The Golden Peaches of Samarkand

A STUDY OF T'ANG EXOTICS

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Domestic Animals

Horses were of tremendous importance to the rulers of T'ang, whose high estate and far-flung majesty among the peoples of Asia depended in large measure on the availability of quantities of horses to carry soldiers and supplies against mobile enemies, especially the nomadic peoples, their voracious rivals. The doctrine of the final dependence of the state upon a huge number of war horses is plainly pronounced in the Book of T'ang, which states, in connection with the death of 180,000 government horses by disease, "Horses are the military preparedness of the state; if Heaven takes this preparedness away, the state will totter to a fall."1 When the dynasty was founded early in the seventh century, the victors found themselves in possession of only five thousand horses pastured in the grasslands of Lung-yu, that is, in modern Kansu. Of these, three thousand were inherited from the fallen house of Sui, and the rest were bought taken from the Turks.2 Through the care of the magistrates charged with carrying out government policy on horses, the nation could claim, in the middle of the same century, 906,000 horses, divided among the eight great pasturelands north of the Wei River, in the countryside above the Western Capital.3 From then on every effort was made to keep the horse population at this high level. The only important change came after the reign of Hsien Tsung, in the middle of the eighth century, when the disasters of war left the countryside waste. After these calamities, which accompanied the breakdown of central authority, the great nobles and high provincial officials acquired enormous holdings in livestock, which finally outnumbered those of the imperial government.4

The paramount need for horses did not, however, make it necessary for the sovereign to accept any gift of them. He might, out of conviction or expediency, reject an expensive present, whether dancing girl or dancing horse, as unworthy of his virtuous and incorruptible reign. The first three rulers of T'ang frequently did so.5 Or again, the princes of foreign nations often sought the advantage of a family alliance with T'ang during the seventh century, and accordingly sent herds of the much-desired horses to accent a suggestion of marriage with a Chinese princess. Therefore, for the Chinese monarch to accept the gift was to announce a foreign policy. Consider, for example, the difference in the treatment of two Turkish governments: the T'olös sent three thousand horses in 649, asking a royal wedding, but after protracted argument T'ang rejected the humiliating concession.6 But the very next year an alliance was contracted with the Sir-tardush Turks, who had sent a royal prince with fifty thousand of their grizzled black-manned horses,7 along with great numbers of oxen, camels, and goats.8

Coupled with the notion of the horse as an instrument of diplomatic and military policy was the conception of horsemanship as an aristocratic privilege—a prejudice which the government tried to enforce by edict in 667, in prohibiting artisans and tradesmen from riding horseback.9

Still, this patrician animal owed his unique status to more than his usefulness to the lords of the land. He was invested with sanctity by ancient tradition, endowed with prodigious qualities, and visibly stamped with the marks of his divine origin. A revered myth proclaimed him a relative of the dragon, akin to the mysterious powers of water. Indeed, all wonderful horses, such as the steed of the pious Hsien-tung which, in later legend, carried the sacred scriptures from India, were avatars of dragons, and in antiquity the tallest horses owned by the Chinese were called simply "dragons."10

Most honored of all antique horses were the uncanny mounts of Mu, Son of Heaven, named the "Eight Bayards."11 "Bayard" represents the Chinese designation of any pure-bred and magnificent horse, and has the frequent implication of supernatural origin or enigmatic parentage from the divine horses of the West and even, metaphorically, a human hero. Artistic representations of the abnormal but angelic animals which accompanied the great king through the wastes of hallowed K'un-lun were an important theme in the fantastic art of medieval China, and their grotesque images, painted in the fifth century, were treasured by T'ang connoisseurs, who explained their bizarre appearance by pointing out that the holy sages of antiquity, even Confucius himself, did not look like natural men. Divine creatures, whether human or equine, must not only be, but look, weird and otherworldly.12

In the Far West lived the great Horses of Heaven, "bayard-boned dragon-
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decoyas," that is, with bones made to carry the wings of an ideal Western bayard, and precursors and inveters of dragons. This is how Li Po described them:

The horses of Heaven come out of the dens of the Kushanas, backed with tiger markings, bones made for dragon wings. The belief in the dragon-horses of the West goes back to the second century before the Christian era, when Wu Ti of Han, seeking to guarantee his own divinity and immortality, whether by magical foods prepared by alchemists or by elaborate rituals of incredible (and dubious) antiquity, longed for a set of unceasingly steady steeds to draw him up into Heaven.

The legend of water-borne horses was known in various parts of Turkestan. In Kucha, for instance, when that city was visited by Holm-tang in the seventh century, there was a lake of dragons in front of one of its temples. "The dragons, changing their form, couple with mares. The offspring is a wild species of horse (dragon-horse) difficult to tame and of a fierce nature. The breed of these dragon-horses became docile." This story must have had its origin farther west in Iranian lands, where winged horses were familiar in art and myth. Even the long-legged small-bellied horses of the "Tajik," that is, of the Arabs, were said to have been born of the conjunction of dragons with mares on the shores of the "Western Sea." 

By Wu Ti's time the exemplars of the divine horses had been placed in Farghâna on the Jaxartes, outliers of the Sinaecens bred in Media for the kings of Persia, "blood-sweating horses" renowned both East and West. It is quite likely that the envoy who opened up the West to Chinese penetration in the second pre-Christian century, the famous Chang Ch'ien, was in fact a personal envoy of the emperor, charged with finding the wonderful horses which would usher in the Age of the Dragon for the people of Han.

Though Chang Ch'ien may not have brought them, the Chinese had, by the second century of our era at least, obtained a fine, handsome kind of horse from the West, which they identified with the dragon-horses of legend. Even if these steeds did not have wings, they had "horses made for dragon-wings." Though larger than the Mongolian pony and its domestic varieties familiar in China, these were perhaps not great battle chargers, but delicately nurtured animals kept for ritual purposes.

The zoological identity of these wonder-horses is uncertain. They have been described by one authority as "Aryan horses," a large, fast breed known around the Caspian Sea in antiquity. Perhaps we can recognize their descendants in the modern Turki horse:

The Turki or Turk, horse takes its name from Turkistan, its original home, although it has spread into Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor. There are several strains, of which the finest inhabit the country to the south of Lake Aral and the Sir Darya, or Oxus. Standing from 15 to 16 hands in height, and capable of great endurance, these horses have large, Roman-nosed heads, ewe-necks, slender bodies, and long limbs. Although generally bay or grey in colour, some of them are black with white feet. The speed of these horses and such beauty as they possess are due to Arab parentage, grafted on an original stock, doubtless more or less nearly akin to the Mongolian tarpan . . .

The Arab element is revealed in the "double spine," observed by the Chinese in Han times —two ridges of muscle on both sides of the backbone, which made bareback riding more comfortable, a much admired feature in classical antiquity in the West. The "tiger markings" of Li Po's poem, on the other hand, reveal an astutic element; "ed marking," that is, a dark stripe down the back, is characteristic of many primitive horses, like the Norwegian dun, and is very pronounced in the Asian onager.

