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MINT

MINT, a strongly scented herb of genus *Mentha* of flowering plants in the Labiatae family, with many medicinal properties. *Mentha* is named after Minthe, a charming fresh water nymph in classical mythology, who was metamorphosed into the humble, down-trodden mint plant by Proserpina, the suspicious wife of Pluto, the god of the underworld, in a fit of jealousy (Rosengarten, p. 291).

Discorides, Galen, and other Greek authors frequently mentioned mint in their medical writings (see below). Pliny (VII, p. 520, s.v. Mint and Mentastrum) recommended it as an ingredient in forty-one therapeutic potions, and in some works it was specially prescribed as a stomachic, restorative, and carminative. The Jews used mint, no doubt the mint of kitchen garden, as a condiment to their food. The Pharisees carefully tithed this and other trifling condiments, while they neglected judgement and the love of God (Wilson, p. 305; Luke, 11:42; Matthew, 23:23). Qosṭus/Qosṭos (probably Cassianus Bassus Scholasticus, Byzantine scientist of the 6th century and the probable author of *al-Felāḥa al-rumiya,* tr. into Arabic by Sarjis b. Helia in the 9th century; Sezgin, p. 317) discussed the culture of mint. According to him, if one of its roots is planted, it will multiply and spread everywhere in the field. So it is necessary to plant it around the vegetable gardens near water channels (apud ʿĀdel Abu'l-Naṣr, p. 380). Probably, the old name *hazārpā* (millipod) mentioned by ʿAqili Ḵorāsāni (p. 872) is a reference to its ability to take root, and its wide distribution and speedy growth.

Herbs of genus *Mentha* have been mentioned in Islamic and Persian sources

after the 2nd/8th century as useful medicinal plants, with references to their importance as an effective remedy. The species of *Mentha* have the ability of hybridization and some similarities in morphological characters, smell, and taste (Dumancel, s.v. “Menthe”). Moreover, the medico- pharmacological authors of the Islamic period have briefly described several species of mint, which cannot be always identified with certitude because of inadequate morphological descriptions or confusion in terminology. Most of the uses attributed to peppermint, pennyroyal, and other species of genus *Mentha* in traditional Galenic medicine in the Islamic period can be essentially traced to the writings of Discorides and other Greek authors.

Naʿnāʿ. Peppermint (Pers. *naʿnāʿ*, Ar.-Pers. *naʿnaʿ*; *Mentha* × *piperita* L.) is thought to be a cross between spearmint (*M. spicata*) and water mint (*M. aquatica*). It is a herbaceous, rhizomatous, perennial, aromatic plant, with smooth, wide-spreading underground stems, which are square in cross-section. The leaves are arranged in opposite pairs, and the purple flowers are produced in clusters.

Peppermint does not grow wild in Iran (Zargari, pp. 5-7; Qahramān, pp. 307-8). Use as a raw table vegetable, and its famous essence (menthol), account for its spread since the 18th century. Some authors, such as Kordi Nišāburi (fl. 5th/11th cent.; p. 304), Abu Rayḥān Biruni (d. 440/1048, p. 968), Maydāni Nišāburi (d. 518/1124; p. 503), and Zanjī Sajzī (fl. 9th/15th cent. I, pp. 255, 358), have remarked that *naʿnāʿ* and *puna* are synonyms (cf. Platts, s.v. *pudina)*. Others have mentioned *ḥabaq-e bostāni* and *fudanj*/*futanj-e bostāni* (Arabicized Pers. *pudang*; Moʿin, II, p. 2583; ʿAqili Ḵorāsāni, p. 662) as other names of *naʿnā* (Elbiri, p. 39; Heravi, s.v. *naʿnāʿ*; ʿĀdel Abu’l-Naṣr, p. 380). In some sources, however, they are referred to as different plants but with similar properties (Galen, apud Rāzi, XXI, pt. 1, p. 199; Ḥakim Maysari, p. 199). According to Anṣāri Širāzi (d. 806/1403; p. 436), it was also called *rāquta* by the people of Shiraz, as also evidenced by a verse of Bosḥāq Aṭʿema (apud Dehḵodā, s.v. *rāquta*), a 15th-century poet from Shiraz (cf. *rāfuta*, in Moḥammad Pādšāh, III, p. 2031, and *rāfuna,* in *Borhān-e qāṭeʿ*, ed. Moʿin, II, p. 930).

