

RICE

26. While rice is at present a common article of food of the Persian people, being particularly enjoyed as pilau,¹ it was entirely unknown in the days of Iranian antiquity. No word for "rice" appears in the Avesta.² Herodotus³ mentions only wheat as the staple food of the Persians at the time of Cambyses. This negative evidence is signally confirmed by the Chinese annals, which positively state that there is no rice or millet in Sasanian Persia;⁴ and on this point Chinese testimony carries weight, since the Chinese as a rice-eating nation were always anxious to ascertain whether rice was grown and consumed by foreign peoples. Indeed, the first question a travelling Chinese will ask on arrival at a new place will invariably refer to rice, its qualities and valuations. This is conspicuous in the memoirs of Čan K'ien, the first Chinese who travelled extensively across Iranian territory, and carefully noted the cultivation of rice in Fergana (Ta-yüan), further for Parthia (An-si), and T'iao-či (Chaldæa). The two last-named countries, however, he did not visit himself, but reported what he had heard about them. In the Sasanian epoch, Chinese records tell us that rice was plentiful in Kuča, Kašgar (Su-lek), Khotan, and Ts'ao (Jāguḍa) north of the Ts'un-liñ;⁵ also in Ši (Tashkend).⁶ On the other hand, Aristobulus, a companion of Alexander on his expedition in Asia and author of an Alexander biography written after 285 B.C., states that rice grows in Bactriana, Babylonia, Susis, and in lower Syria;⁷ and Diodorus⁸ likewise emphasizes the abundance of rice in Susi-

¹ *T'oung Pao*, 1916, p. 481.

² MODI, in Spiegel Memorial Volume, p. xxxvii.

³ III, 22.

⁴ *Wei šu*, Ch. 102, pp. 5 b-6 a; *Čou šu*, Ch. 50, p. 6. Tabari (translation of NÖLDEKE, p. 244) mentions rice among the crops taxed by Khusrau I (A.D. 531-578); but this is surely an interpolation, as in the following list of taxes rice is not mentioned, while all other crops are. Another point to be considered is that in Arabic manuscripts, when the diacritical marks are omitted, the word *birinj* may be read as well *naranj*, which means "orange" (cf. OUSELEY, *Oriental Geography of Ebn Haukal*, p. 221).

⁵ *Sui šu*, Ch. 83, pp. 5 b, 7 b.

⁶ *T'ai p'in hwan yü ki*, Ch. 186, p. 7 b.

⁷ Strabo, XV. I, 18.

⁸ XIX, 13.