The people of Tang believed that the horses which they imported from well-watered Samarkand as breeders for their battle steeds were of the stock of the original bayards of Farghâna, and they had heard of horses of the "dragon seed" in the snowy, windless valley of Kashmir. In a story told at the beginning of the eleventh century we learn that six of the true blood-sweating horses were sent from Farghâna to the court of Hsian Tsung in the middle of the eighth century. These were named "Red Cherpâd," "Purple Cherpâd," "Scarlet Cherpâd," "Yellow Cherpâd," "T-atomatic [dove] Cherpâd," and "Peach Flower Cherpâd," Cherpâd meaning "quadraped" in the language of the Sogdians. The sovereign received them with delight, gave them new and less barbarous names, and had their pictures painted on the walls of one of his great halls. It would be tempting to attribute this pretty tale solely to the nostalgic fancy of its author, Ch'in Tsai-ku, a literary man who lived three centuries after the alleged event. He has used, for instance, the romantically archaic name Ta-yûn for the homeland of the colored horses. But his story cannot be rejected outright. For one thing, the Chinese were prone to cherish obsolete names for foreign countries, and for another, there is an authentic account of a gift of horses (unfortunately not described or named) from Farghâna to Hsian Tsung in an historical record. Moreover, the epithet "red cherpâd" appears more than once in eighth-century literature—indeed, it was even applied to a unique variety of Chinese cat, bred at Ling-wu in Kansu. I am inclined to believe in these Tang blood-sweaters, and in the equestrian murals of Hsian Tsung. But real or not, horses of that lineage inevitably had a dreamlike character.

The horse familiar to the Chinese since antiquity was the big-headed pony, with erect mane, shaggy in winter, which once ranged most of Northern Asia and Europe, and was familiar to the Stone Age men of France and Spain. It is the wild horse of the steppes of Asia, whose bones have been discovered in Pleistocene deposits of the Ordos of north China, but which is now restricted to Dzungaria, and on the verge of extinction. This tarpan (Equus przewalski) also has domestic relatives scattered about the world, either relatively pure, like the Norwegian dun, or much altered by admixture of Arab blood. The domestic Mongolian pony, on which the Chinese chiefly rely, is mainly tarpan but has a long flowing mane, a forelock, and a thick tail presumably the result of interbreeding with the Arab.
From this basic stock, possibly with the help of other unknown races, many varieties of color and pattern were developed in ancient times, such as the white horse with a black mane traditionally associated with Hsia, the black-headed white of Shang, and the red-maned yellow horses of Chou. The richness and complexity of the vocabulary of horse types even in Chou and Han times testify to the high state of the art of breeding in Chinese antiquity.67 Despite the greed of the men of Tang for the larger Western horses, they seem to have retained some admiration for the wild pony, for in 654 the Tibetans considered the gift of a hundred wild tarpan horses to be suitable for the reigning Son of Heaven.68 From the same primitive stock, with greater or lesser admixture of Far Western strains, came also the few distinctive types of medieval China, such as a white horse with “vermiculation” mane, bred in Shensi in Tang times 69 and possibly a relic of the classic horse of Chou, and the wiry pony of Szczawny, a specialty of Sui-chou under the Tang but known many centuries earlier to China’s Western neighbors.70 Many of the “national horses,” that is, the government’s breeding stock—post horses, war horses and the like—were hybrids of tarpan and Arab, some predominantly Arab. Sometimes there were too few of these carefully tended horses for the purposes of the nation, and then it became necessary to replenish them from abroad, as when Hsuan Tsang, early in the eighth century, issued an edict authorizing trade in horses with the “Six Western Barbarian Tribes.” 71 But Arab blood was at a disadvantage in China, and hard to maintain against the flood of Mongolian ponies close at hand. The strains of Western steeds began to disappear after the end of Tang, and vanished in early modern times with the great influx of ponies during Yuan and Ming.72

Foreign horses of these two sorts, then, Northern ponies and Western chargers, and many intermediate blends and varieties, poured into China during the rule of the Tang empire. The Chinese loved and admired them. Part of their exotic taste in horses can be attributed to the tradition of the dragon-horses of the West, and part to the Turkish and distant nomadic affinities of the ruling clan. Moreover, since there were never enough horses pastured in China for the needs of a great empire and of an equestrian, polo-playing aristocracy, the preference for foreign varieties followed naturally from the necessity for them.73 Stories about the excellent horses of far countries were welcome to the men of Tang, the believable along with the barely credible. They had heard, for instance, of a “Dappled Horse Country” (Po ma luo) far to the north, where the snow was always heaped high upon the ground. The Chinese name of the nation seems to translate the name of a Turkish tribe, Ala-yan-dlu, “Those with plow horses.”74 We do not know whether any of these spotted beasts, which in their homeland were subject to the indignity of being hitched to plows, ever reached the soil of Tang.75

Even more remote were the lands of the Arabs, whose admirable destriers could understand human speech.76 Envoys of the Muslims brought some of these pure-blooded steeds to China in 703,77 but we know nothing of their later adventures. More dependable supplies of horses came from the northeast, from Tungusic and Mongolic peoples, such as the Mo-ho of P’o-hai,78 who ranged south of the Amur;79 the Shih-wen,80 who dwelt to the west of the Mo-ho people;81 the Hsi of southern Manchuria, who sent a gift of their agile horses in 876, and regular tribute missions after that year;82 the Khitans, also in Manchuria and the destined conquerors of northern China, who sent many embassies with their small horses, adept at forest-coursing, in the seventh and eighth centuries.83

