



TURNIP

TURNIP (Pers. *šalġam*; Arabicized *šalġam*), *Brassica rapa* L. vars., a biennial shrub of the Cruciferae family with edible fleshy thick root, hairy rosette leaves, grape inflorescence and siliques fruits (Moẓaffariān, p. 179; Ṭabāṭabā'i, I, p. 560; Zargarī, I, p. 236, uses *Brassica napus* [see below] for turnip). Ian Hedge and Karl Rechinger (p. 36) mention Iran (Māzandarān and **Baluchistān**), Afghanistan (**Kabul**, **Badaġšān**, **Fayzābād**, and **Bāmiān**), and Pakistan (**Chitral**) as its natural habitats.

There are many varieties of turnip, differing in size, form, and color, that are cultivated in Persia throughout the year (for some, see Ṭabāṭabā'i, I, pp. 565-70). The Persian turnip is cultivated everywhere in Persia and eaten raw (with salt and lemon juice) or in some culinary uses, for instance, *āš-e šalġam*, a kind of pottage made with vegetables, grains, beans, rice, and numerous pieces of turnip root (Ṭabāṭabā'i, pp. 560, 565; for its use in other varieties of *āš*, see Nur-Allāh, pp. 242, 243, 245, 246; Āšpaz-bāši, p. 32).

Persian and Arabic nomenclature. Besides the word *šalġam* for turnip, other Persian terms, mainly dialectical variations, include *baršād*, *šalam*, *šilam*, and a few obsolete, metathesized forms such as *šalmak/šamlak* (Enju Širāzi, II, p. 1627; 'Aqili Ķorāsāni, p. 552; Awbahi Heravi, p. 216; Moqim Tuyserkāni, p. 298; Aġawayni Boġarā'i, pp. 157, 510; Hā'eri Ardakāni, p. 145); these are said to be synonyms with Arabic *left* "rape" (Lane, VII, p. 2665; Laufer, pp. 380-81), derived from Akkadian *laptu* "turnip" (CAD IX, p. 96; cf. Aramaic *lefto*; Sallum, pp. 64-65, 105). The term *labu*, used in Persian for cooked beet, may have had



its origin in the Akkadian term (Purdāvud, p. 30). In old Arabic and Persian books, words such as *ʿoqaṅqol*, *ḡoṅqily*, *ʿoṅqili*, and *ʿoṅqoli*, mentioned as Greek terms for turnip (Dioscorides, p. 188; Ebn al-Bayṭār, 1989, p. 180; ʿAqīlī Ḳorāsānī, p. 552), are borrowings of Greek γογγύλη. Also, *bonias* (βουνιάς, believed to be *Brassica napus*, rape) is referred to as a small turnip (Dioscorides, p. 189).

The turnip is mentioned in classical Persian poetry as a low-level food item: “for someone without means, boiled turnip is equal to a broiled fowl” or “to a poor man scorched in a hot desert, a boiled turnip is of more value than pure silver (Saʿdi, pp. 115-16). The compound *šalam-šurbā* “higgledy-piggledy” (lit. turnip pottage) is used to indicate a confused or disorder condition (see Mošīrī, p. 649; Anwari, II, p. 1021; Dehḳodā, s.vv. *šalḡam*, *šalam-šurvā*).

History of culture. The earliest mention and the most detailed botanico-agricultural discussion of the turnip in Islamic sources is in *al-Felāḥat al-nabaṭiya*, collected from Chaldaean or old Assyrian books and translated probably by Ebn Waḥšiya (fl. 3rd-4th/9th-10th cents.; for detailed culture conditions about turnip growing in this book, see Ebn al-ʿAwwām, I, pp. 543-48). It also mentions other kinds of turnip and their culture and medicinal properties (I, pp. 548-52). These are probably the different species of *Brassica*. Concerning turnip culture, Ebn al-ʿAwwām (II, pp. 171-76) recommends that the distance between seedlings must be three spans, and the farmer must irrigate the seedlings twice a week.

Rašīd-al-Dīn Faḏl-Allāh (d. 718/1318), the historian of the [Il-khanid](#) period, who was also interested in horticulture, notes concerning some vegetables such as turnip that, if several seeds are planted in the same hole, larger roots will be produced; he also recommends that its fresh root be kept under the mud (pp. 198-99). Abunaṣri Heravi (fl. 9th-10th/16th cent.) mentions Virgo (*Sonbola*), the last month of summer, as the best time for planting turnip, which will then ripen in two months, in Scorpius (*Aqrab*; pp. 148-49). According to Berthold Laufer (pp. 199, 381), Persians were active in disseminating species of *Brassica* and *Raphanus* to Tibet, the Turks, and Mongolia; *Brassica rapa* was introduced into China by the Turkish tribes of Mongolia under the later Han dynasty, and it would be reasonable to conclude that they had previously received the cultivation from Iranians (Laufer, pp. 199, 381).

