

THE DATE-PALM

35. The Chinese records of the date-palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*) contain two points that are of interest to science: first, a contribution to the geographical distribution of the tree in ancient times; and, second, a temporary attempt at acclimating it in China. The tree is not indigenous there. It is for the first time in the T'ang period that we receive some information about it; but it is mentioned at an earlier date as a product of Sasanian Persia in both the *Wei šu* and *Sui šu*, under the name *ts'ien nien tsao* 千年棗 ("jujubes of thousand years," the jujube, *Zizyphus vulgaris*, being a native of China).¹ In the *Yu yan tsa tsu*,² the date is styled *Po-se tsao* 波斯棗 ("Persian jujube"), with the observation that its habitat is in Po-se (Persia), or that it comes from there.³ The Persian name is then given in the form 窟莽 *k'u-mañ*, *k'ut(k'ur)-mañ, which would correspond to a Middle Persian *xurmañ (*khurmang), Pāzand and New Persian *xurmā*, that was also adopted by Osmanli and Neo-Greek, *χουρμās* ("date") and *κουρμαδηά* ("date-palm"), Albanian *korme*.⁴ The *T'an šu*⁵ writes the same word 鶻莽 *hu-mañ*, *guδ(gur)-mañ, answering to a Middle-Persian form *gurmañ or *kurmañ. The New-Persian word is rendered 苦魯麻 *k'u-lu(ru)-ma* in the *Pen ts'ao kañ mu*,⁶ this is the style of the Yüan transcriptions,⁷

¹ This name was bestowed upon the tree, not, as erroneously asserted by HIRTH (Chau Ju-kua, p. 210), "evidently on account of the stony hardness of the dates on reaching China," but, as stated in the *Pen ts'ao kañ mu* (Ch. 31, p. 8), owing to the long-enduring character of the tree 其樹性耐久也. The same explanation holds good for the synonyme *wan sui tsao* ("jujube of ten thousand or numerous years"). Indeed, this palm lives to a great age, and trees of from one to two hundred years old continue to produce their annual crop.

² Ch. 18, p. 10.

³ The same term, *Po-se tsao*, appears in a passage of the *Pei hu lu* (Ch. 2, p. 9 b), where the trunk and leaves of the sago-palm (*Sago rumphii*) are compared with those of the date.

⁴ In Old Armenian of the fifth century we have the Iranian loan-word *armav*, and hence it is inferred that the *x* of Persian was subsequently prefixed (HÜBSCHMANN, *Persische Studien*, p. 265; *Armen. Gram.*, p. 111). The date of the Chinese transcriptions proves that the initial *x* existed in Pahlavi.

⁵ Ch. 221 B, p. 13.

⁶ Ch. 31, p. 21. It is interesting to note that Li Ši-čen endeavors to make out a distinction between *k'u-mañ* and *k'u-lu-ma* by saying that the former denotes the tree, the latter the fruit; but both, in his opinion, are closely allied foreign words.

⁷ The T'ang transcription, of course, is not "probably a distorted transcription of *khurma*," as asserted by BRETSCHNEIDER (*Chinese Recorder*, 1871, p. 266), but, on the contrary, is very exact.