To the north were the Turkish peoples, the chief source of Tang’s horses. They supplied a versatile and cunning breed, close to the ancient tarpan stock, handy for long journeys and peerless as hunters, tamed long ago by the primitive masters of the steppe, the Hsui-nu.84 So important was the Turkish stock to the proud Chinese that they were obliged to humble themselves in many little ways to obtain badly needed animals. On one occasion, during the dynasty’s early years, a Chinese prince demeaned himself by calling in person on the Turkish Khan in his distant camp, and was received with a display of haughty and imperious manners until the prince revealed his rich gifts (bolts of silk and jugs of wine were surely among them), at which the reception suddenly became ceremonious and warm, and a return mission was sent to the Tang court with a herd of horses.85 There were other little favors which could be done for the Turks. Material gifts were not always needed to elicit the desired return of well-bred horses. When, in the winter of 753-754, Bilgi Qaghan, the mighty lord, sent fifty fine horses to the Tang capital, they were in the nature of a thank offering. The Qaghan’s younger brother had recently died, and a band of six Chinese painters had gone to the tent-city on the steppes, there to render a likeness of the dead prince, which moved the lord to tears. His welcome herd accompanied the happy artists back to Tang.86 So, by one means or another, the Turkish tribes of the North, whether the Si-turshus or the Teqquz-Oghuz—the “Nine Tribes”—or some other group, were induced to send enormous numbers, sometimes as many as five thousand at once, to the imperial corral.87 But greatest and most arrogant of the suppliers of horseflesh to the Chinese were the Uighur Turks, who dominated the horse market after the middle of the eighth century, when incessant war, both domestic and foreign, had created an insatiable demand in the shrinking Tang empire. The Uighurs and the Tibetans had become the chief foreign enemies of Tang and natural rivalry and Chinese diplomacy had turned the former against the latter. After the Tibetans had herded off all of the thousands of Chinese horses from the government ranges in Lung-yu88 and even captured the capital city of Ch’yang-an, those insolent Turks, who had driven out the highlanders only to their own advantage, were deferred to in countless ways by the humiliated Chinese. Despite endless complaints about the Uighurs’ haughty manners, extending even to attacks on the persons of Chinese on their own soil, the foreigners were rewarded for their services by a monopoly of the lucrative trade in
The important trade in horses with the nomads of the North was systematized in 727 by the authorization of "exchange marketing" (hu shih) under government supervision on the frontier in the Ordos region. The purpose of this policy was to increase the number of horses in China and to improve the quality of the "national horses" by interbreeding with desirable foreign stock. The immediate occasion of its establishment was the receipt of a friendly gift of thirty fine horses from Bilgel Qaghan, along with a letter which had come to him from the Tibetans, urging him to join in raids on Chinese territory, but which was now handed over to Husain Tsung by the Turkish envoy. The sovereign was delighted with these tokens of friendship, loaded the envoy with rich gifts, and also

. . . authorized that a place for "exchange marketing" be created at the Walled Town for Receiving Surrenderer in the West, under the Army of the Loreal Quarter. Here several tens of myriads of bolts of heavy taffeta and other silks were delivered each year. . . .

This became the regular point at which the horses of the Northern tribes were brought to China. Hencethrough we can read in the Chinese histories such statements as the following, which is appended to the notice of the presentation of sixty-four horses by the Toquz-oguz, the Kirghiz, and the Shih-wei early in 748: "The Commissioner at the Walled Town for Receiving Surrender in the West was ordered to receive them and take them in." A similar trading post was established on the Tibetan frontier, at the Red Mountain Pass, in 735. But there was brisk private trading, too. The Tangut settlements along the northwestern marches in particular enriched themselves at it. Early in the ninth century " . . . itinerant merchants from far and near delivered silks and other commodities to them, taking sheep and horses in exchange." Prosperity was an uncertain thing, however, for in the third decade of the same century the settlements were impoverished by avaricious Chinese officials, who compelled the enterprising Tangut to sell their livestock at ruinously low prices. This led naturally to Tangut banditry along the roads on the southern fringe of the Ordos. At the great government trading post, camels, asses, and sheep as well as horses were received and examined and registered by the imperial superintendent and sent on to the appropriate pasture or to the imperial stables. On the road from the frontier the horses went by groups of ten, each group under a single herdsman. From then on the horses were tenderly watched by the state, and the greatest care was taken lest any be injured, lost, or stolen. The person in charge of a government horse at any moment was responsible for its safety and welfare. Horses were not to die, but if one did, the procedure for establishing proof of its death, and for the degree of responsibility of the agent using it, was prescribed in the smallest detail. For instance, if a horse was being used for a long journey, that is, not as a regular post horse, and it died on the road, the meat was sold and the skin sent back to a
government warehouse. But if the death occurred in the desert, where no buyer or storehouse was at hand, the rider need only bring back (if he could get back himself) a piece of skin bearing the government brand as evidence.31

Once received in the imperial pasture, the foreign horse was assigned to a herd (ch'ien) of 120 animals in one of the great pastoral “inspectorates” (chien), each of which cared for as many as 5,000. There the animal was looked after until it was wanted for state service, either as a war horse, as a post horse, or as a mount for a member of the ruling family or a favored courier. The horse was branded on many parts of his body, to show his ownership, age, type, quality, and condition. All state horses bore the character kuan, “official,” on their right shoulders, and the name of the inspectorate to which they were assigned beside their tails. There were brands to show the nation of origin of a horse; brands to show his agility and stamina, such as “flying,” “dragon,” and “wind”; and brands to show his proper work, as the word “sent forth” branded on the right cheek of army and post horses on duty, or the word “bestowed” on the right cheek of official horses given to private persons.96 The herdsmen and officers set over them were required to maintain their quotas of animals at the proper level, and were expected to increase them. Severe punishment was inflicted on the officer whose register showed fewer horses than required by his quota: thirty blows of a bamboo staff was the certain penalty for the shortage of a single horse.55

If an imported horse merited the attention of the magistrates who tended the palace horses, the beast was sent from the pasture to the capital city, and assigned to one of the corrales (kien) or stables (chii) attached to the palace itself. According to his type and quality, the horse was enclosed in the “Horse Corral of the Flying Yellows,” the “Horse Corral of the Auspicious and Well-Bred,” the “Horse Corral of the Dragon Decoys,” the “Horse Corral of the Ta-o-su,” the “Horse Corral of the Chu-eh-ti,” or the “Horse Corral of the Heavenly Park.”54 Five of the corrales were named for noble horses of the past, remembered through literature and tradition,56 while the “Heavenly Park” was a poetic name for the park of the Son of Heaven, where he hunted with his dragon-horses. From these corrales exotic steeds could be taken for the use of great warlords, for imperial hunts, for aristocratic polo games, for ceremonial processions, or for other splendid and noble purposes.

Polo, introduced from Iran by way of Serindia at the beginning of Tang56 or a little earlier, and transmitted from China to Korea and Japan, was called simply “hit-ball!”97 and was played with curved sticks, their ends shaped like crescent moons, and net bags as goals. Emperors, courtiers, ladies, and even scholars played the game, and the palace had its own polo field.98 We do not know what horses were accounted best for polo playing by the men of Tang, but the records show that a pair of polo ponies was sent to China by the city of Khotan in 719.99 We may guess that the superior ponies came from lands where polo was played with enthusiasm,
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Lu Kuai-meng's "Dens of the Moon" are Li Po's "Dens of the Kushanans" in Western Turkistan, and these dancers belong to the exotic wonders of mid-T'ang.