Uses of peppermint. According to Dioscorides (1952, p. 255), mint is producer of hot temperament (*mosaḵḵen*) and, because of its stringency, is used as a haemostatic. It kills intestinal worms, stimulates the sexual desire, and is useful for hiccup, vomiting, and diarrhea. Applying its poultice to the forehead alleviates headache. It is also useful to a breast that is swelled because of mastitis, and on the site of the rabies. Putting its branches in milk, prevents the

milk from coagulating. It is also the best spice for cooking (cf. ʿAqili Ḵorāsāni, p. 872).

According to Rāzi quoting Galen (XXI, pt. 1, p. 199), the mixture of its pounded leaves with ground barely soaked in water is useful for treating abscess. Elbiri Qorṭabi (p. 89) believed that mint is hot, dry, and diuretic and effective for the treatment of inflammation in the digestive system, renal colic, and vomiting. According to Ḥakim Maysari (pp. 198-99) it sweetens the breath and removes garlic and leek smell. Mowaffaq Heravī (fl. 4th/ 10th cent.), author of the oldest known medical treatise in Persian (pp. 48- 49, 75, 127), prescribes it for digestion of apple. It is also said to moderate the effect of purslane and lettuce for cold-tempered (*mabrud*) persons (pp. 48-49, 75, 127; see HUMORALISM).

According to ʿAli b. ʿAbbās Majusi (d. 384/994 [?], II, p. 105), physician of the Buyid king in Fars ʿAżod-al-Dawla (936-83), raw mint mixed with vinegar is an effective medicine for reatment of swooning and vomiting. Ebn Sinā (d. 428/1037; I, book 2, p. 621) mentioned that its sherbet is useful for curing jaundice. Jorjāni (d. 531/ 1136) claimed that it was necessary to eat mint after having cucumber, pumpkin, and the seeds of lettuce. (For detailed accounts about mint in traditional medicine, see Jorjāni, pp. 14, 119, 141, 156, 176, 181, 203; Rāzī, XXI, pt. 1, pp. 595-97; Ebn al-Bayṭār, IV, pp. 181-82; Anṣārī Širāzī, p. 437; ʿAqīlī Ḵorāsāni, p. 872; Ḥakim Moʾmen, pp. 256-57).

Peppermint leaves, other aerial organs, and essence (menthol) still are used medicinally, sometimes confirming traditional medicine ((Zargari, pp. 11-13, 18). The herb is beneficial, for instance, for catarrh, grippe, and coughing. *ʿAraq-e naʿnā*, a distillate of mint, is marketed in Iran as a remedy for meteorism (flatulence).

Among culinary uses, mint is also used in making the Persian sherbet, *sekanjabin*—a concoction of sugar (originally, honey) and vinegar usually flavored with mint extract. *Naʿnā dāḡ* (its dried and powdered leaves in boiled oil) is used to flavor and add zest to a variety of some dishes, such as various kinds of Persian soup (*āš*) and *kašk o bādemjān,* a popular dish made with the mixture of *kašk* (a dairy product) and eggplants. A variety called *ḵālvāš*, which grows wild in north of Iran, is used as a spice (Zargari, p. 18).

In colloquial Persian, when a person tries to present a subject as being more significant than it really is, others remark: he/she has increased its *naʿnā dāḡ* (Anwari, 2004, II, p. 1613).

Puna. Varieties of *puna* (pennyroyal; *Mentha pulegium* L. vars.) are similar to *naʿnā*, but with erect stems and downy leaves. The flowers are in whorled clusters of ten or a dozen, and their color is reddish purple to lilac blue. The plants that do not grow near water channels have stronger smell (Zargarī, p. 14). *Puna* is known as *pudna*, *pudina*, *pudanj*, and *marbu* (Jorjāni, pp. 240-41; Dāʿi-al-Eslām, p. 124; Dehḵodā, s.v. *Pudna*), Arabicized as *fuḏanj* (Aṣmaʿi, p. 17), *fudanj* (Rāzi, XXI, pt. 1, p. 243), and *futanj* (ʿAli Majusi, II, p. 104); it is also called *ḥabaq* (Dinavari, p. 119).

