens in Persia are found particularly in the travel books of some European visitors to Persia. Marco Polo refers to a lofty, solitary tree in the province of Tonocain (i.e., Tūn o Qāʾen), which he calls the tree of the sun (Arbre Sol) and which H. Cordier identified as a plane tree (pp. 83, 127, 128 n. 2). The Italian diplomat Pietro della Valle, writing in June 1618 about the then village of Tehran, says (I, p. 703; Pers. tr., p. 288); "All streets are shaded by planes, which in Persia they call *cinar*, big, luxuriant and handsome, and I must say I have not seen in all my life any bigger or more beautiful. Many of them are so [thick] that two or three men could not embrace them, therefore I call Tehran the city of planes." Concerning the Bāḡ-e Jannat (Paradise Garden) outside Isfahan, he says that he "would have rather called it forest garden, because it [had] nothing but innumerable tall and thick planes, which shade it" (I, pp. 722-23; Pers. tr., p. 311). His contemporary de Silva Figueroa mentions a gigantic plane tree in the vicinity of "Natan" (i.e., Naṭanz near Kāšān), whose shade could accommodate a great number of people, horses, and camels. A trunk over seven toises thick supported a large number of branches so huge that they could serve as boles to the largest trees in Europe. A tiled platform, about 20-24 feet in diameter surrounded the trunk and was enclosed by a wall (pp. 251-52, Pers. tr., pp. 283-84). Among the gardens laid out by

Tīmūr (Tamerlane) in Samarqand was a plane garden (Bāḡ-e Čenār) mentioned by Šāmī (p. 211) and Bābor (p. 78), the founder of the Mughal empire in India. Bābor also mentions the Bāḡ-e Kalān "Great garden" in Kabul, in which garden stout planes were found. Among other Kabul gardens, he also mentioned the Bāḡ-e Čenār (quoted from Bābor's *Memoirs* by Wilber, p. 35; Pers. tr., p. 96). Isfahan's famous boulevard Č(ah)ār Bāḡ was lined with four rows of plane trees. In 1881, Mrs. Dieulafoy was much impressed by a colossal, odd-looking plane at "Tajrīš mosque" (i.e., at Emāmzāda Ṣāleḥ in Tajrīš, now a northern district of Tehran; for this plane, see below), whose circumference reached "nearly fifteen meters," and which shaded the activities of a great many people, including a primary school master and his class, and a *qahvačī* (tea-shop keeper) who had installed his samovar and paraphernalia inside the hollow in the tree base (p. 158; Pers. tr., pp. 170-72; Figure 10; cf. H. Rawlinson quoted as saying that "at Tajrīš . . . he measured a great *čīnār* [*sic*] which had a girth of 108 feet at 5 feet from the ground;" for this and further quotations from European travelers about planes in Persia, see Yule and Burnell, p. 187). Of the Emāmzāda Ṣāleḥ plane (visited by the present writer in December 1989) there remains only the dried-up huge bifurcate trunk base; a couple of recent shoots, however, indicate that the tree base is not completely dead.

In 1347 Š./1968-69 the former Sāzmān-e Mellī-e Ḥefāẓat-e Āṯār-e Bāstānī-e Īrān (National Organization for the Conservation of the Antiquities of Iran) started locating and registering again all over the country the conspicuous trees at least one hundred years old. The *šenās-nāma*s (identity records) established for them show a great many planes, including one in Šahmīrzād (age: 1,500 years; height: 25 m; circumference of the trunk at 1 m from ground level: 15 m), another one in Ṭarq, a village in Naṭanz (age: 1,300 years; height: 25 m; circum.: 7.8 m), and another one in Ḵāmna in East Azarbaijan (age: 1,250; height: 22 m; circum.: 16.5 m). These records (the present writer got access to the photocopies of many of them at the Dept. of the Environment in Tehran) also confirm Della Valle's remark that Persians have "a custom which leads them to venerate all large and old trees, believinġ . . . that these are the retreat of happy souls whom . . . they call *pīr* or *šeyḵ* or *emām* . . ." (quoted by Massé, I, pp. 221-22; tr., p. 223; cf. also J. Chardin's statement that "the Mohammedans devoutly revere trees which seem to have existed for several centuries"; *Voyages* VII, p. 424; quoted by Massé, loc. cit.). Veneration of old trees seems to point to the survival of an ancient tradition in Persia. Xerxes is said to have decorated a beautiful plane tree with golden ornaments during his expedition against Greece (Herodotus, 7.31; cf. Polo, p. 129). In fact, many of the above-

mentioned recorded old planes are situated at or near the shrine of an *emāmzāda* (q.v.), at or near a mosque, a *takīa* (q.v.), an old cemetery, or similar "sacred" places, for instance: the 220-year-old and 20-meter-high plane at Emāmzāda ʿAbbās in Sārī; the 140-year-old and 20-meter-high one at Pīr Takīa in the same city; the 420-year-old and 21-meter-high one in front of the Masjed-e Bālā in Kāḵak (*šahrestān* of Gonābād); and the 205-year-old and 30-meter-high one at the old cemetery in Rostamkalāta (a hamlet in Gorgān).

