

SUGAR BEET AND LETTUCE

37. In the preceding notes we observed that the name for a species of *Beta* was transferred to the spinach in India and still serves in China as designation for this vegetable. We have also a Sino-Iranian name for a *Beta*, 軍蓬, *kiin-t'a*, **gwun-d'ar*, which belonged to the choice vegetables of the country 末祿 *Mo-lu*, **Mar-luk*, in Arabia.¹ The *Čen su wen* 證俗文² says that it is now erroneously called *ken ta ts'ai* 根大菜 or *ta ken ts'ai*, which is identical with *tien ts'ai* 甜菜 ("sweet vegetable"). STUART³ gives the latter name together with 著蓬 *kiin-t'a*, identifying it with *Beta vulgaris*, the white sugar beet, which he says grows in China. Stuart, however, is mistaken in saying that this plant is not mentioned in the *Pen ts'ao*. It is noted both in the *Čen lei pen ts'ao*⁴ and the *Pen ts'ao kan mu*,⁵ the latter giving also the term *kiin-t'a*, which is lacking in the former work. Li Ši-čen observes with reference to this term that its meaning is unexplained, a comment which usually betrays the foreign character of the word, but he fails to state the source from which he derived it. There is no doubt that this *kiin-t'a* is merely a graphic variant of the above 軍蓬. The writing 著 is as early as the T'ang period, and occurs in the *Yu yan tsa tsu*,⁶ where the leaves of the *yu tien ts'ao* 油點草 ("herb with oily spots") are compared to those of the *kiin-t'a*.⁷ A description of the *kiin-t'a* is not contained in that work, but from this incidental reference it must be inferred that the plant was well known in the latter half of the ninth century.

Beta vulgaris is called in New Persian *čugundur* or *čegonder*, and is mentioned by Abu Mansur.⁸ The corresponding Arabic word is *silk*.⁹ The Chinese transcription made in the T'ang period is apparently based on a Middle-Persian form of the type **gundar* or **gundur*. *Beta vulgaris* is a Mediterranean and West-Asiatic plant grown as far as the

¹ *T'ai p'in hwan yü ki*, Ch. 186, p. 16 b.

² Ch. 12, p. 3. This work was published in 1884 by Ho Yi-hiñ 郝懿行.

³ Chinese Materia Medica, p. 68.

⁴ Ch. 28, p. 9.

⁵ Ch. 27, p. 1 b. Cf. also *Yamato honzō*, Ch. 5, p. 26.

⁶ Ch. 9, p. 9 b.

⁷ "On each leaf there are black spots opposite one another."

⁸ ACHUNDOW, Abu Mansur, p. 81.

⁹ LECLERC, *Traité des simples*, Vol. II, p. 274.