Many medicinal properties and uses attributed to mint in the Islamic period can be traced back to the Dioscorides's *De Materia Medica*, but its translator, Ḥonayn b. Esḥāq, and some other authors have also rendered some other plants as *futanj*. So in the medico-pharmacological works of the Islamic period, *futanj* and other similar words may designate plants of other species or genera of the Labiatae family, and it is difficult to identify their correct scientific names. Bellow are such plant names that have been translated as some kinds of *futanj* or by similar words by Ḥonayn b. Esḥāq (pp. 253-55) and in other Islamic sources:

(1) *Gleḵon* (Arabicized and misspelled form of γλήχον), probably *M. pulegium* (Dioscorides, 1934, p. 270).

(2) *Diqṭāmnon* (Arabicized form of δίκταμνον), mentioned by Ebn al-Bayṭār (III, p. 170) as a kind of *fudanj*. According to Robert Gunther's notes in Dioscorides (1934, p. 271) and Ubaydullah Karimov's comments on Biruni (tr. Możaffarzāda, p. 390) it is *Origanum dictamnus* "Cretan dittany," but the *diqṭāmnon* painted in *De Materia Medica* (p. 272) is not similar to the morphology of *Origanum dictamnus*. Also, according to Dioscorides (1934, p. 271; idem, 1952, p. 254) the leaves of *diqṭāmnon* are bigger than those of *gleḵon*, but we know that the leaves of *Origanum dictamnus* are not bigger than of *M. pulegium*. Ebn al-Bayṭār (1989, p. 222) gave the synonyms *maškaṭarāmši*ʿ and *fuḏanj al-tisi*. Johann Schlimmer (p. 557) mentions *mešk-e ṭarāmeši*ʿ as the Persian designation of *Ziziphora cristata*. Dioscorides has also mentioned another kind of *diqṭāmnon*, which is said to be *Ballota pseudo-dictamnus* (Dioscorides, 1934, p. 273).

(3) *Fesududeqṭamnon* (i.e., *pseudodiktamnon;* Arabicized form of ψευδοδίκταμνον), *Marrubium pseudo-dictamnus*, according to Gunther's notes (Dioscorides, 1934, p. 273).

(4) *Qālamenṭi* (Arabicized form of καλαμίνθη), probably *Mentha sylvestris* (Dioscorides, 1934, p. 273, Gunther's note).

ʿAqīlī Ḵorāsānī (pp. 662-63) has described all of the above together as *fudanj* and divided them into three types: *barri* (wild), *jabali* (mountainous), and *nahri* (riverine). *Fudanj-e barri* is probably *puna*, and the others are other species of *Mentha* or genera of Labiatae.

Uses of pennyroyal. Dioscorides (1952, p. 253) mentions some of the medicinal properties of this plant. According to him, it is *mosaḵḵen* (producing a hot temperament, calefactive) and *molaṭṭef* (demulcent for the throat), eases menstruation, and is an abortifacient. When it is eaten with vinegar, it relieves nausea, and inhaling it with vinegar relieves fainting fits. Its burnt and powdered leaves tightens the gums, and applying a poultice of it is effective for gout and splenitis (cf. ʿAqili Ḵorāsāni, p. 872). Rāzi (XXI, pt. 1, pp. 243-50) has quoted some medicinal virtues of *fudanj-e barri*, *jabali*, and *nahri* from old masters and physicians such as Dioscorides, Galen, Rufus of Ephesus (a Greek physician, fl. ca. 2nd cent. CE), Oreibasios/Oribasius (b. 325 CE, Caesar Julian's physician), also Māsarjawayh (a Christian physician in Jondēšāpur, 2nd-3rd/8th-9th cent.), and Ebn Māsawayh (physician at Jondēšāpur, d. 243/857).

The following are some medicinal virtues attributed to *fudanj-e barri*: it is beneficial for treating scorpion bites and clears the chest and lungs of the phlegm collected in them. According to Ebn Sinā (I, book 2, pp. 684-86), it kills intestinal pinworms. The other information mentioned by Ebn Sinā and other physicians are details stated by earlier medico-pharmacologists (see Mowaffaq Heravi, pp. 241-42; Ebn al-Bayṭār, 1874, III, pp. 170-72; Ebn Faẓl-Allāh, XXI, pp. 321-22; Anṣāri Širāzi, p. 332; ʿAqili Ḵorāsāni, pp. 661-62; Ḥakim Moʾmen, p. 199).

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