

Original Research Article

## Moshkijeh (Musk Rose)

### A Forgotten Flower in Persian House and Garden

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**Abstract** | Persian gardens reflect the special popularity of plants with Iranian people. The plants in the Persian gardens have always been native and in full harmony with their context and climate. This has contributed to the stability and continuity of Iranian gardens over time and across geographical regions and has created a sense of belonging to them. Much of the usefulness and stability of Iranian gardens can be attributed to these native plants that have therapeutic, healing, and semantic functions. These plants have a special place in Iranian culture. Unfortunately, today, inadequate knowledge of native plants that are compatible with the conditions of Iran has made these species extinct. Iranian parks and urban landscapes have been filled with foreign and non-original plants that are inconsistent with the climatic and cultural contexts of Iranian regions. Due to rapid and unpleasant changes in the present era, the native plants have been forgotten. The purpose of this study seeks to introduce and identify the characteristics of the musk rose, one of the original and native flowers planted in Iranian gardens and houses. The concern is that this flower has been overlooked for many years and no longer can be seen in parks and green spaces. Even knowledge of this flower is scanty. Information about this flower is limited to some travelogues. However, not much is available on the features of this flower, and only its name has been mentioned as one of the native flowers of Iran. The required data for this study were gathered through a bibliographical method, field studies, and interviews with residents of the cities and villages of Yazd and Kerman, and the head of botanical garden research. The results of these studies show the physical, semantic, and functional characteristics of this flower and confirm that this flower design has been used in some decorations. During the field research, data about this flower was found in the central regions of Iran.

**Keywords** | *Musk rose flower, Native flower of Iran, White flowers with multiple petals, Pentamerous flower, Persian garden flower.*

**Introduction** | For decades, the tendency for selecting and planting native and local plants in parks, gardens, and other

green spaces has been reduced while a general preference for planting non-native, non-local, and imported plants have been on the rise. Regardless of the high cost, more resources,

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and special environmental conditions for the preservation of imported species, there is a growing interest in the removal of genuine, native, and environmentally friendly flowers and plants from the gardens, parks, and homes. This has led to the extinction of the species of flowers. Musk rose as one of the old, original, and native flowers of Iran have long been forgotten in Iranian gardens and houses. Today, only a few people know this flower or even remember it. The flowers have today been almost completely erased from the collective memory of the inhabitants of Iran. However, in the past, they used to be the significant and popular flowers in the landscape of Iran and were often planted in abundance in the yards of houses and gardens. Only a few traces of them have remained in travelogues and books. Due to the abandonment of these flowers in gardens and houses and their replacement with numerous imported flowers. Now there is no information about the musk rose. Knowledge is limited to its name. The present study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What does the name of the musk rose signify?
- What is the physical feature of this flower? Which family of flowers does it belong to?
- Apart from its aesthetic aspects, what are the other functions of this flower?

### Research background

So far, no research has been mainly carried out to introduce and identify the features of the flower. In the botanical book (Gol Golab, 1947), the musk rose and other plants, have been introduced and studied in terms of botanical structure. In the book of "Islamic architecture", Pirnia (1995) has mentioned this flower as an element in Persian gardens. So far, no research has specifically examined the features of this flower. This research whose concept stated by Shohre Javadi<sup>1</sup> is an attempt to identify this flower based on historical documents, available literature, handicrafts, and the observation of the only surviving species of this flower in a village in Yazd and through interviews with the old residents of Yazd.

### Research methodology

This research is based on bibliographical and field studies. Initially, the relevant literature was reviewed, the existing data about musk rose in travelogues, novels, botanical and historical books were examined. Based on the collected information, some of the characteristics of this flower were identified then were used for field studies. During the field studies, the authors realized that there is an Imamzadeh named after this flower, that is, the "Imamzadeh of Seyed Gol Mashkijeh" (in English musk rose) in Yazd. Therefore, the effects of this flower in the city of Yazd and the village of "Banadak-al-Sadat", and the village of Golafshan were examined. This information about the musk rose flower helped the authors carry out field research in Kerman city and then the samples of this flower in carpets and architectural

decorations in Kerman city were examined. According to literature and field studies, the traces of this flower can be found in the central regions of Iran.

