



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). Qoşus/Qoşos (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 'Adel Abu'l-Naşr, p. 380). Probably, the old name *hazārpā* (millipod) mentioned by 'Aqili Kōrāsāni (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.

Na'nā'. Peppermint (Pers. *na'nā'*, Ar.-Pers. *na'na'*; *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 *na'nā'* and *puna* are synonyms (cf. Platts, s.v. *pudina*). Others have mentioned *ḥabaq-e bostāni* and *fudanj/futanj-e bostāni* (Arabicized Pers. *pudang*; Mo'in, II, p. 2583; 'Aqili Ḳorāsāni, p. 662) as other names of *na'nā'* (Elbiri, p. 39; Heravi, s.v. *na'nā'*; 'Adel 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 **Boshāq Aṭ'ema** (apud Dehḳodā, s.v. *rāquta*), a 15th-century poet from Shiraz (cf. *rāfuta*, in Moḥammad Pādšāh, III, p. 2031, and *rāfuna*, in *Borhān-e qāṭe'*, ed. Mo'in, II, p. 930).

Uses of peppermint. According to Dioscorides (1952, p. 255), mint is producer of hot temperament (*mosakken*) 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. ‘Aqīlī Ḳorāsānī, p. 872).

According to Rāzī 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 Qorṭabī (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 Ḥakīm Maysarī (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 ‘Alī b. ‘Abbās Majusī (d. 384/994 [?], II, p. 105), physician of the Buyid king in Fars ‘Azod-al-Dawla (936-83), raw mint mixed with vinegar is an effective medicine for treatment of swooning and vomiting. Ebn Sinā (d. 428/1037; I, book 2, p. 621) mentioned that its sherbet is useful for curing jaundice. Jorjānī (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 Jorjānī, pp. 14, 119, 141, 156, 176, 181, 203; Rāzī, XXI, pt. 1, pp. 595-97; Ebn al-Bayṭār, IV, pp. 181-82; Anṣārī Šīrāzī, p. 437; ‘Aqīlī Ḳorāsānī, p. 872; Ḥakīm Mo’men, 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. ‘Araq-e na’nā, 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. *Na’nā dāg* (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 *kālvāš*, 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 *na’nā dāg* (Anwari, 2004, II, p. 1613).



Puna. Varieties of *puna* (pennyroyal; *Mentha pulegium* L. vars.) are similar to *na'nā*, 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; Dā'i-al-Eslām, p. 124; Dehḳodā, s.v. *Pudna*), Arabicized as *fudanj* (Aṣma'ī, p. 17), *fudanj* (Rāzi, XXI, pt. 1, p. 243), and *futanj* (‘Ali Majusi, II, p. 104); it is also called *habaq* (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. Eshāq, 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. Eshāq (pp. 253-55) and in other Islamic sources:

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

(2) *Diqtāmnnon* (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. Moẓaffarzāda, p. 390) it is *Origanum dictamnus* “Cretan dittany,” but the *diqtāmnnon* 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 *diqtāmnnon* are bigger than those of *ḡleḳon*, 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 *maškaṭarāmsī* and *fudanj al-tisi*. Johann Schlimmer (p. 557) mentions *mešk-e ṭarāmeši* as the Persian designation of *Ziziphora cristata*. Dioscorides has also mentioned another kind of *diqtāmnnon*, which is said to be *Ballota pseudo-dictamnus* (Dioscorides, 1934, p. 273).

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



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

‘Aqīlī Ḳorāsānī (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 *mosakken* (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. ‘Aqīlī Ḳorāsānī, 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 Faḏl-Allāh, XXI, pp. 321-22; Anṣārī Šīrāzi, p. 332; ‘Aqīlī Ḳorāsānī, pp. 661-62; Ḥakim Mo'men, p. 199).

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