A recurrent theme in the puritanical edicts which appeared from time to time during the T'ang regime, especially during virtuously warlike and ostentatiously solemn reigns, was the interchange of gifts to the throne of small and delightful things, which were regarded as trivial, since they did not serve the state. Such was the ban on small horses which was handed down during the first year of the dynasty and rejected pretty ponies in favor of stately steeds. Nonetheless, three years later the same monarch, Kao Tsu, accepted miniature "ked-ka horses" from Paekche, in the southwestern part of the Korean peninsula. Evidently the inaugural gesture of grave sincerity had been forgotten. When the stern and militant regimes of the seventh century gave way to the milder and more frivolously "cultured" reign of Hsuan Tsung in the eighth, little horses, along with other delicacies, were welcomed by the court. In this century the ponies came from the dominant Korean kingdom of Silla. But they must have been of the same race as the ponies of Paekche, diminutive tarpok stock, evolved on an island-the island of Quelpart in Korea Strait-like our familiar Shetland ponies and the "fairy ponies" of Orkney. Small horses of this name had been known to the Chinese since the first century B.C., when they were hitched to the carriage of a dowager empress. In the second century of the Christian era these ponies were sent by the central Korean kingdom of Wei,121 but a later tradition identified them with the horses of the hero Chu Meng, the legendary archer who founded the kingdom of Koguryo. Whether all these ponies came from the hunting environment of Quelpart is conjectural. In T'ang times their name, ked-ka, was written with Chinese characters meaning "beneath a fruit-tree," and the explanation then current was that it signified that one could ride them without mishap under the lowest branches of a fruit tree. But the name must originally have been a word from some northeastern language, whose meaning was forgotten and then rationalized by the Chinese. In the twelfth century it was even possible to apply the name to small horses from the tropical south of the empire. It was also customary in T'ang times to say that Korean ponies were three feet high, but this must have been a symbolic number for the height of all diminutive creatures; it had been applied to dwarffish men since antiquity, and so we cannot tell the size of the little animals with precision. It is easy to guess that they were used in T'ang in much the same way as in Han-to pull carts for royal ladies, to grace formal processions, and to embellish the public appearances of all efficacious young persons. It is likely that these were the gaily decorated dwarf ponies which carried the gilded youth of T'ang to drinking parties in the gardens of the capital during the height of the spring flower-viewing season.

Celebrated above all other exotic horses in the age of T'ang were the "Six Bayards," which carried T'ai Tsung through dangerous campaigns against rival claimants to the throne of China. These paragons are known to us through both literature and art. The sovereign himself, in his deep affection for them, wrote a short prose description of each of the six, or rather of their effigies, and a poetic eulogy of each. Here is one of them:

The Cherpādh Red: its color pure red, ridden at the time of the putting down of [Wang] Shih-ch'ung and [Ts'ai] Chien-tee; by four arrows from the front and by one arrow from the back. The Eulogy goes:

Where Ch'an and Chien were still unquiet,
There and polax extended my majesty;
Verminous blood—impetuous feet!
Blue banners—triumphant return!

Poetry and sculpture commemorate this charger, but a war horse ridden by T'ai Tsung in this same campaign, named "Yellow Grizzled Roan," had a different character: after it died in the Korean wars, T'ai Tsung had music composed in its honor, called "The Doubled Song of the Yellow Grizzled," apparently in imitation of an old tune of Han times. By means of the image "verminous sweat," the beloved "Cherpādh Red" was linked, at least in fancy, with the blood-sweaters of Farghāna. Though the imperial six all had Western blood in their veins, it is certain, in view of some of their names, like "T'egīn Roan," that they came to T'ai Tsung from the Turks. The renowned images of these renowne steeds, done in stone relief at the emperor's command in the winter of 656-657, were based on drawings by the great Yen Li-pen. After T'ai Tsung's death the sculptures were installed next to his "Radiant Tumulus" in Shensi, but they have since been transferred to museums. The stone horses have their manes cut or tied in bunches, like crenelated battlements, an ancient fashion in Central Asia and Siberia, though probably of Islamic origin, but obsolete in China since the days of the Han emperors. Its reappearance testifies to the Turkish origin of T'ai Tsung's steeds, and certifies the nobility of both horses and rider. But the ideal pedigree of the Six Bayards goes back beyond the famous horses of Han to the Eight Bayards of King Mu of Chou, whose wonderful lineaments were still preserved, a model for great barbarian-subduing kings, in an old painting, a kind of T'ang national treasure. Not so well known as the Six Bayards, but marvels of their age, were the "Ten Ch'en" and "Ten Ch'ing" of T'ai Tsung. These rare and beautiful steeds came to the monarch late in his life, and therefore lacked the intimate relationship with him which gave special dignity and glory to their six predecessors in the old days of bitter trials and uncertain success. The new horses were personally chosen by the monarch from among a hundred sent by the Turkhis Qirguñ nation in 647. The bereal herdsmen who raised them, dwellers in a land full of lies, north of Lake Baikal, bred them as sinewy and powerful horses, similar to those of the Kirghiz, and sent them unbranded, but with oddly decorated ears and marked noses, to the great ruler of China. T'ai Tsung himself chose names for the elect ten: "Frost
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many camels, along with other treasures, at Chi-chi.143 Fighting camels were a noted feature of the great festivals of Kuch,144 and the Kirghiz, too, used camels in various sporting events.145

The vast camel herds of the Chinese government, enriched from these foreign sources, were prestated over by herders of officials, as were the imperial horses. The chief herdsman of each herd was in charge of only seventy camels, however, while the standard herd of horses was made up of 120 animals.146 Along with the other large domestic animals, they were kept in the grassy provinces of Kuan-nei and Lung-yu, that is, in modern Shensi and Kansu. The exact size of the imperial herds is not known, but in 754 there were 279,000 cattle, sheep, and camels in the official herds of Lung-yu.147 Private gentlemens of means also kept camels as riding animals and as beasts of burden. It is probable that most of the herdsmen, trainers, and camelers, both in public and private employ, were foreigners from Mongolia, Central Asia, and Tibet, in accordance with Tu Fu’s dictum, “Western boys have power over camels.”148

Very fast and dependable camels, especially white ones, were assigned to officials entitled “Emissaries of the Bright Camels,” for emergency use on state business, and in particular to bring news of a crisis on the frontier.149 But these excellent post camels might be diverted to less serious ends, as in a tale about Yang Kuei-fei, the consort of Hsian Tung. The monarch, so the tale goes, gave ten pieces of Borneo camphor, which he had received as tribute from Chiao-chih in Indochina, to the Lady Yang. She secretly dispatched them by “Bright Camel Emissary” to Rokhshar, her lover (as he appears to have been), on a remote and dangerous frontier.150

There were also “Flying Dragon Camels” in the imperial stables. Late in the eighth century it was not deemed too ignoble to employ these fine animals to bring rice to the capital, when the supply of grain in the metropolis proved insufficient for the brewing of wine for the Son of Heaven.151 Camels seemed destined for anomalous and bizarre purposes on Chinese soil.