### Meaning of Moshkijeh

According to the definition given by Dehkhoda in his dictionary, Moshkijeh (Moshkche or Mashkcha or Che) means flower, which is also called Nastaran. It belongs to the group of main roses that have long, prickly stems. According to other definitions, Moshkijah (Moshkjah or Moshkkeh) is a fragrant white flower called Nasrin. It is a white, fragrant flower with multiple petals similar to a rose known as sweet and loyal black (Dehkhoda, 1995, 291). In "The history of perfume" in Iran, it is written that many fragrant flowers of Iran, which are not used in perfumery, have borrowed the term Atr (in English perfume) and used in their name due to their well-known smell. Among the fragrant flowers and plants that have borrowed all or part of their name from musk, we can refer to the following flowers and plants: Maryam is called "Roman musk", Nastaran is named "Moshkijeh" (small musk), and Nasrin is known as "Meshgijeh (musk rose)" (Ansari, 2002). During the field studies, two reasons for naming this flower were identified: The first reason is that the musk rose has a very pleasant smell during the flowering season and according to the people of Yazd and Golafshan village, it is called Moshkijeh (Moshk + Gijeh), which means a flower with a pleasant smell like musk, which makes people feel exultant. The second reason is that this flower was originally called Moskhche (Mosh + Che) and means a small musk. Because of its very pleasant smell, later it turned into Moskhijeh.

### Identifying the characteristics of musk roses

#### • Characteristics of musk roses in scientific texts and sources

For many years there has been no trace of the musk roses in gardens, urban green spaces, and houses. Only a few people have heard the name of this flower. For this reason, the only source to identify the features of this flower have been scientific texts, travelogues, historical, and books. The following texts describe the characteristics of this flower as follows. Pirnia in the book entitled Getting to know the Iranian Islamic architecture, mentions the name of this flower while referring to the role of flowers in the garden: "... Flowers also played a role in gardens, but not all of them were used. Several types of flowers were mostly planted because of their properties, red flower or rose flower for rose water (it also has therapeutic properties). Fire flowers, yellow or round flowers, and Meshkijeh flowers, small and tiny flowers with a wonderful aroma, were planted next to trees or at the foot of them; Pale pink Rashti, white, oily, or soapy (pea-colored) flowers also bloomed in all seasons. Seasonal flowers were also planted in front of the pavilions and the flower garden.

Other flowers were marigold, white lily, nightshade, etc ...” (Pirnia, 1995, 291). Abdolrahim Zarabi in his book entitled *The history of Kashan* describes the musk roses as follows: “... In the middle of the cedars are Nastaran flowers, which are one cubit high, and the other flowers spreading by root sprouts, such as the colorful jasmine and the musk, sheepberry, judas, silk and pomegranate flowers (and the like) and forest purple nightshade and butterfly have big trees and each one is sitting somewhere” (Zarabi, 2000). In *The travelogue of Amin al-Dawla Mirza Ali Khan*, in comparison with Gol Razeqi (Arabian jasmine) and Moshkijah (Musk rose), it is stated: “... Arabian jasmine flowers are each as big as a white flower called Moshkijeh, and I have never seen Arabian jasmine so well and perfect and fragrant and fresh. The flowers of jasmine, although small and tiny and in bud, but have a special fragrance and gentleness ...” (Amin al-Dawla, 1975, 196). In his book on botany, Gol Golab describes the characteristics of this flower as follows: “The flower is a family of roses and has pear-shaped leaves and blossoms whose ovaries are in the shape of a crock on top of which the sepals are located and inside which numerous ovules form many seeds. After intercourse, the wall of this crock thickens, food accumulates in it, and its color changes” (Gol Golab, 1947, 227).

Bastani Parizi also mentions the existence of a mosque named Moshki Flower in Kerman in Ganj Ali Khan’s travelogue and the reason for this naming was probably the presence of musk flowers in this mosque: “... I say this because the oldest neighborhood of Kerman is called the neighborhood of the city, whose entrance is on the alley – opposite Ghadmagah, the current Red Crescent alley - and the oldest historical monuments of Kerman such as Sheikh Davood pool, Malek pool (related to Malek Dinar) Ganj Mosque, Camel Bazaar are located in this part of the city. There used to be an old Tekiyeh (a religious place for holding ritual ceremony) called the Tekiyeh of the neighborhood. It had been used for praying until recently. The mosque was known as the “Gol Moshki Mosque”, which was one of the oldest. Probably this

name was associated with the tiles used to have the picture of musk flowers or musk shrubs on. For this reason, this mosque was known by that name and besides, my guess is that the “Grand Mosque inside the city” to which Basmat al-Ali refers had been in the “neighborhood of the city” and maybe this mosque had been Gol Moshki Mosque. In *The history of Kerman*, there have been lots of discussions about the neighborhood of Gabran, and the neighborhood of Gabri ...” (Bastani Parizi, 2014, 79).

