

Chinese learned of the genuine coral through their intercourse with the Hellenistic Orient: as we are informed by the *Wei lio* and the Han Annals,<sup>1</sup> Ta Ts'in produced coral; and the substance was so common, that the inhabitants used it for making the king-posts of their habitations. The T'ang Annals<sup>2</sup> then describe how the marine product is fished in the coral islands by men seated in large craft and using nets of iron wire. When the corals begin to grow on the rocks, they are white like mushrooms; after a year they turn yellow, and when three years have elapsed, they change into red. Their branches then begin to intertwine, and grow to a height of three or four feet.<sup>3</sup> Hirth may be right in supposing that this fishing took place in the Red Sea, and that the "Coral Sea" of the Nestorian inscription and the "sea producing corals and genuine pearls" of the *Wei lio* are apparently identical with the latter.<sup>4</sup> But it may have been the Persian Gulf as well, or even the Mediterranean. Pliny<sup>5</sup> is not very enthusiastic about the Red-Sea coral; and the *Periplus* speaks of the importation of coral into India, which W. H. SCHOFF<sup>6</sup> seems to me to identify correctly with the Mediterranean coral. Moreover, the Chinese themselves correlate the above account of coral-fishing with Persia, for the *Yi wu ċi* 異物志 is cited in the *Čen lei pen ts'ao*<sup>7</sup> as saying that coral is produced in Persia, being considered by the people there as their most precious jewel; and the *Pen ts'ao yen i* speaks of a coral-island in the sea of Persia,<sup>8</sup> going on to tell the same story regarding coral-fishing as the T'ang Annals with reference to Fu-lin (Syria). Su Kuñ of the T'ang states that coral grows in the Southern Sea, but likewise comes from Persia and Ceylon, the latter statement being repeated by the *T'u kin pen ts'ao* of the Sung. It is interesting that the *Pen ts'ao* of the T'ang insists on the holes in coral, a characteristic which in the Orient is still regarded (and justly so) as a mark of authenticity. Under the T'ang, coral was first introduced into the materia medica. In the Annals, coral is ascribed to

<sup>1</sup> HIRTH, *China and the Roman Orient*, pp. 41, 73.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>5</sup> XXXII, II.

<sup>6</sup> *The Periplus of the Erythræan Sea*, p. 128.

<sup>7</sup> Ch. 4, p. 37.

<sup>8</sup> Ch. 5, p. 7 (ed. of Lu Sin-yüan). The coral island where the coral-tree grows is also mentioned by an Arabic author, who wrote about A.D. 1000 (G. FERRAND, *Textes relatifs à l'Extrême-Orient*, Vol. I, p. 147). See, further, E. WIEDEMANN, *Zur Mineralogie im Islam*, p. 244.