But their association with the ruffianly nomads across the northern frontier could also make camels seem terrible animals. Early in the eighth century they appear in a street song of the capital as the “golden camels from north of the mountains,” and represent the marauders from Mongolia with their pack animals laden with the rich spoils of Tang.152 Later in the century they became specific symbols of the barbarous rebels who followed Rokhshar: “They brought the Two Capitals low, and made a practice of loading the rick-ties and treasures of the Tabooed Repository on camels for storage in heaps and hills in Fan-yang.”153 The classic expression of this attitude toward the northern nomads and their camel transports is in Tu Fu’s poem “Lament for a King’s Grandson,” whose picture is of a prince of Hsian Tung’s scattered household, hoping to escape death at the hands of Rokhshar’s men; the poet tells him of the accession of Su Tsung, whose “saintly virtue” has obtained the aid of the Uighur Turks against the insurgents. The poet affirms that the sacred emana-

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Although we may imagine that the horses of Qurqish must have been painted by some seventh-century master to delight the eyes of their lord, there is no record of such a project. This was before the time of the most eminent of all Chinese painters of horses, Han Kan, who lived in the next century, during the reign of Hsian Tung, himself a fancier of exotic horses. Han Kan prided himself that his vigorous representations were based directly upon nature, rather than on traditional pictures of regal horses.135 From what we may read of older horse paintings, the preferred pre-Tang style was symbolic and even fantastic, with the divine parentage of royal horses shown plainly in eccentric line and color. Han Kan, it seems, was the first great painter to adopt the principle of uncompromising realism in horse painting. This was a great change. The supremacy of the horse among the foreign domestic animals was due not only to its role in the security of the nation but equally to its affinities with legendary and supernatural creatures of the venerated past. In a sense, then, Han Kan brought it down to earth forever, and the Chinese of the eighth century were the last to see the dragon-horses of Heaven as stupendously believable animals. Naturalistic exoticism had triumphed forever over reverent symbolism.

Camels

At the beginning of Hsueh-tung rule the domestic form of the two-humped Bactrian camel had been known to and used by the northern Chinese for at least a thousand years. In Han times they had been used by the thousands in the commercial and military caravans which penetrated the newly won lands of Serindia.154 In those classic days the Chinese had to depend on such pastoral outlanders as the Hsung-nu to replenish their supply of these valuable animals, treasured for their reliability in transporting men and merchandise through the high desert wastes of Gobi and Tarim.155 So also in the Tang times, when the empire extended once more far across Central Asia, the need for camels was equally great, and they, like horses, had to be found abroad to meet the enormous demands at home. Camels came as presents to the throne, as tribute, as barter, as commodities, and as war booty. The Uighurs156 and the Tibetans157 sent camels to Tang; camels came with a mission from Chumul on the Manas River,158 and from the Turghach,159 and Khotan sent a “wind-footed wild camel.”160

Indeed, among the Turkish tribes generally, camels were enumerated among things of the greatest worth, like gold, silver, virgins, and slaves,161 and they appeared in omen lore and poetry as beneficent and noble animals.162 They could be obtained in the city-states of the Tarim, along the old caravan roads; Kao Hsien-chih selected

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Sewed or broiled camel could not have been an ordinary dish in the cuisine of north China, except where both camels and foreign fashions were common.

Cattle

We do not easily think of cattle as important on the list of exotic goods needed or desired by the men of Tang. Since antiquity the Chinese had had many varieties of oxen, including fantastic races with motley hides, developed for the manifold sacrifices to the archaic gods, most of them hardly remembered in Tang times. But under this multiplicity lay the comparative simplicity of three great varieties. These three primordial types were recognized in Tang, as they are now: the great eighth-century pharmacologist Chi'en T'ang-ch'i called them the "yellow cow," the "raven-black cow," and the "water cow,"

The yellow is thought to be a hybrid of the European cow and the Indian zebu.

It is of southern origin and remains most characteristic of the south, though it has spread all over China. Where its range overlaps that of the magnificent carabaos, the yellow cow turns water wheels and plows light ground, while the buffalo turns up the thick clayey soils of the rice fields. In Tang times the yellow cow was even more important on the island of Hainan, a savage land then, newly under Chinese administration; there were no asses or horses there, so the people rode about on yellow cows saddled, bridled, and decorated like horses elsewhere.

The black ox of north China is something of a mystery; it may share the blood of one of the wild races of oxen native to the Far East, as the gaur or banting. At any rate, cattle of one kind or another were to be found everywhere in the lands of Tang.

The Chinese had also had their dwarf breeds of cattle, comparable to the "fairest cattle" of Corvo in the Azores, since very remote times. The "millet ox" and giew-ex of the Chou kingdom were supposed to have been miniature sacrificial animals. Another kind of tiny cattle, called pil-cattle, or "cattle under a fruit tree," like the fairy horses of Korea and Kwantung, had been produced since early times at Kao-liang, southwest of Canton. T'ang Kao T'su's edict, published late in 618, against the offering of dwarf cattle and other tiny beings to the throne, may have been aimed against the presentation of such Chinese pygmies as these, and possibly against foreign oxen too, such as the beautiful little gynes of Bengal.

Stories about the oxen of foreign countries, some colorful, some fairly prosaic, circulated among the men of Tang. They knew that the red-haired, white-faced Kirghiz people, dissavowing descent from wolves (a peculiarity of the Turks), claimed to be the issue of the mating of a god with a cow in a mountain cave. But what sort of beast that totemic ancestor was, or whether the race of domestic cattle heralded by the Kirghiz resembled it, is not on record. The Chinese knew too that the natives of Kucha held ceremonial contests between fighting oxen (and horses

The Tibetans and Western boys blend their chant and song,
They bray yaks whole, and cook wild camels...
and camels as well) during their New Year’s festival. The outcome of these ritual battles gave the prognosis of the increase, or decrease, of their herds during the coming year. But no one has made note of these gallant cattle in China. Nor is there any report that the giant wild oxen of Central Asia, white-haired, with tails like deer and the space of ten feet between the tips of their horns, was ever seen by a Chinese traveler, though their existence was authoritatively reported.

But indeed, nothing reliable can be said about the character of even such plainly visible cattle as the thousands sent to T’ang by a Turkish Qaghan in 628. As for the herds of “cattle” submitted by the rulers of the Tu-yu-hun and the Tibetans, it appears that these must have been yaks, the only cattle reported among the domestic animals of these people in this age. To be more precise, they were zebus, hybrid offspring of male yaks and female zebus. The large, brownish-black wild yaks and its half-breed, which resembles it but is somewhat smaller, thrive only in the frigid air of the alpine massif. Only the shaggy little half-breed zebus, of variable color, can endure the oppressive, cold winter.

From the homeland of the Tu-yu-hun, rich in parrots and useful metals, around the great blue lake Kokonor, had come tribute of yaks, unambiguously named, from the beginning of the sixth century, and also gifts of their famous grizzled cloaks. The Tibetans, who required their guests to shoot their own yaks before a great banquet, also sent specimens yaks to the Chinese court early in the eighth century. I take it that these solitary beasts were not the docile little zebus, but the dark and proud ancestral types, sent for the admiration of the sophisticated of the capital.

The image of the yak in Chinese literature did not reflect the dangerous character of the wild type. Tu Fu wrote:

Blue-green grass was rank and rife—its withered dead and gone; Horses of Heaven, with shambling feet, follow after the yak-cattle. So, from ancient days, our noble and honest ones were thinly treated by fate. While wanton cockerels and vicious youths all were pampered as lords.