Based on the literature, the general features of musk roses are as follows: musk roses are small, white fragrant root sprouts having multiple petals. They used to be planted at the foot of trees and next to walls (Table 1).

#### • Features of musk roses based on the interview, field observations (Yazd city, Bandak Sadat<sup>2</sup>, and Golafshan villages), and artworks (Kerman)

##### - Seyed Gol Moshkijeh Imamzadeh (Accounts narrated during an interview with the people of Yazd)

The existence of the shrine of Imamzadeh Seyyed Gol Mashkijeh in Yazd city was the main place from which the field research was initiated. One of the native clerics<sup>3</sup> of Yazd, the author came to know was an old resident who was the writer of a book about the miracles of this Imamzadeh. According to him, Yazd now has three shrines with the names of Seyed Gol Zard (In English Yellow flower) Imamzadeh, Imamzadeh of Seyed Gol Sorkh (In English Red flower), and Imamzadeh of Seyed Gol Meshkiyeh. He narrated a story about naming these shrines and the reason for selecting them. The following excerpt is part of a narrated story.

“Three baker brothers lived in Yazd, who had been honored and respected by the people for their miracles. One day, while working in a bakery, one of these miraculously pulled out a beautiful and fragrant musk rose from the oven then became famous. “For this reason, after his death, a tomb was built for him, which is known by the same name, and the people of Yazd restore to him for their needs and desires.”

From this, it can be concluded that the musk rose is valuable for the people of Yazd and has been used a lot in the recent

Table 1. Characteristics of musk roses in literature. Source: Authors.

Literature	Specifications
History of Perfume in Iran (Ansari, 2002)	Aromatic
Ashnaye ba Memari-ye Eslami (Pirnia, 1995)	Small and tiny, has a wonderful aroma Planting site: next to trees or at their foot
Tarikh-e Kashan (Zarabi, 2000)	Root sprouts
Haj Mirza Ali Khan Sadr Azam; Travelogue of Amin Al-Dawlah (Amin al-Dawlah, 1975)	White color Another name: white flower
Giah Shenasi Baraye Sal-e Aval-e Pezeshki (Gol Golab, 1947) Plant guide (Gol Golab, 2007)	Pear-shaped leaves and flowers, the middle stamens tend to gain colored Scientific name: <i>Rosa spinosissima</i>
Safarname-ye Ganj Ali Khan (Bastani Parizi, 2014)	Spreading by shrubs



past. The respected Imamzadehs of their city has been named after this flower. In an interview with the people of Yazd, some old residents stated that this flower was one of the most popular ones among the dwellers of the city and was planted in the gardens around the pool, central courtyards, and even inside the house. According to the locals, this flower was a symbol of empathy and happiness and they believed that its presence in the house brought them luck.

**- The first type of musk rose (interviews with the residents of Golafshan village and Bandak al-Sadat)**

The field study in Yazd city showed that except for a few local and old residents of Yazd, no one remembers this flower and two of them guided the authors to discover this forgotten flower in two villages around Yazd city Golafshan village and Bandak al-Sadat in Miankuh, Mehriz district

“This flower used to be abundant in the city and was mostly planted in the backyards as a shrub along the walls and trees. Its flowering season is mid-May to late August. Its flowers withered (the flowering season may vary from June to August depending on the climatic conditions of the region). In the flowering season, the dense green foliage is filled with tiny white flowers, as if these small, miniature flowers, like snowballs, are beautifully raining on their green beds and making any viewer happy. Moshkijeh has a very pleasant smell in the flowering season, and that is why the locals call it Moshkijeh (Moskh + Gijeh), which means that it smelled like musk, which makes the smellers exultant and slaphappy. According to the locals, a sample of this flower is currently available in the two villages of Golafshan and Bandak al-Sadat around Yazd. “Under the guidance of the locals, the authors visited these two villages and documented and specifications of this flower.”