Medical uses. The root and seeds of turnip were believed to have medicinal properties. Most of the uses attributed to turnip in traditional ([Galenic](#))



medicine in the Islamic period (see, e.g., Ebn al-Bayṭār, 1989, s.v.; ‘Aqili Ḳorāsāni, pp. 552-53) can essentially be traced back to Greek sources. According to Dioscorides (p. 188), the root of turnip is nutritive and stimulates sexual desire. The warm, compressed (*naṭul*) poultice of its root is useful against gout and schism caused by frostbite. The cooked turnip leaves are diuretic, and its seeds, with other drugs, are alexipharmic and quench the poisonous effect caused by drugs. He also mentions other kinds of turnip, including wild turnip and *boniās* with their medicinal effects: (1) Wild turnip (*šaljam-e barri*) is a shrub with many branches and the length of about one cubit. Its leaves may grow as wide as the thumb of a man or even wider. Its seeds, mixed with other powdered seeds, are used for the treatment of small pimples (Dioscorides, pp. 188-89; also apud Ebn Sinā, I, bk. 2, p. 743). (2) *Boniās* (*Brassica napus*) is a small turnip with less nutritious qualities than turnip; its cooked root causes flatulence and counteracts poisons (Dioscorides, p. 189; for probable scientific names of this plants, see Ebn al-Bayṭār, 1989, p. 180 and notes 95-96). The seeds are said to stimulate sexual desire (Galen, apud Rāzi, XXI, p. 103). According to Galen, cooking it with fat meat is more nutritive than with water and salt (apud Ebn Sinā, I, bk. 2, p. 743; Ebn Waḥšiya, I, p. 546, noting that the ancient Persians used to cook meat in turnip juice).

Medicinal applications of turnip mentioned in the works of Dioscorides and Galen may be detected also in the Traditions attributed to the prophet and **Imams** (e.g., ‘Aqili Ḳorāsāni, p. 553). For instance, according to Barqi (II, pp. 333-34), turnip was recommended by Imam **Ḥosayn b. ‘Ali** for the treatment of leprosy (*joḍām*). Some of these uses are still practiced, with variations and additions. The earliest mention of these properties in Persian is the succinct account by ‘Ali b. Sahl Ṭabari (comp. 236/850; p. 378), who reports that “the turnip is hot and moist and its cooked softens the chest and increases [the production of] the semen” (cf. ‘Aqili Ḳorāsāni, pp. 552-53).

According to some traditional physicians such as Ḥakim Maysari (4th/10th cent.), the powdered seeds of turnip mixed with seeds of radish, carrot, etc., increase the secretion of milk (pp. 333-34), and its ointment quenches chilblain (p. 207). **Abu Maṣur Mowaffaq Heravi** (fl. ca. 370-80/980-90), author of one of the oldest known medical treatises in Persian, added some details to Maysari’s description and remarked that it is the hot nature of turnip that makes it an effective means of treatment against frostbite and gouts caused by cold; it is also diuretic (Mowaffaq Heravi, pp. 198-99; see also his contemporary Aḳawayni Bokārā’i, pp. 157, 510; Ebn Waḥšiya, I, pp. 543-48; Rāzi, XXI, p. 103).



Ebn Sinā (I, bk. 2, p. 743) prescribes its cooked root in plaster for the treatment of gout and its cooked or raw root for improving the eyesight. The moisture caused by turnip led some authors (e.g., [Sayyed Esmā'īl Jorjāni](#)) to consider it harmful for colic persons, so it must be mixed with carrot, pennyroyal, and other hot plants, but moderated with oxymel (*sekanjabin*) for hot-tempered (*maḥrur*) persons.

