



GĀV-ZABĀN

GĀV-ZABĀN (lit. "ox-tongue," in reference to the rough, tongue-shaped leaves of the plant), the popular designation for several medicinal species of the borage family (Boraginaceae).

The term *gāv-zabān* seems to be an old calque of Ar. *lesān al-ṭawr*, by which the earliest Arabic translator of Dioscorides (1st century C.E.), Eṣṭefan b. Basīl (Stephanos, son of Basileos; 3rd/9th century), has translated literally Dioscorides' *bouglosson* (no. 101, p. 352; see also an improved version thereof in Ebn al-Bayṭār, IV, s.v. *lesān al-ṭawr*). Dioscorides' *bouglosson* has usually been identified as *Anchusa italica* Retz. (= *A. paniculata* Ait., as in the edition of the old English translation [1655] of Dioscorides, bk. iv, no. 128).

Medicinal uses. Dioscorides, in his short and vague description of *bouglosson*, mentioned (apparently by hearsay) only one medicinal virtue for it: A decoction thereof in wine "is thought to be a cause of mirth." Galen (Jālīnūs, 2nd century C.E.; quoted by Ebn al-Bayṭār, *ibid.*), trying to elucidate Dioscorides' statement, explained that the said euphoriant virtue results from the "hot and moist" nature of the plant. He also cited a new use for it: "When cooked with oxymel, it is good for coughs due to roughness in the throat and windpipe." Later, certainly because of confusion with other similar boraginaceous plants popularly called *lesān al-ṭawr* (see below), additional medicinal properties, sometimes discordant or even conflicting, were 'discovered' and mentioned by physician-pharmacologists of the Islamic period. According to Ebn Māsūya/Māsawayh (d. 243/857; quoted by Ebn al-Bayṭār, *ibid.*), "It evacuates [excess] bile and atrabile; [consequently], if taken



with Armenian bole, it is good for *kaḥfaqān* [abnormal heart palpitation] caused by [excessive] bile.” Abū Maṣṣūr Mowaffaq Heravī (4th/10th century; q.v.), repeating these medical uses, explained that, “it is good against atrabile and for cause-less [sic] gloominess and sorrow” (p. 100). In the same century, Aḳawaynī Boḳārī (p. 242; q.v.), expatiated on the latter ailment, dealing with it as *mālīkūliā* (melancholia), which is “a senseless phobia” caused by “burnt atrabile lingering in the whole body or cerebral veins.” Among other compound medicines that he prescribed to cure this disorder was a decoction containing *lesān al-tawr* (p. 245). According to the “Kūz” (probably physicians associated with Gondēšāpūr medical center in Kūzestān), *lesān al-tawr* is “cold and moist, and its leaves, when burnt, are good for flaccidity of the tongue and gums, as well as for aphtha, especially in children’s mouths” (quoted by Rāzī, XXI/2, p. 447). Later authors have added almost nothing new to the above-mentioned medical uses, except for dosage and succedanea; see, e.g., Ebn Sīnā (I, bk. 2, pp. 352-53), Anṣārī Šīrāzī (729-806/1328-1403; p. 396; he is probably the first Persian physician to have used *gāv-zabān* as the Persian synonym for *lesān al-tawr*), and Tonokābonī (comp. 1080/1669-70; pp. 762-63). Incidentally, in connection with the euphoriant property of *gāv-zabān*, the latter claims that, “ten *meṭqāls* of a beverage made of *gāv-zabān* juice, apple juice, and *mavīz* (large dark brown raisins) juice cheers [the drinker] as much as one *raṭl* of wine.”