Part of what the villagers said<sup>4</sup> about the flower is as follows: “In the past, this flower had edible and medicinal use and it used to be used for curing knee and joint pain among the locals. The residents decocted this flower in tea and herbal tea or like Mohammadi, they used dried rose petals in yogurt” (Figs. 1 & 2).

**- The second type of musk roses (interviews with the residents of Golafshan village and Bandak al-Sadat)**

In addition to the flower with multiple petals, which has been mentioned in documents and the majority of the people of Yazd and the surrounding villages agree, some have referred to and described its color as white or pink. According to scientific texts, this flower, which is called Meshijeh by some locals, is the same as dog roses (Fig. 3).

### Causes of extinction of musk roses

During the interview with the people of Yazd about the cause of the extinction of musk roses, they stated that water shortage and drought have been effective in this regard. However, due to the high resistance of this flower, the hypothesis of water scarcity is not a valid reason for the extinction of musk rose

species. The main reason can be the tendency of the people of the city towards foreign species. This is surprising because due to their root resistance, durability, and high adaptation to climatic conditions, native flowers are used as roots and stems of imported flowers. Currently, native flowers are not popular anymore. They have been replaced with imported flowers for purely ornamental purposes. According to the hypothesis of water scarcity quoted by the locals, it is possible that after a period of drought coinciding with the decorative attitude, residents started growing the tendency toward choosing imported plant species for decoration, and this has been the beginning of the time that this flower has dropped in value and accordingly faded from the yards of houses, gardens, etc.

### Searching for features of musk roses in architectural decorations

A shrub covered in small white flowers on a scaffold can be seen at the entrance of “Ebrahim Khan Qajar School” in “Ebrahim Khan Bazaar”. They have been drawn on the mosaic tile pieces with a blue background. A similar drawing is on the horizontal painting in “Ganj Ali Khan’s bath” (Fig. 4). These flowers, which are scattered on the branches of the

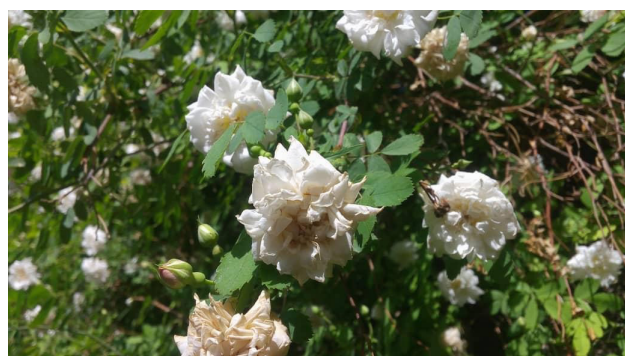


Fig. 1. Musk roses (the first type). Location: Golafshan village. Mid-May. Photo: Zia Hosseinzadeh, 2020.



Fig. 2. Musk roses (the first type) Location: Benadak Sadat village. Late May. Photo: Farzaneh Sadat Dehghan, 2019.

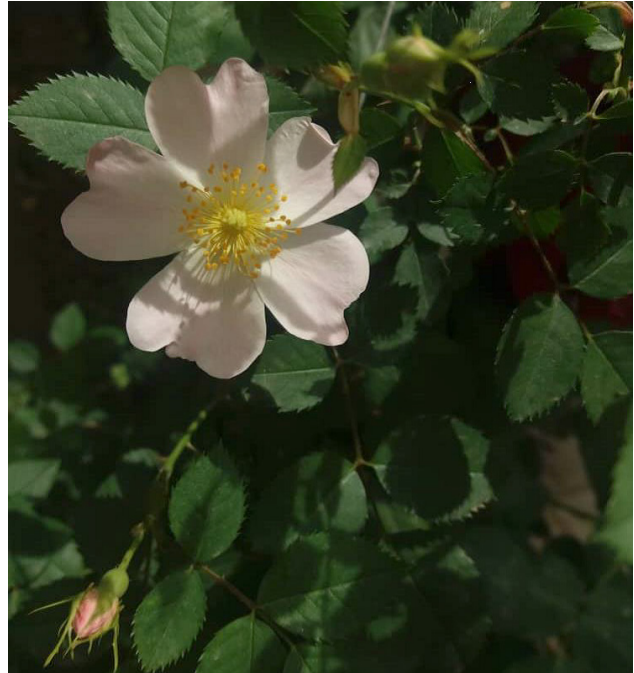


Fig. 3. Musk rose (the second type) Location: Yazd. Early May. Photo: Farzaneh Sadat Dehghan, 2019.

tree, are matched to the descriptions provided by the people of Yazd.