Some of the more venerable of these old planes are popularly believed or expected to work miracles, such as curing an illness, finding a good husband for an unwed girl, or ridding a married woman of her co-wife. In order to have their wishes granted, superstitious people (usually women) tie a *daḵīl* (mostly a shred from their *čādor*, scarf, dress, and the like) to a nail which they drive well into the plane trunk (or they may use a nail left by someone whose wish has been granted and who, accordingly, has untied her *daḵīl*). If there are accessible shoots or twigs on the trunk, the *daḵīl* may be tied on them. Votive candles may also be lit somewhere on the trunk or, if the trunk base has been hollowed out by age, inside the grotto. In Tehran, two of the oldest planes still extant at the old sanctuary of Emāmzāda Yaḥyā bear the vestiges of old and recent *daḵīl*s (these two planes have been marked by the former Edāra-ye Koll-a Bāstanšenāsī). The one standing now outside the premises of the Emāmzāda is known as Čenār(-e) Sūḵta (the burnt plane), for the huge hollow in the trunk base has been charred by the smoke and flame of votary candles and lamps (now the entrance to the tree grotto is barred by a door; concerning this Čenār-Sūḵta, see also Massé, I, p. 219; tr., p. 221). Another "miracle-working" plane in Tehran, known as Haft Čenār (the seven planes), is located near a small mosque in a southwestern district of the city. (When I visited it in December 1989 the old mosque had been demolished, and a new one was being built on its site.) This plane looks like seven independent planes having grown very close to each other, but reportedly the seven massive trunks have developed from a single enormous base, which is now almost totally buried in the ground. This seven-bole plane, signalized by the "sacredness" of the number seven, also bears *daḵīl*s, and the small grotto in one of the boles is charred.

The popular veneration for old, portly planes (and similar longevous trees like cypresses) may, in some cases, have created fictitious patron saints for them. For instance, in connection with the plane of Emāmzāda Ṣāleḥ, who is popularly believed to be a nephew of the eighth imam, ʿAlī al-Reżā (Massé, I,

pp. 219-20; tr., loc. cit.; another supposition is that he was the imam's brother), Hedāyat has recorded a folktale about the origin of that plane (pp. 164-65; also quoted by Massé, I, p. 20; tr., loc. cit.). Within the Arg precinct in Tehran there were a number of old *čenār*s known as *čenār-e ʿabbāsī* and popularly, but erroneously, ascribed to ʿAbbās b. ʿAlī. According to Eʿtemād-al-Salṭana et al. (pp. 603-04), they had probably been planted by the order of Shah ʿAbbās I (for a different interpretation, see Moʿayyer-al-Mamālek, pp. 16, 28).

Plane wood is lightweight, hard (but easy to plane), with an attractive texture. It constitutes the main carpentry material in most non-wooded areas of the country, for instance in Isfahan, where "the farmers call it *mīḵ-e ṭelāʾī* (golden peg; Ḥejāzī et al., p. 7, a study of the anatomical structure and the growth rate of the wood of numerous elderly planes felled on the premises of Karaj Agricultural College). Nowadays it is frequently used to make chests, doors, and windows, parquet, veneer, etc. Adam Olearius, member of the embassy sent by the Duke of Holstein-Gottorp to the Safavid court in Isfahan during the first half of the 11th/17th century, when writing about Persian decorative woodwork, reports (p. 756; quoted in *Survey of Persian Art*, 3rd ed., VI, p. 2625) that Persians "like especially a kind of wood, unknown in Europe, called *Tzinar* [i.e., *čenār*] . . . [It] is brown and has a wavy grain, and the Persians use it for doors and windows, which, when rubbed with oil, become incomparably finer than those made here [i.e., in Europe] of walnut." The wooden columns in the former royal Safavid palaces ʿĀlī Qāpū and Čehel Sotūn in Isfahan (both built during the 1st half of the 11th/17th cent.), are hewn out of plane logs to an average diameter of 60 cm and are still holding firm in spite of severe insect damage (Ḥejāzī et al., loc. cit., and pictures on pp. 8-9). Plane wood, usually obtained by pollarding the planes, is also used as a fairly good fuel in some rural areas. (For individual representations of the plane in Persian painting, see *Survey of Persian Art* XV, index, p. 47, s.v. Plane trees.) The statement by some Persian poets and lexicographers that "the plane is known to catch fire by itself" (Moḥammad Pādšāh, s.v. *čanār* [*sic*]) or that "at night it rains sparks" (Rāmpūrē, p. 285, s.v. *čenār*) may have its explanation in the flammability of dry plane wood (cf. Anṭākī, I, p. 134, s.v. *dolb*, who remarks that "it smells like tar"): As in the primitive fire-making method of generating heat and then fire by the friction of two wooden objects, the dried spreading branches of an old plane rubbing together in the wind (especially in dry weather) may produce smoke and ignite fire. Some of the above-mentioned "burnt planes" may have suffered from this phenomenon, too. For literary allusions to plane fire, see Dehḵodā, s.v. *čenār*, including the obsolete proverb