In these lines the noble horses of divine blood are shown stricken by drought and famine (symbolizing the poor spiritual sustenance given the good-hearted in these trying days), and can only shuffle along with the humble zebus, pictured as dull-witted, cowdlik beasts (symbolizing men of like temperament).

Since antiquity, when barbarians brandishing swords adorned with yaktails entertained the guests of the king, yaktails had been greatly desired in the Chinese lowlands as standards and banners, as decorations for hats, and as ornaments for the carriages of the nobility. Under the rulers of T’ang, they were sent to the court and were highly valued, and as such annual tribute by the westernmost towns of Szechwan, where the great mountains rise into Tibet. These tails were the bushy ones of the zebus, which also provided the chowries of India. In T’ang, having been delivered at the palace, the tails might eventually come under the delicate care of the “Supervisor of Carriages,” who tended the vehicles of the ladies of the imperial seraglio and the costly animals which pulled them: “he has carriages and chaises in charge, and umbrellas and fans for them, and decorative objects, feathers, and yaktails, which he must put out in the sun at the proper season.”

Sheep and Goats

Many wonderful kinds of exotic sheep (or, it may be, goats, since these animals were classified together by the Chinese, as is entirely reasonable) were known by repute in the lands of T’ang. Probably the most astonishing were the “earth-born sheep” of Rome:

The lambs of certain sheep are born from within the earth. The people of that country wait until they are about to sprout, and then construct a wall with which to enclose them and prevent them from being eaten by wild beasts. But their navel are attached to the ground, and if they cut them they would die. However, if men clathed in armor run their horses there, with the beating of drums, and so torture them, these lambs will cry out in fright, at which the navel are separated, and they go off after water and herbs.

One scholar has hoped to see in this an echo of the legend of the Argonauts (armed men) and the Golden Fleece, but the story has been confused with that of the pinna mussel, so that the men in armor might represent the crustaceans which war on the mollusks and devour their lifelines. But we shall hear more of the pinna later. The “earth-born sheep” is also, in part, the story of the “planted sheep,” that is, of the cotton plant which produces vegetable wool.

It was also reported in China that sheep with great heavy tails, weighing as much as ten catties, were raised in Samarkand. They are no myths, but are the fat-tailed dumbs of Buhkara and the Kirghiz steppe, whose young are the source of the famous astrakhan fur. These animals spread from this center through Persia and Syria at a very early date. A wild sheep of bluish tint was also reported from Kapiša, with a “kingfisher-colored” tail. This must have been a variety of the great bharal or “blue sheep,” of the strangely twisted horns. This fine animal, whose slate-blue coloration serves as camouflage against the bare rocks of the high mountains, ranges from Balistan through the K’un-lun Mountains, at altitudes of over ten thousand feet, to the confines of China.

It is not easy to identify the huge sheep reported by the famous traveler Hsian-tsang as being raised by villagers high in the snowy Pamir. A prince of the Turks offered ten thousand sheep, along with a great herd of horses, to the Chinese emperor in 646, but the gift was not accepted, and indeed, quite aside from political reasons, it appears that the Chinese of this age stood in no great need of foreign sheep and imported very few. Goats they had known from early times, but sheep were more appropriate to the stinking nomads. We must guess
that the rejected sheep of the Turks were the stelotypous breed with drooping ears characteristic of Central Asia and Siberia, and well-known to the Chinese."[297]

Asses, Mules, and Onagers

The ass, like the camel, appeared on the Chinese horizon only in late classical times, that is to say, toward the end of the Chou dynasty, having been transmitted by slow degrees from its North African homeland. But for the men of T'ang, a millennium later, it was a native domestic animal, not to be wondered at, and not, it seems, an article of import, unless we count the ass fifty feet tall, reported in a credible source to have been sent by the Tibetans in 654, along with a hundred horses.[188] But this gigantic donkey seems to have been born from an overexcited ram or a coyist's pen, unless a myth has somehow become entangled with a real event. The pharmacologist Ch'en Ts'ang-ch'i also told of "asses of the sea," as well as horses and cete of the sea, whose hair would rise on end when they felt the sea wind, but what traveler's tale he had heard I do not know. It must have been of some distant sea creature, whose hair was not wetted by water, like the sea elephant and the sea otter.[106]

Mules, like their paternal ancestors, were post-archaic introductions into China and even somewhat odd in Han times, but by T'ang they were so common that it was possible to mount an army on mules in a province which was deficient in horses.[210]

Cousin to the ass and the mule was the equine animal known to the Chinese only from specimens sent as token tribute from the Far West in the eighth century. These strange beasts had the name lou, which registered a linguistic affinity with both the ass (lo) and the mule (lo). The Chinese lexicographers have been at a loss to classify these creatures, which were sent from Tukharistan in 720,[201] and from Persia in 734,[203] the latter being a land in which they were said to abound.[203] Some say it was a kind of horse, and some say a kind of ass, but indeed it must have been a variety of the almost intractable onager, the miscalled "wild ass" of Turkestan, Persia, and the Near East, related to the chigetai of Central Asia and Mongolia, and to the kiang of Tibet.[204]

Dogs

It has been thought that all varieties of domestic dogs descend from five ancient types.[200] Several of these primate ancestors had descendants in China. The "chow," for instance, derives from the spitz prototype, which also has many offspring among the Samoyeds and the Tungus peoples, and even in the tropical lands of Indonesia.[204]

Domestic Animals

The greyhound, a very old kind of dog, is shown in stone reliefs of the Han dynasty; its forebears surely came from Egypt in long-forgotten times.[207] Most popular of all in ancient China was the snub-nosed mastiff, with its tail curled up over its back, in the lineage of the Tibetan wolf, Canis niger, which also bred the hound of the Assyrians, the Roman molosseus, the Saint Bernard, the Newfoundland, the bulldog, and especially the miniature breeds of China, such as the pug.[208] Even the great Yen Li-uen painted a mastiff brought in the seventh century, perhaps a gift from Tibet, the motherland of the breed.[206]

The nations of Turkestan also sent dogs to China: Samarkand in 713,[310] and again in 724;[211] Kucha in 721.[221] Presumably these were hunting hounds, which were in great demand among the Chinese courtiers, though we know nothing specific about them. If so they found their way into the imperial kennels of the palace at Ch'ang-an.[212] There were useless curiosities too, like the two-headed dog, a monstrous birth, sent to the court of the Empress Wu in 699.[214]

A breed of spotted dog which came from Persia was called simply the "Persian dog" by the Chinese, but its ancestry is a mystery.[215] The dogs known by this epithet in the sixth century were large, ferocious animals, capable of killing and eating humans.[216] Presumably the spotted Persians of T'ang times were the same.