### Searching for the features of musk roses in the carpets of Kerman

Researching and examining works of art and artifacts, the authors learned about the characteristics and habitat of this flower, traces of its designs in the hand-woven carpets of Kerman. These are described as follows:

- **The similarities between the designs of the carpets and musk roses with the multiple petals (Type 1)**

In Kermani hand-woven carpets, some designs, and patterns completely correspond to the characteristics of the first type of musk roses (Fig. 5).

- **Similarities**

Flower form: Shrubs have lots of flowers on but they are smaller in comparison with other flowers. Color and appearance of flowers: White flowers with multiple petals are next to dark dried flowers or petals.

Color, and appearance of the leaves: They are similar to the real samples.

Flower Location: Like reality, flowers can be found among plants or at the foot of trees.

- **The Similarities between carpet designs and musk roses with flowers (type 2)**

Pentamerous flowers on the rugs are very similar to musk roses type 2 (Fig. 6).

- **Similarities**

Flower form: flowers are of medium density but they are smaller than other flowers.

Color and appearance of flowers: flowers are pink and have multiple petals.

Color and appearance of the leaves: They are similar to the real samples.

Flower Location: Like reality, they can be found among plants or at the foot of trees.

Based on the data obtained from field studies, the general characteristics of musk roses are detailed in Table 2.

### Conclusion

The process of growth and development of Iranian gardens has long been stopped. Given the conditions and demands of the day, city managers, designers, engineers are no longer willing to revive and reproduce them. Now, after many years, the university communities in Iran have attempted to raise the awareness of people in this field. Some of the designers and experts have aimed to improve urban spaces according to the principles and concepts of Iranian gardens. In line with these measurements, we are witnessing the re-design and revival of the Iranian gardens. However, no studies have attempted to discover and introduce each element of the landscape. As these gardens including the musk rose are being extinct, there is a necessity for conducting research addressing this gap. Using historical sources and field research, the authors have succeeded in identifying and introduce the features and characteristics of this native Iranian flower, which is as follows:

Analysis of the literature reviews, documents, and the data gathered from most of the people of Yazd, Kerman, and the village of Golafshan and Bandak al-Sadat, this plant can be





Fig. 4. Entrance of Ebrahim Khan School, Kerman. Photo: Shohreh Javadi, 2018.



Fig. 5. The similarities between musk roses with multiple petals (type 1) and the patterns in Kerman carpets. Photo: Shohreh Javadi, 2018.





Fig. 6. The similarities between musk roses with few petals (type 2) and the patterns in Kerman carpets. Photo: Shohreh Javadi, 2018.

Table 2. Characteristics of Musk roses based on field studies. Source: Authors.



Field Studies	Features
Imamzadeh of Seyed Gol Moshkijeh	It signifies the sanctity and spiritual value and omens of this flower for the people of Yazd and reflects its extensive use in not so distant past
Kerman hand-woven carpets	White, bushy, some with multiple petals or pentamerous
Interviews with residents of Yazd and the village of Golafshan and Banadak al-Sadat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Shrub plants</li> <li>- Location: next to the walls and trees</li> <li>- Blooming season: Mid-May to late August, and white flowers with multiple petals and a pleasant odor</li> <li>- The locals have given it the name Moshkijah (Moskh + Gijah). This flower is now endangered. In the past, it was used for treating knee and joint pain or used to be decocted in tea and herbal tea</li> <li>- Some people in Yazd also mentioned the existence of the second type of musk flower: Pentamerous flower in white and pale pink</li> </ul>
Interview with Afsoon Rahmanpour <sup>5</sup> (Head of Research Department of the National Botanical Garden)	Thorny flower with the scientific name of <i>Rosa pimpinellifolia</i> L.= <i>Rosa spinosissima</i> L.