Jorjāni reckons the root and seeds of turnip among emetic drugs (Jorjāni, 2002, pp. 22, 23; idem, 2001-05, II, pp. 39, 40, 44, 50, 59-60, 61, 149, 151, 289). Ġassāni (p. 267) specifies that *selq* (beetroot: *Beta vulgaris* L.) and *sadāb* (rue: *Ruta* spp.) are used as substitutes for turnip. Anṭāki (I, p. 247) remarks that the seeds of turnip are useful for [renal and vesicular] calculi. It is also a poultice against edema, and its oil is good for weakness treatment (see also Ebn al-Bayṭār, 1874, III, p. 68; Ġassāni, p. 270; Anṣāri Širāzī, pp. 256-57; Ḥakim Mo'men, p. 167; for a detailed account of accumulated knowledge about the turnip in traditional [post-Galenic] medicine in Persian in India, see 'Aqili Ḳorāsāni, pp. 552-53). [Moḵber-al-Salṭana Hedāyat](#) (p. 36) recorded a remembrance about its use for edema. Most of its medicinal properties have fallen into disuse, but some of them conform to modern medicine as diuretic, dissolver for urine salts, laxative, and useful for gout and inflammation (see Zargari, I, pp. 237-39).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Qāsem b. Yusof Abunaṣri Heravi, *Eršād al-zerā'a*, ed. M. Moširi, Tehran, 1977.

Abu Bakr Rabi' b. Aḥmad Aḳawayni Boḳārā'i, *Hedāyat al-mota'allemin fi'l-ṭebb*, ed. Jalāl Matini, Mašhad, 1965 (the earliest extant medical treatise in Persian).

Zayn-al-Din 'Ali b. Ḥosayn Anṣāri Širāzi, *Eḳtiārāt-e badi'i: moḫradāt*, ed. Moḥammad-Taḳi Mir, Tehran, 1992.

Dā'ud Anṭāki, *Tadḳerat ole'l-albāb wa'l-jāme' le'l-'ajab al-'ojāb*, 2 vols., Cairo, 1416/1996.

Ḥasan Anwari, *Farhang-e kenāyāt-e soḳan*, 2 vols., Tehran, 2004.

Moḥammad-Ḥosayn 'Aqili Ḳorāsāni, *Maḳzan al-adwia*, Calcutta, 1844; repr.,



Tehran, 1974.

‘Ali-Akbar Khan Āšpaz-bāši, *Sofra-ye aṭ‘ema*, Tehran, 1974.

Hāfeẓ Solṭān-‘Ali Awbahi Heravi, *Farhang-e toḥfat al-aḥbāb*, ed. Faridun Taqizāda Tusi and Noṣrat-al-Zamān Riāzi Heravi, Mašhad, 1986.

Aḥmad b. Moḥammad Barqi, *al-Maḥāsen*, ed. S. M. Rajā’i, II, repr., Qom, 1413/1992.

[CAD] *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago IX*, Chicago, 1973.

Dioscorides, *Materia medica*, tr. Eştefan (Stephanos) b. Bazil, as *Hayuli’l-ṭebb fi’l-ḥašā’eš wa’l-somum*, ed. Ḥonayn b. Eshāq, Tatvan, Turkey, 1952.

Ebn ‘Awwām Ešbili, *Ketāb al-felāḥa* (compiled at the end of the 6th or the beginning of the 7th cent.), tr. John Jacques Clément-Mullet, as *Le livre de l’agriculture d’Ibn-al-Awam*, 2 vols. in 3, Paris, 1864-67; repr., Tunis, 1983.

Ebn al-Bayṭār, *al-Jāme’ le mofradāt al-adwia wa’l-aḡdā*, 4 vols. in 2, Bulaq, 1291/1874;

Idem, *al-Moḡni fi’l-adwia al-mofrada*, ed. Ebrāhim b. Morād, as *Tafsir ketāb diāsqrīdos*, Beirut, 1989.

Ebn Sinā, *al-qānun fi’l-ṭebb*, ed. Adwār Alqaš and ‘Ali Zayḡur, 4 vols., Beirut, 1987.

Mir Jamāl-al-Din Ḥosayn Enju Širāzi, *Farhang-e jahāngiri*, ed. Raḥim ‘Afifi, 3 vols., Mašhad, 1972-75.

Ebn Waḥšiya (tr. attributed to), *al-Felāḥat al-nabaṭiya*, ed. Tawfiq Fahd, 3 vols., Damascus, 1993-98.

Abu’l-Kāṭem b. Moḥammad Ġassāni, *Ḥadiqat al-azhār fi māhiyat al-ošāb wa’l-‘aqqār*, ed. Moḥammad ‘Arabi Kaṭṭābi, Beirut, 1985.

Malek Moẓaffar Yusof b. ‘Omar Ġassāni Torkamāni, *al-Mo’tamad fi’l-adwiat al-mofrada*, ed. Moṣṭafā Saqqā, 3rd. ed., Beirut, 1975.

