



KĀK

KĀK, a general term applied to several kinds of flat bread or small, often thin, dry cakes variously shaped and made, and therefore differently defined in dictionaries and cookbooks. The earliest source which mentions *kāk* is perhaps *Asrār al-tawḥīd*, where one reads of Shaikh Abu Saʿīd (d. 1048, q.v.) sending his servant to “a *kāk-pazi*,” similar to a bakery, to buy a large quantity of *kāk*, and praising the *kāks* made there for their topping of white sesame seeds and pistachios (Moḥammad b. Monawwar, I, p. 71).

At the present time in Iran, the best-known *kāk* seems to be made in, and widely exported from, the city of Kermānšāh in western Iran. It is neither round nor flat, but relatively thick and lozenge-shaped. To make a *kāk*, a mixture of dough, shortening, a small amount of beaten egg, and a little baking soda is prepared with a sprinkling of salt and allowed to rest for a short while. The dough is then made into globular pieces, each the size of a small orange. These are then flattened with a rolling pin and placed on a pre-heated *sāj* (a round iron pan). After a few seconds the flattened dough is removed, and its whole surface is abundantly sprinkled with a mixture of icing sugar, powdered cardamoms, and almonds, and then folded into a lozenge-shaped cake some 3 to 4 cm long. Very quickly the *kāk* becomes brittle and crunchy. The color may turn either whitish or yellow. Since the dough can set within minutes and become too hardened to fold, all the abovementioned steps must be taken very quickly. This *kāk* is often called *nān yoḳe* in Tehran (Moʿīn, s.v. *kāk*). Najaf Daryā-bandari gives two recipes for what he calls *kāk-e bādām*, almond *kāk* and *kāk-e māst o fandoq*, yoghurt and hazelnut *kāk* (II, pp.



1580-81), which, far from being nationally widespread, seem to be, at most, varieties of kāk, not the typically traditional one.

The 17th-century *Borhān-e qāte'* defines kāk as “dry bread, or the kind of bread inadequately baked, containing no fat and milk.” It then adds that *ka'k* is the Arabicized form of kāk. Under the same entry, it states that kāk, according to some, refers to a kind of flat, round, and greasy bread (s.v. kāk). However, in a gloss to this entry, Moḥammad Mo'in cites [Paul Horn](#), the German orientalist and philologist, as considering an Aramaic origin for the word. A non-Iranian origin also might be suggested by the geographer Strabo's reference to *kákeis*, a type of Egyptian bread (17.2.5) that had an astringent effect on the digestion (cf. Ḥakim Mo'men's comment on kāk, below). In favor of an Iranian origin with Indo-European connections, Mo'in cited the orientalist Enno Littmann (1875–1958), comparing “kāk” with English “cake” and its related Germanic words (for these, see the OED, s.v. “cake”); J. T. Platts (p. 802) wanted to connect “kāk” with Sanskrit *karkara* “hard.”

The compiler of *Farhang-e Ānandrāj* defines the word as “thin and light bread, changed in Arabic as *ka'k*” (Moḥammad Pādšāh, s.v. kāk). The two Arabic wordlists, *Aqrab al-mawāred* and *al-Mo'arrab* both regard *ka'k* as being the Persian kāk Arabicized, the former defining it as “round bread made with flour, milk, sugar, and some other items,” and the latter simply as “dry bread” (Šartuni, s.v. *ka'k*; Javāliqi, s.v. *al-ka'k*). Jār-Allāh Zamakšari defines “*ka'k*” simply as dry bread (p. 350). In northern Persia, in the Gilaki dialect of Zīābar, the word is pronounced as *kākā* and in Lāhijān and Ābkenār as *kake* (Sotuda, p. 183).

In a number of books on traditional medicines in Iran, there are references to kāk/*ka'k* with short descriptions of its medical effects. Ḥakim Mo'men equates *ka'k* with *kobz al-šābun*, which the author defines as “a kind of bread containing little bran and mixed with [cooking] oil; it is hard to digest but very nutritious, harmful to those running a fever.” The same work defines *kobz al-ka'k* as bread made with twice-sieved and twice-baked flour, which can be prepared as ointment useful for joint pains (Ḥakim Mo'men, pp. 328, 728). Another book on traditional medicines, *Maḳzan al-adwia (materia medica)*, also regards *ka'k* as the Arabicized form of the Persian kāk, a kind of bread also called *količa* in Persian. It then describes its qualities and medical advantages and disadvantages (ʿAqili, p. 749; also see p. 1015). In Khorasan and Qazvin kāk is called *qāq* (Dehḳodā and Mo'in, s.v. kāk).



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