described as follows: This is a bushy, small and miniature flower with lots of white petals spreading by root sprouts and some types of it have less white or pink petals, fragrant. In terms of application, it has edible and medicinal properties that are widely used in Iranian gardens and yards. This flower had a special place in terms of meaning and it was considered a sign of good omen and empathy. This plant used to be planted at the foot of trees and next to the walls and its blooming season was spring (Table 3). One of the important features of this flower is its compatibility with the region and high resistance. Today, due to the growing interest of people in decoration, the use of native plants that are resistant and suitable for regional conditions has been forgotten in urban landscapes or private properties. People's desire for using imported plants that are purely ornamental and not useful has two consequences. First, native and compatible flowers

and plants of Iran, including musk roses have lost their value. Second, they have gone extinct. Considering the fact that non-native plants need care and special conditions that impose extra costs, we can claim that in the Iranian garden, the choice of flowers and plants has not been based on taste and beauty. The efficiency, usefulness of plants, and ecology have been the first concern. In the current period that there is a water shortage crisis, imported flowers can be replaced with musk roses which have special features such as resistance and low water requirement. In this study, the place of growth has been introduced, this flower can be planted and propagated in parks, green spaces, and houses by cutting, and its species can be revived. For this purpose, the authors handed over the cuttings of this plant to the Karaj Botanical Garden so that it could be planted in this garden. This helps visitors get acquainted with musk roses.

## Moshkijeh (Musk Rose), A Forgotten Flower in Persian House and Garden

Table 3. Summary of literature review and field data and general conclusions. Source: Authors.

The name of the flower scientific name	Color	Smell	Propagation methods, growth conditions, and place of growth	Appearance (The number of petals, size Leaves, and thorns)	Function	Shape
Rosa pimpinellifolia	White	Mild but different from rose perfume	-Cuttings and seeds. It has a lot of resistance in different weather conditions. -Location: central regions of Iran (often at the foot of trees and next to walls) -Flower life is short and its petals fall off quickly. Flowering time: early to late May	Form: Shrub plant It is similar to the rose in the bud state and the open state. It has a lot of petals, the shape of leaves, and morphology of the stems, thorns are similar to the rose, they are smaller in size.	Due to the good aroma of the flower and its properties, it has many oral and therapeutic uses	
Rosa canina Musk roses with few petals (Type2).	White, pale pink, and pinkish-white		-Cuttings and seeds. It has a lot of resistance in different weather conditions. -Location: central regions of Iran (often at the foot of trees and next to walls) -Flower life is short and its petals fall off quickly. Flowering time: early to late May	-It is similar to the rosebud. The shape of leaves and the morphology of the stems, thorns are similar to the rose, but they are smaller in size. -The number of petals ranging from five to seven. Petals are heart-shaped and stamens are visible. Its stems are thorny.	Due to the good aroma of the flower and its properties, it has many oral and therapeutic uses	

### Endnotes

1. In an informal interview with Dr. Shohreh Javadi (In February of 2018): "The idea for this research was formed by chance ten years ago while I was in the yard (Tehran - the late '80s). When I first heard the name of Moshkishjeh flower from a Kermani relative. He mentioned the fragrant flowers growing on shrubs. I have been searching for this flower in Kerman ever since, and we have been seriously looking for this flower for several years with the help of landscape students, and finally, we found traces of this flower in the central regions."
2. Mr. Gholami is one of the clergymen and residents of Yazd who has written a book mentioning the miracles of the three Imams, Seyyed Golzard, Seyyed Golsorkh, and Seyyed Gol Moshkijeh.
3. Ms. Dehghan was one of the senior residents of Yazd city and

- originally from the village of Benadak Sadat and Modarres (Mullah). He helped the authors of this paper to find musk roses (May 7, 2020).
4. Interview with Mr. Shahedi, the owner of a house in the village of Golafshan. His house was covered in flowers (September 19, 2019).
5. To further clarify the characteristics of the musk rose, the sample found by the authors was taken to the National Botanical Garden. During an interview with Afsoon Rahmanpour; the head of the research department of the national botanical garden of Iran (August 22, 2020), the necessary experiments were performed on the flower, the scientific name of the plant was found and the accuracy of the obtained information was confirmed.

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