Another dog imported from Western Asia in T'ang times was the "dog of Hrom,"
[211] that is, a "Roman dog," which first appeared early in the seventh century, the gift of the king of Kao-ch'ang, or Qocho. Here is the story:

He presented male and female dogs, one of each, six inches high, and a foot or so long. They were most clever. They could lead horses by their reins and carry candles in their mouths. It is said that they were originally bred in the Country of Hrom.[218]

Nothing certain can be said of the appearance of these small animals, but it has been proposed that they were none other than the classical lap dogs par excellence, of the ancient Malyse race,[209] and it may well be so. Those intelligent toys, ultimately of the spitz family, with their shaggy hair and pointed faces, were the favorites of Greek hetaerae and Roman matrons alike.[207] The strain had been remarkably conservative, a white variety being still extant today. It may be such a white dog of Malta which we see in a painting of the Sung dynasty, though there is no certainty of the identification.[211] Indeed, it is not at all certain that the pair of small dogs sent by Qocho had any descendants in China at all, though perhaps others like them came to replenish the stock in the Far East. Consider this story of Hsin Tsung and his beloved:

One summer day His Highness was playing at go with a Prince of the Blood, and he had ordered Ho Hsui-chih to strum a solo on the lute. The Precious Consort stood before the gaming board and watched them. At a point when several of His Highness's men were about to be carried off, the Precious Consort released a toy dog from the country of Samarkand from beside the seats. The toy dog accordingly went up on the board, and the men on the board were disarranged. His Highness was greatly pleased.[217]
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The hero of this tactful enterprise was probably a Roman dog. We may see him again (but with no hint of his ancestry) in the words to a song by an anonymous Tang poet, written to the tune of “The Drunken Lordling.” The verses show a light-of-love, perhaps a courtesan, expecting her young gentleman’s arrival:

Outside the gate the toy doggy barks—
I know that it’s Master Hsiao who’s here,
With socks peeled off I go down the scented staircase,
But—my dear oppressor is drunk tonight.

The Chinese word which I have translated “toy dog” in these passages is related to the word for “dwarf,” and so gives us no clue to the geographic origin of the creature. The Samaritans’ origin of the Consort’s dog points to Rome and thence to Malta; we cannot be so positive about the lap dog which announced Master Hsiao, though some authorities have thought that all dogs called “dwarf dogs” (my “toy dogs”) were of “Roman” origin. In any case, the modern stub-nosed toys of China do not seem to show Maltese blood, but perhaps unnoticed traces of it remain. But these dwarfish pets, whether native or not, were favorite subjects for poems, or favorite images in them, from T’ang times down to the seventeenth century.

iv. Wild Animals

Elephants

The elephant was not always an exotic animal to the Chinese. In the Age of Bronze, when the kings of Shang ruled in the valley of the Yellow River, it was one of the commoner wild animals, and was evidently captured and tamed for useful purposes. But as the forest cover of north China was reduced and the human population increased, the great beasts retreated toward the south, and during historical times were to be found only in pockets in the remoter parts of the Yangtze watershed, and south of there. They were still abundant in the mountainous parts of Kwangtung in the ninth century, and on the warm coasts of that province in the tenth; an inscription of 906, in a pagoda at Tung-kuan, east of Canton, commemorates the trampling of the peasants’ crops by a herd of elephants. These Cantonese elephants were noted both for the pink color of their tusks, well suited to the manufacture of ceremonial writing tablets, and for the delicate flavor of their trunks, which were prized by native cooks. More interesting, because more mysterious, was a black race of elephants, sometimes described as “blue-black,” denizens of the Yangtze valley, where they were given the humiliating name of “river pigs.”

During these centuries from the fall of Shang to the rise of Sung, the elephant, though only an occasional spectacle for the people of the north, was sometimes useful to the people of the south, but only in warfare, and that rarely. The warriors of Chu sent elephants against their enemies in 506 B.C.; the southern state of
("Country Stabilizing") temple by the Emperor I Tsung in 871, to be used by lecturers on the sutras. The seats were twenty feet high and framed in sandalwood and aloeswood. Of the same magnificence was the meditation platform at the T'ien-t'ai monastery on Mount Wu-t'ai in the ninth century; it was covered with a sandal paste, so that the breezes blew its fragrance over a considerable distance.

Sandal also supplied the poets with an easy, even rather ordinary, exotic image: such a pairing as "modeled in candana aromatic" and "copied on patta leaves" (the second of these, intended for "palmyra palm leaves," being literally redundant) gave an automatic picture of an Indian or a Hinduized milieu. A much greater rarity is the metaphor "sandal mouth" in the erotic verses of the talented harlot Chao Luan-luan, clearly meaning "her mouth fragrant as sandal."

**Ebony**

Many trees of genus Diospyros, relatives of the persimmon and natives of India and the Indies, yield the handsome black hardwoods collectively named "ebony." Some kinds of ebony, under the name of "raven wood," were imported into China by Persian argosies as early as the fourth century. Again, in the twelfth century, we hear of imported ebony; one writer, for instance, describes the distinctively shiny black surface of antique zithers as "... like the raven wood which is brought for trade by overseas argosies." But no direct evidence of the importation of ebony in T'ang appears, though the period is straddled by the era just mentioned. We might reasonably expect to find objects of ebony in the Shinto, if it were important among exotic woods used in eighth-century China. The catalogues of that treasury allude frequently to elegant cabinetwork—a hexagonal stand and a cabinet with hinged doors are instances—of "black persimmon," but this does not seem to be a proper ebony but rather a paler Diospyros, stained with sapjuice. The question is open.

**Foods**

Manna and dates, in argosy transferred
From Fen; and spiced dainties, everyone,
From nilken Samawand to cedar'd Lebanon.

John Keats, The Eve of St. Agnes

Just as no hard and fast line can be drawn between cosmetics and drugs in the civilization of the medieval Far East, so any attempt to discriminate precisely between foods and drugs, or between condiments and perfumes, would lead to frustrated misrepresentation of the true role of edibles in T'ang culture. This role was not simple but complex. Every food had medicinal properties, which were carefully studied by learned doctors, and especially by the Taoists, for whom diet was closely related to the fight against time, and who aimed at prolonging ruddy and robust youth. Spices in particular—and exotic ones above all—because of their aromatic nature, infusing their wonder-working properties by means of unmistakable effluvia, were ranked high among the useful drugs, and were no mere taste-sharpeners for Lucullan banquets, though they were that too. But it is important to remember that even this statement oversimplifies the picture: spices and perfumes had their parts to play in religion as well as in medicine, and also in daily life, to preserve food, to repel unpleasant insects, to purify noxious airs, to clean the body and beautify the skin, to evoke love in an indifferent beloved, to improve one's social status, and in many other ways. The variety and multiplicity of these purposes, rather than some easy and condescending characterization such as the "luxury trade," as if only the rich desired health and beauty, must be taken as the real basis of the great medieval commerce in exotic seasonings and relishes. They were at once charms and panaceas, and much else besides. So saying, I will perversely proceed to divide up these edible aromatics or aromatic edibles quite arbitrarily, and treat them under separate rubrics, according to whether they seem to be most important in cookery, in perfumes and incenses, or in medicine. Sometimes the catalogu-
ing will seem strange, not only because it is arbitrary and one-sided, but because it defies modern usage and belief. Gloves and nutmegs can be given as examples: these will be discussed in the next chapter, on “Aromatics,” rather than here under “Foods,” where we should be most inclined to put them. There is no evidence that these spices were much used in T’ang cookery, but a great deal of evidence that they were important in the manufacture of perfumes and drugs.

