

THE CORIANDER

8. The *Po wu či*, faithful to its tendencies regarding other Iranian plants, generously permits General Čaň K'ien to have also brought back from his journey the coriander, *hu swi* 胡荽 (*Coriandrum sativum*).¹ Li Ši-čen, and likewise K'aň-hi's Dictionary, repeat this statement without reference to the *Po wu či*,² and of course the credulous community of the Changkienides has religiously sworn to this dogma.³ Needless to say that nothing of the kind is contained in the General's biography or in the Han Annals.⁴ The first indubitable mention of the plant is not earlier than the beginning of the sixth century A.D.; that is, about six centuries after the General's death, and this makes some difference to the historian.⁵ The first *Pen ts'ao* giving the name *hu-swi* is the *Ši liao pen ts'ao*, written by Moň Šen in the seventh century, followed by the *Pen ts'ao ši i* of Č'en Ts'aň-k'i in the first half of the eighth century. None of these authors makes any observation on foreign introduction. In the literature on agriculture, the cultivation of the coriander is first described in the *Ts'i min yao šu* of the sixth century, where, however, nothing is said about the origin of the plant from abroad.

An interesting reference to the plant occurs in the Buddhist dictionary *Yi ts'ie kin yin i* (*l.c.*), where several variations for writing

¹ This passage is not a modern interpolation, but is of ancient date, as it is cited in the *Yi ts'ie kin yin i*, Ch. 24, p. 2 (regarding this work, see above, p. 258). Whether it was contained in the original edition of the *Po wu či*, remains doubtful.

² Under 葫 ("garlic") K'aň-hi cites the dictionary *T'aň yün*, published by Sun Mien in A.D. 750, as saying that the coriander is due to Čaň K'ien.

³ BRETSCHNEIDER, *Chinese Recorder*, 1871, p. 221, where the term *hu-swi* is wrongly identified with parsley, and Bot. Sin., pt. I, p. 25; HIRTH, *T'oung Pao*, Vol. VI, 1895, p. 439.

⁴ The coriander is mentioned in several passages of the *Kin kwei yao lio* by the physician Čaň Čuň-kiň of the second century A.D.; but, as stated above (p. 205), there is no guaranty that these passages belonged to the original edition of the work. "To eat pork together with raw coriander rots away the navel" (Ch. c, p. 23 b). "In the fourth and eighth months do not eat coriander, for it injures the intellect" (*ibid.*, p. 28). "Coriander eaten for a long time makes man very forgetful; a patient must not eat coriander or *hwaň-hwa ts'ai* 黃花菜 (*Lampsana apogonoides*)," *ibid.*, p. 29.

⁵ An incidental reference to *hu swi* is made in the *Pen ts'ao kaň mu* in the description of the plant *küan er* (see BRETSCHNEIDER, Bot. Sin., pt. II, No. 438), and ascribed to Lu Ki, who lived in the latter part of the third century A.D. In my opinion, this reading is merely due to a misprint, as there is preserved no description of the *hu-swi* by Lu Ki.