

NARCISSUS

46. The *Yu yan tsa tsu*¹ contains the following notice: "The habitat of the *nai-k'i* 柰祗 is in the country Fu-lin (Syria). Its sprouts grow to a height of three or four feet. Its root is the size of a duck's egg. Its leaves resemble those of the garlic (*Allium sativum*). From the centre of the leaves rises a very long stem surmounted by a six-petaled flower of reddish-white color.² The heart of this flower is yellow-red, and does not form fruit. This plant grows in the winter and withers during the summer. It is somewhat similar to shepherd's-purse (*tsi* 齊, *Capsella bursa-pastoris*) and wheat.³ An oil is pressed from the flowers, with which they anoint the body as a preventive of colds, and is employed by the king of Fu-lin and the nobles in his country."

Li Ši-čen, in his *Pen ts'ao kan mu*,⁴ has placed this extract in his notice of *šwi sien* 水仙 (*Narcissus tazetta*),⁵ and after quoting it, adds this comment: "Judging from this description of the plant, it is similar to Narcissus; it cannot be expected, of course, that the foreign name should be identical with our own."⁶ He is perfectly correct, for the description answers this flower very well, save the comparison with *Capsella*. Dioscorides also compares the leaves of *Narcissus* to those of *Allium*, and says that the root is rounded like a bulb.⁷

The philological evidence agrees with this explanation; for *nai-k'i*, **nai-gi*, apparently answers to Middle Persian **nargi*, New Persian *nargis* (Arabic *narjis*),⁸ Aramaic *narkim*, Armenian *nargēs* (Persian

¹ Ch. 18, p. 12 b.

² Cf. the description of Theophrastus (Hist. plant., VII, 13): "In the case of narcissus it is only the flower-stem which comes up, and it immediately pushes up the flower." Also Dioscorides (IV, 158) and Pliny (XXI, 25) have given descriptions of the flower.

³ This sentence is omitted (and justly so) in the text, as reprinted in the *Pen ts'ao kan mu*; for these comparisons are lame.

⁴ Ch. 13, p. 16.

⁵ Also this species is said to have been introduced from abroad (*Hwa mu siao či* 花木小志, p. 19 b, in *Č'un ts'ao t'an tsi*, Ch. 25).

⁶ In another passage of his work (Ch. 14, p. 10) he has the same text under *šan nai* 山柰 (*Kæmpferia galanga*), but here he merely adds that the description of the *Yu yan tsa tsu* is "a little like *šan nai*."

⁷ LECLERC, *Traité des simples*, Vol. III, p. 368.

⁸ According to HÜBSCHMANN (Armen. Gram., p. 201), the New-Persian form would presuppose a Pahlavi **narkis*. In my opinion, Greek *ναρκισσος* is derived from an Iranian language through the medium of an idiom of Asia Minor, not *vice versa*, as believed by NOELDEKE (Persische Studien, II, p. 43).