Maḥmud Ḥā’eriān Ardakāni, *Farhang-e fārsi-e sara*, Hamadān, 2005.



- Mahdiqoli Mokber-al-Saltana Hedāyat, *Kāterāt wa kaṭarāt*, Tehran 1984.
- Ḥakim Mo'men Moḥammad-Mo'men Ḥosayni Tonokāboni, *Toḥfat al-mo'menin: toḥfa-ye Ḥakim Mo'men*, Tehran, 1959.
- Ḥakim Maysari, *Dāneš-nāma dar 'elm-e pezeški: kohantarīn majmu'a-ye ṭebbi ba še'r-e fārsi*, ed. Barāt Zanjānī, Majmu'a-ye tāriq-e 'olum dar Eslām 2, Tehran, 1987.
- Ian C. Hedge and Karl Heinz Rechinger, "Cruciferae," in Karl Heinz Rechinger, ed., *Flora Iranica: Flora des iranischen Hochlandes und der umrahmenden Gebirge: Persien, Afghanistan, Teile von West-Pakistan, Nord-Iraq, Azerbaidjan, Turkmenistan*, no. 57, Graz, 1968.
- Sayyed Esmā'il Jorjāni, *Yadgār dar dāneš-e pezeški wa dāru-šenāsi*, ed. Mahdi Moḥaqeq, 3 vols., Tehran, 2001-05.
- Idem, *Dakīra-ye k'vārazmšāhi*, ed. Moḥammad-Rezā Moḥarreri, 3rd book, Tehran, 2003.
- Berthold Laufer, *Sino-Iranica: Chinese Contributions to the History of Civilization in Ancient Iran ...*, Chicago, 1919; repr., Taipei, 1967.
- Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 8 vols., repr., Beirut, 1968.
- Abu Maṣṣūr Mowaffaq Heravi, *Ketāb al-abniā 'an ḥaqāyeq al-adwīā*, ed. Aḥmad Bahmanyār and Ḥosayn Maḥbubi Ardakāni, Tehran, 1967.
- Mahšid Mošīri, *Farhang-e zabān-e fārsī: alefbā'i-qiāsi*, Tehran, 1990.
- Wali-Allāh Moẓaffariān et al., *Flor-e ostān-e Yazd*, Tehran 2000.
- Nur-Allāh, *Mādat al-ḥayāt: resāla dar 'elm-e ṭabbāki*, in Iraj Afšār, ed. *Āš-pazi-e dawra-ye Šafawi: matn-e do resāla az ān dawra*, Tehran, 1981, pp. 187-256.
- Ebrāhim Purdāwud, *Hormazd-nāma*, Tehran, 1952.
- Rašīd-al-Din Faẓl-Allāh Hamadāni, *Tār wa aḥyā*, ed. Manučehr Sotūde and Iraj Afšār, Tehran, 1989.
- Abu Bakr Moḥammad b. Zakariyā' Rāzi, *Ketāb al-hāwi fi'ṭebb*, 21 vols., Hyderabad, Deccan, 1955-70.



Moḥammad Pādšāh Šād, *Farhang-e Ānandrāj*, ed. Moḥammad Dabirsiāqi, 7 vols., Tehran, 1956-58..

Sa'di Širāzi, *Golestān*, ed. Gōlām-Ḥosayn Yusofi, Tehran, 1989.

M. D. Sallum, *Mo'jam al-kalamāt al-akkadiya fi'l-loḡāt al-šarqiya wa'l eḡriqiya wa'l-lātiniya*, Beirut, 2003.

Yohann L. Schlimmer, *Terminologie medico-pharmaceutique et anthropologique française-persane.*, litho. Tehran, 1874; 2nd. ed., Tehran, 1970, p. 93.

'Ali b. Sahl Ṭabari, *Ferdaws al-ḥekma fi'l-ṭebb*, ed. Moḥammad Zobayr Seddiqi, Berlin, 1928; repr. Frankfurt on the Main, 1996.

M. Ṭabāṭabā'i, *Giāh-šenāsi-e kārbordi ...*, I: *Giāhān-e zerā'thā-ye bozorg*, Tehran, 1986.

Moḥammad Moqim Tuyserkāni, *Farhang-e Jafari*, ed. Sa'id Ḥamidiān, Tehran, 1983.

'Ali Zargari, *Giāhān-e dāru'i*, Tehran, 2 vols., 1989.