"the plane's fire is from the plane itself," and Farīd-al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār's distich, "Every silkworm clothes itself with a shroud, every plane ignites fire from itself."

Medicinal properties and uses were found out for the plane by Dioscorides (I.107, Eng, tr., p. 58; Ar. tr. apud Ebn al-Bayṭār, I, pt. 2, p. 94, s.v. *dolb*) and Galen (Ar. tr. ibid.). The physicians and pharmacologists of the Islamic world in the Middle Ages have added hardly anything new to the findings of the Greek masters (see, e.g., Majūsī, II, p. 115, Mowaffaq Heravī, pp. 155-56, Ebn Sīnā, I, bk. 2, p. 292). Concerning the (Galenic) *mezāj* (temperament, nature) of the plane, whereas Galen states that "the essence of the plane is moist and not far from moderate things," the Medieval Islamic period scholars do not seem to concur with him or with each other. To Ṭabarī (p. 403), "the plane is cold and moist"; Majūsī believes that "the temperament of fresh plane leaves is cold and dry"; Heravī thinks that "it is cold and dry in the first degree"; and Ebn Sīnā states that "it is cold in the first degree, its bark and *jawz* [lit. "(wal)nut," here globular fruit] are highly dry, detergent (*jālī*), and siccative." An interesting, probably new, point in these non-Greek authors concerns the noxious or repelling effect of the plane on a certain animal: Majūsī says that "the *ḵoffāš* (bat) dies of its leaves if these are burned"; Heravī states that "if plane leaves and bark are burned, the *parastū* (swallow) will die of their smoke"; Ebn Sīnā seems to have the correct reading of the name of the animals involved when he stresses that plane leaves and bark will kill *ḵanāfes* (plur. of *ḵonfosāʾ*, see above; the disparity seems to have derived from the confusion in reading the hand-written Arabic words *ḵanāfes*, *ḵafāfīš* [plur. of *ḵoffāš*], and *ḵaṭāṭīf* [plur. of *ḵoṭṭāf*, "swallow"]).

Tonokābonī (fl. 1077-105/1667-94) is probably the first Islamic pharmacologist-physician to have discussed plane *ʿaraq* (distillate) and its properties (p. 388). He explains how to obtain it from the bark, leaves, and fruits of the plane and states that it is "highly beneficial against asthma (*żīq al-nafas*). As to the distillate from plane roots, he specifies that it fortifies the body, the stomach, and the nerves, fattens the body, is good against piles, "cold" diseases, muscular tremor, dropsy (*estesqāʾ*), and belly ache. This distillate, he says, "causes some euphoria, but it is not inebriating." Nowadays in Persia the *ʿaraq* from plane leaves is commercialized (by Iran Targol Co., Tehran) and advertised as "very cold, febrifuge, fattening thin persons, useful against neurosis, muscular tremor, and asthma."

Despite all those virtues and uses, the plane has been disparaged by some less

romantic Persian poets as “fruitless,” “empty-handed,” and, therefore, useless (cf. the same poetic disgrace on the *bīd* “willow,” cypress, etc., see also Dehḵodā, loc. cit.). That is probably why some horticulturists have contrived to make the plane “fruitful” by trying various grafts on it. Following Rašīd-al-Dīn Fażl-Allāh (see above), Abūnaṣrī Heravī, author of a treatise on agriculture and horticulture in the Herat area (*Eršād al-zerāʿa*, comp. 921/1515-16), repeating that most fruit trees can be successfully grafted on the plane (p. 198), is particularly intent on the possibility of grafting the grapevine on it. In order to substantiate his claim, he quotes Galen (Jālīnūs-e Ḥakīm): “The grapevine cannot be grafted on any tree except the plane, and that because of the full similarity between them as to wood, leaves, and the small number [?] of branches. That cleft-grafting of the vine on a young plane . . . will produce a lot of grapes has been [successfully] experimented” (pp. 198-99).

See also daḵīl and deraḵt.

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