Identification. The plants sold by popular druggists as (*gol-e*) *gāv-zabān* have been variously identified, e.g.: *Caccinia glauca* Savi (now considered *C. macranthera* var. *crassifolia*, with yet another synonym, *Borago crassifolia*; Dymock et al., II, pp. 520-21; see Riedl, pp. 228-29; *Echium amoenum* Fisch. & Mey. (Hooper’s “flowers of borage”; Riedl, p. 115); *Anchusa intalica* Retz. (Schlimmer, s.v.; = *A. azurea* Mill. in Parsa, VIII, s.v.; = *A. paniculata* Ait. in the edition of Dioscorides’ English translation). The “genuine” Persian *gāv-zabān*, of which only the small azure flowers (*gol-e gāv-zabān*) are used (in an infusion or decoction) in Persia is most probably either *Caccinia glauca* or *Anchusa intalica*. The former grows in some localities in Gorgān, Gīlān, Azarbaijan, Arāk, Hamadān, Kermān, Kermānšāhān, Khorasan, Tehran, Qazvīn (for distributional details see Riedl, pp. 228-29); the latter grows on the Alborz slopes in Gīlān (where it is called *gow-zūbōney* and *gūl-gowzūbōn*; Pāyanda Langarūdī, p. 639), Māzandarān, Azarbaijan, Isfahan, Luristan, Kermānšāhān (called *gāzowan* and *gāzerwān* in Kurdish, Ṣafīzāda, pp. 114, 186), Hamadān, and Qazvīn (details in Riedl, p. 233).



In contemporary Persia, the infusion of *gāv-zabān* flowers is used mainly as a mild medicine against chill and catarrh and for soothing the resulting sore throat, cough, and chest ailment.

Another boragineous plant with similar habit and flowers but with different medicinal properties, namely, the borage (*Bor[r]ago officinalis* L.), also negligently called *gāv-zabān*, has been mistaken for the “genuine” one and marketed, perhaps fraud ulently, instead of it (see Jazāyerī’s recriminations in this regard, pp. 184-87).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abū Manṣūr Mowaffaq Heravī, *Kētāb al-abnīa ‘an haqā’eq al-adwīa*, ed. A. Bahamanyār and Ḥ. Maḥbūbī Ardakānī, Tehran, 1346 Š./1967.

Abū Bakr Rabī b. Aḥmad Aḳawaynī Boḳārī, *Hedāyat al-mota’allemīn fi’l-ṭebb*, ed. J. Matīnī, Mašhad, 1344 Š./1965.

‘Alī b. Ḥosayn Anṣārī Šīrāzī, *Eḳtīārāt-e badī’ī (qesmat-e mofradāt)*, ed. M.-T. Mīr, Tehran, 1371 Š./1992.

Dioscorides, *La ‘Materia Medica’ de Dioscorides*, ed. and tr. C. E. Dubler and E. Terés, 6 vols., Barcelona and Tetuan, 1952-57.

Idem, *The Greek Herbal of Dioscorides*, tr. John Goodyer (1655), ed. R. T. Gunther, Oxford, 1934.

W. Dymock et al., *Pharmacographia Indica*□, 3 vols., London etc., 1890-93.

Ebn al-Bayṭār, *al-Jāme‘ le mofradāt al-adwīa wa’l-aḡdīa*, 4 vols., Būlāq, 1291/1874.

Ebn Sīnā, *al-Qānūn fi’l-ṭebb*, 3 vols., Būlāq, 1294/1877.

D. Hooper, *Useful Plants and Drugs of Iran and Iraq*; with notes by H. Field, Chicago, 1937.



A. Parsa, *Flore d'Iran VIII*, Tehran, 1960.

Maḥmūd Pāyanda Langarūdī, *Farhang-e Gil o Deylam*, Tehran, 1366 Š./1987.

Abū Bakr Moḥammad b. Zakariyā' Rāzī, *al-Hāwī XXI/2*, Hyderabad (Deccan), 1388/1968.

Ş. Şafizāda, *Ṭebb-e sonnati dar miān-e kordān*, Tehran, 1361 Š./1982.

H. Riedl, *Boraginaceae* (= K. H. Rechinger, ed., *Flora Iranica*, fasc. 48), Graz, 1967.

Moḥammad-Mo'men Ḥosaynī Tonokābonī (Ḥakīm Mo'men), *Toḥfat al-mo'menīn (Toḥfa-ye Ḥakīm Mo'men)*, Tehran, 1360 Š./1981.