



SAQQEZ

SAQQEZ, a semifluid resin obtained from cuts and cracks of the wild pistachio trees, *Pistacia mutica* Fisch and C. A. Mey, and *Pistacia lentiscus* L., of the *Anacardiaceae* family, found in its natural habitats in Iran, more abundantly in the western region (Karimi, p. 581; Van). These small trees are called *bana*, *van*, or *saqqez* tree in Persian, *boṭm* in Arabic, and *čātlanquš* in Turkish (Dehḵodā, *Loḡat-nāma*, s.v.; Ḥakim Mo'men, pp. 164, 271). A good deal of evidence supports the assumption that the city of Saqqez in western Iran is so called due to the local abundance of this plant and its product (Abrišami, *passim*).

Guillaume Olivier, a French traveler who visited Iran in 1796, wrote: "On May 30, we passed through Kerand Valley ... reached a big village, Māhidašt. The villagers for a very long time have obtained good edible oil from the fruits of *saqqez* tree. They also make cuts in the trunk to collect *saqqez*" (tr., p. 29; on him, see [FRANCE viii. TRAVELOGUES OF THE 18TH-20TH CENTURIES](#)). Jakob Polak, visiting Iran in the 1850s, wrote that *saqqez* was produced by the *ban* tree, *Pistacia mutica*, found between [Isfahan](#) and [Shiraz](#). He noted that *saqqez-e kordi* from Kurdistan sold more than other types (Polak, p. 458). A traveler visiting the south of Iran in 1256/1840, in the village of Fāruq, 25 km northeast of [Persepolis](#), wrote: "this whole area is woods, mostly *bana* trees from which every year the inhabitants obtain the resin *saqqez* and sell it" (*Safar-nāma*, p. 23). In Kurdistan, the 20th-century agriculturalist Taqi Bahrāmi (p. 257) noted: "In Kurdistan, *bana* or wild pistachio, upon one making cuts on its bark, yields an important product called *saqqez*." It is a longtime tradition in Kurdistan



that villagers, in early to mid-June, take tools such as adze, sieve, sacks, and rope, and go up the hills in groups to collect *saqqez* (Ṭabāṭabā'ī and Qaṣrīāni, p. 538).

Saqqez, known as *qandarun* in Isfahan Province was used as chewing gum in Iran long before manufactured products came on the market. This resin is called 'elk or 'elk *al-boṭm* in Arabic (Dehḳodā, *Loḡat-nāma*, s.v.; Ḥakīm Mo'men, pp. 164-65, 271). 'Elk is mentioned in classical Persian literature. For instance, the poet Mas'ud-e Sa'd-e Salmān (d. 515/1121) writes (*Divān*, p. 103):

Āb-am ka marā har kas-i beyābad.
'Elk-am ka marā har kas-i beḳāyad

I am (like) water that any straw can find me;
(Like) 'elk that anyone can chew me

The historian and poet 'Awfi (late 6th/12th-early 7th/13th cent.; p. 97) has: "I saw a man chewing something and followed him for a milepost, hoping he would give me a part of what he was eating. Then, I found he was chewing 'elk"; and from the poet 'Obayd Zākāni (d. 771/1370; p. 259): "When someone is chewing 'elk, his stomach says: who is knocking at the door but doesn't come in?" The poet Kāqāni (d. 595/1198; p. 55) also mentions *maṣṭaki*, the obsolete name for *saqqez* in Persian, along with [almond](#), pistacio, and jujube.

Saqqez is an antibacterial agent and removes *Helicobacter pylori* bacteria, the main factor for peptic ulcer. Ebn Sinā (d. 428/1037) mentions *saqqez* for the treatment of digestive complications (Ebn Sinā, p. 163). Today, a low dose of it, one gram per day for two weeks, is prescribed to cure peptic ulcers (Huwez, et al., p. 1946). It is also effective in the treatment of benign gastric and duodenal ulcers.

A *saqqez* manufacturing company (*Šerkat-e saqqez-sāzi Van*) was established in 1990 in Kurdistan, near Sanandaj, and its main product, *van* natural chewing gum, came on the market in 1994. Most of its production is exported to more than fifteen countries (see Van). In addition to the trees in the wild, there are also successful productive plantations of this species.

The species of *Pistacia* are dioecious, and both male and female trees should be present for fruit production. The oil content of fruits and leaves of *Pistacia mutica*, in samples from [Kerman](#) Province, have been measured as 1.25 percent and 0.75 percent, respectively (Moghtader, p. 292). The oil from resin

and seed are referred to as turpentine, and the tree as terebinth, because of its resemblance to the oil and resin from pine trees. A by-product in the process of natural chewing gum, alpha pinene, commercially known as terebinthine, is used as raw material in pharmaceutical, cosmetic, and foodstuff industries.

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