

CUMMIN

34. Under the foreign term 蔞蘿 *ši-lo*, **ži-la*, the Chinese have not described the fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*), as erroneously asserted by WATTERS¹ and STUART,² but cummin (*Cuminum cyminum*) and caraway (*Carum carui*). This is fundamentally proved by the prototype, Middle Persian *žira* or *zira*, Sanskrit *jira*, of which *ši-lo* (**ži-la*) forms the regular transcription.³ In India, *jira* refers to both cummin and caraway.⁴ Although *Cuminum* is more or less cultivated in most provinces of India, except Bengal and Assam, there is, according to WATT, fairly conclusive evidence that it is nowhere indigenous; but in several districts it would appear to be so far naturalized as to have been regarded as "wild," even by competent observers. No doubt, it was transmitted to India from Iran. Cummin was known to the ancient Persians, being mentioned in the inscription of Cyrus at Persepolis,⁵ and at an early period penetrated from Iran to Egypt on the one hand, and to India on the other.⁶

Avicenna distinguishes four varieties of cummin (Arabic *kammūn*),⁷ — that of Kirmān, which is black; that of Persia, which is yellow and more active than the others; that of Syria, and the Nabathæan.⁸ Each variety is both spontaneous and cultivated. Abu Mansur regards that of Kirmān as the best, and styles it *zire-i kirmān*.⁹ This name, according to SCHLIMMER,¹⁰ would refer to caraway, also called *zire-i siah*,¹¹ while cummin is styled in Persian *zire-i sebze* or *sefid*. Caraway (*Carum*

¹ Essays on the Chinese Language, p. 440. He even adds "coriander," which is *hu swi* (p. 297).

² Chinese Materia Medica, p. 176. Fennel is *hwi hian* 茴香, while a synonyme of cummin is *siao hwi hian* ("small fennel").

³ In the same form, the word occurs in Tibetan, *zi-ra* (*T'oung Pao*, 1916, p. 475).

⁴ G. WATT, Commercial Products of India, p. 442.

⁵ JORET, Plantes dans l'antiquité, Vol. II, p. 66.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

⁷ Hebrew *kammōn*, Assyrian *kamanu*, resulting in Greek *κμινον*, Latin *cumīnum*, *cymīnum*, or *cimīnum*; Armenian *caman*; Persian *kamūn*.

⁸ LECLERC, Traité des simples, Vol. III, p. 196.

⁹ ACHUNDOW, Abu Mansur, pp. 112, 258.

¹⁰ Terminologie, p. 112.

¹¹ In India, the Persian word *siah* refers to the black caraway (*Carum bulbocastanum*), which confirms Schlimmer's opinion. Also Avicenna's black cummin of Kirmān apparently represents this species. This plant is a native of Baluchistan, Afghanistan, Kashmir, and Lahūl, mainly occurring as a weed in cultivated land.