Acacia

*Acacia sp.* (Mimosaceae), A: ʼaqāqiyyā, (tree) sant

**D&H:** The acacia species includes 750 varieties of trees and shrubs widespread throughout tropical and sub-tropical regions. Most of them grow in desert areas, and some of the trees and shrubs are thorny. The main species that flourish in this region are *Acacia albida*, *Acacia raddiana*, *Acacia tortilis*, and *Acacia gerrardii*. Gum Arabic was made mainly out of the resin of *Acacia nilotica*. Acacia gum was widely used in Egypt from the second millennium BCE, and in Sudan during the first century CE.
The Talmud mentions the use of ‘akakia’ (acacia gum) for remedial purposes and as a contraceptive. Because of its low cost and its appearance, acacia gum was sometimes used as an imitation for the more expensive myrrh and frankincense. Dioscorides mentions *akakia*, identified as *Acacia vera*, claiming that it grew in Egypt and noting especially the use of its gum to cure diseases of the eyes and intestines, as well as mouth sores, and to dye the hair black.3

**PU:** Acacia figures in a list of *materia medica* (T-S NS 321.49).

**TU:** Acacia is also mentioned in several fragments, mainly from books, and in recipes for the treatment of children with umbilical hernia and incessant crying (T-S Ar.40.160), septic conditions near the ear (ointment; T-S NS 164.62r), and roughness in the eye (collyrium; T-S NS 222.18). Different kinds of acacia feature in recipes for unknown uses (T-S AS 178.225; T-S AS 179.26), one of which begins with the *basmalah* followed by *al-shafī* – the only healer (T-S Ar.42.152v); and in lists of *materia medica* (T-S AS 170.136; T-S AS 182.183; T-S AS 183.159), one of which concerns eye diseases and was copied, according to Isaacs, with some variation from ‘Ali b. ‘Isās *Tadhkīrat al-Kahālīn* (ed. Hyderabad, p. 347; T-S NS 306.48r) and another is in a recipe for the treatment of swelling of the ear, citing Ibn Sinā and al-Jawhari (T-S AS 187.197).4

**OMU:** According to al-Kindī, ‘*aqāqyā*’ was a preparation for the teeth and for wounds; Maimonides quotes al-Tamīmī and notes that the ‘*aqāqyā*’ was a component in a medication for fracture. The ‘juice of acacia seed pods’ was used as a component in a preparation to strengthen the penis, as well as in a preparation to restore virginity. The ‘*aqāqyā*’ (juices of the fruit and seed pod) and ‘gumi arabica’ were considered a hot and dry drug.5

**TAI:** A letter dated 1110 CE found in the Genizah and sent by Natan ha-Kohen of Ashkelon to Ola ha-Levi in Fustat describes a consignment of ‘rubb al-sanṭ’ (acacia concentrate) sent from Ashkelon to Egypt. Other letters of merchants (mainly of the 11th century) attest that different products of acacia, mainly *sayyāla* (probably resin of *Acacia seyal*),6 were traded between the cities of Alexandria, Būṣīr, Cairo, and Mahdiyya. Tahertsant was traded in Alexandria and Cairo as well.7

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3 Dioscorides, I.101.
4 Isaacs & Baker, personal observations and Isaacs’ unpublished notes.
6 Issa, p. 3, no. 4.
7 Gil, III, p. 485, no. 588. See also Goitein, Society and Gil, Kingdom Indices.