

## THE BALM OF GILEAD

47. The *Yu yañ tsa tsu*<sup>1</sup> has the following notice of an exotic plant referred exclusively to Syria: "The plant 阿勃參 *a-p'o-ts'an* (\*a-bwut-sam) has its habitat in the country Fu-lin (Syria). The tree is over ten feet high. Its bark is green and white in color. The blossoms are fine 細, two being opposite each other (biflorate). The flowers resemble those of the rape-turnip, *man-tsin* 蔓菁 (*Brassica rapa-depressa*), being uniformly yellow. The seeds resemble those of the pepper-plant, *hu-tsiao* 胡椒 (*Piper nigrum*). By chopping the branches, one obtains a juice like oil, that is employed as an ointment, serving as a remedy for ringworm, and is useful for any disease. This oil is held in very high esteem, and its price equals its weight in gold."

As indicated in the *Pen ts'ao kan mu ši i*,<sup>2</sup> the notice of the plant *a-p'o-san* has been adopted by two works,—the *Č'en fu t'un hwi* 程賦統會, which simply notes that it grows in Fu-lin; and the *Hwa i hwa mu k'ao* 華夷花木考 ("Investigations into the Botany of China and Foreign Countries"), which has copied the account of the *Yu yañ tsa tsu* without acknowledgment. Neither of these books gives any additional information, and the account of the *Yu yañ tsa tsu* remains the only one that we possess.

The transcription \*a-bwut(bwur)-sam, which is very exact, leads to Aramaic and Talmudic *afursama* אפּוּרְסָמָא<sup>3</sup> (Greek βάλαμον, Arabic *balessān*), the balm of Gilead (*Amyris gileadensis*, *Balsamodendron giliadense*, or *Commiphora opobalsamum*, family *Burseraceae*) of ancient fame. This case splendidly corroborates Hirth's opinion that the language of Fu-lin (or rather one of the languages of Fu-lin) was Aramaic. The last two characters *p'o-ts'an* (\*bwut-sam) could very well transcribe Greek *balsam*; but the element 阿 excludes Greek and any other language in which this word is found, and admits no other than Aramaic. In Syriac we have *apursāmā* and *pursāmā* (*pursmā*), hence Armenian *aprsam* or *aprasam*.<sup>4</sup> In Neo-Hebrew, *afobalsmōn* or

<sup>1</sup> Ch. 18, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Ch. 4, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> I. LOEW, *Aramaeische Pflanzennamen*, p. 73. Also *afarsma* and *afarsmōn* (J. BUXTORF, *Lexicon chaldaicum*, p. 109; J. LEVY, *Neuhebr. Wörterbuch*, Vol. I, p. 151). Cf. S. KRAUSS, *Talmudische Archäologie*, Vol. I, pp. 234-236.

<sup>4</sup> HÜBSCHMANN, *Armenische Grammatik*, p. 107. I do not believe in the Persian origin of this word, as tentatively proposed by this author.