The monkish traveler, L-ching, who had much experience with the cookery of Indonesia and India, reported, with evident relish, on the richly prepared fare available in those lands, as contrasted with his own: “... in China, people of the present time eat fish and vegetables mostly uncooked; no Indians do this. All vegetables are to be well cooked and to be eaten after mixing with the asafoetida, clarified butter, oil, or any spice.” 4 Possibly we should accept this account of the character of the Chinese cuisine in the seventh century, since it is given by an excellent observer. But it goes against contemporary opinions of Chinese cooking, especially that of the south. L-ching’s description makes T’ang cookery sound like modern Japanese cookery—plain food, sometimes raw, with few savory mixtures or interesting sauces, we would guess. If so, the best of modern Chinese cooking has developed in relatively recent times, and we easily suppose, if that is so, that the rich character we find in it was only beginning to appear in T’ang times, undoubtedly under the influence of foreign taste and custom in foods, in particular those of India and the Indianized lands of the desert and the isles.

But, to tell the truth, very little is yet known about T’ang eating habits. In the sentences which follow it is not possible to do more than suggest, largely by giving examples, what sorts of things were usually or sometimes eaten. But nothing as to how they were prepared will be forthcoming—this important task remains for a future historian.

We know then that certain staples, such as millet, rice, pork, beans, chicken, plums, onions, and bamboo shoots were very widely used. We may also read of local specialties, and suppose that T’ang gourmets sampled these village dishes in the course of their travels for business and pleasure—such delicacies as frogs, a favorite food in Kuei-yang, far in the south (though it is reported that sophisticated northerners ridiculed the natives for this preference). 5 And there were the sago cakes of Kwangtung, 6 the dried oysters taken with wine in the same region, 7 and the “ground-chestnuts” of Chekiang. 8 When a local daintiness attracted favorable attention at court and capital, it was added to the lists of local tribute and thereafter was received regularly by the imperial kitchens: the summer garlic of southern Shenxi, the deer tongues of northern Kansu, the Venus clams of the Shantung coast, the “sugar crabs” of the Yangtze River, the sea horses of Chiao-chou in Kwangtung, the white carp marinated in wine leaves from northern Anhwei, the dried flesh of “white flower snaker” (a pit viper) from southern Hupeh, melon pickled in rice mash from southern Shenxi and eastern Hupeh, dried ginger from Chekiang, loquats and cherries from southern

Shensi, persimmons from central Honan, and “thorny lime” from the Yangtze Valley. 9

As the expansion of imperial T’ang brought new lands and diverse cultures under her control, it was natural that the lists of comestibles demanded in Ch’ang-an (and certainly elsewhere too, as the court set the fashion for the provinces) were lengthened to include new and strange delicacies, such as the aromatic jujubes of Hami, 10 the “thorn honey” which exuded from a leafless desert plant 11 and was sent by Qoqo, the almonds of Kucha, 12 and the bananas and betel nuts (their Malay name of pinang was adopted in Chinese) of Annam. 13 These foods, and others like them, constituted a transitional group of “semi-exotics,” being, so to speak, culturally foreign but politically Chinese. In due time they became culturally Chinese as well. And following them came the true exotics.

The importation of food (which was handled in the same way as drugs) was under strict government supervision. Each foreigner who entered the frontier had the wrapping or box of his “gift” of medicine or victuals sealed and stamped by the competent magistrate at the frontier post, the contents being described plainly for the information of court officials or market authorities, to aid in fixing their value. 14 The best of these exotic delicacies were turned into viands for the imperial tables under the supervision of a dignitary styled the “Provost of Foods” (ch’ang shih). Assisted by eight dieticians and sixteen butlers, he provided the necessaries for the feasts and fasts of the Son of Heaven in strict accordance with seasonal toasts, and meals of appropriate character for state banquets, informal entertainment, and the like.

When he submits the food, he is obliged first to taste it. He must discriminate the names and quantities of all the sweets and nutriment, rarities and oddities, submitted by the several ch’ou (“Island-provinces”) of the Subcontinental Realm, and prudently conserve and supply them. 15

As the knowledge of these rarities spread outwards from the palace, the taste for them grew in town and city, and the commerce in them increased. Let us look at some of them.

**Grapes and Grape Wine**

The Chinese, like the other peoples of the earth, had, since they first brought cereals under cultivation, been familiar with the fermented drinks extractable from them—beer comes with bread. They had their beers (or “wines,” as we like to call them) of millet and rice and barley, plain drinks for daily use; they had fruit drinks, and kumiss of fermented mare’s milk; 16 they had delicacies like ginger wine and mead, 17 and several kinds of perfumed hippocras, dedicated to the gods. Some of these ancient brews were still made in T’ang; some were long obsolete. But in the main the rice had become the staple source of alcohol.
Foods

By reputation, at least, a variety of exotic beverages were known: it was reported that the Chams made a wine of betel sap; a toddy was made in Kalinga from juice extracted from the coconut flower; the Tagants brewed a beer of rice, which they had to import for the purpose. But there is no evidence that any of the cheering foreign liquids were drunk in China, with the sole exception of the grape wines of the West.

Chang Ch'ien, the heroic traveler of early Han times, introduced grape seeds to China, where they were planted in the capital and the fruit grown on a small scale for eating purposes. According to one T'ang tradition, these were of three kinds, yellow, white, and black. They were reported to have been doing well in the vicinity of Tun-huang in the fifth century. But grapes were not an important crop, and the wine made from them remained a rare and exotic drink.

So it was until the beginning of the rule of T'ang, when suddenly, as a result of rapid T'ang expansion into the Iranian and Turkish lands of the West, grapes and grape wine alike became well known in China. Even then, the fruit retained spiritual affinities with the West: clusters of grapes had been used as exotic decorative motifs in polychrome damasks for centuries, and "Hellenistic" grape patterns on the backs of T'ang mirrors are familiar to everyone. Moreover, the Romans, the Arabs, and the Uighur Turks of Serindia were all known as great grape growers and drinkers of wine. But after the T'ang conquest of Serindia, some of the exotic flavor of the grape and its juice was lost, like that of the "semi-exotic" almonds and betel nuts. Quite a variety of the products of the grape were demanded from Qoč in way of annual tribute to the great court at Ch'ang-an: "dried," "crinkled," and "patched" were three distinct varieties of raisins; a sirup was also imported, and, of course, wine.

But most important of all, a new wine-making grape was introduced to China, and with it, knowledge of the art of making grape wine, and the foundation of a new industry. This was the famous "mace test" grape. Our first dated reference to this variety tells of a gift from the Turkish Yabghu, who sent a bunch of these long purple grapes to the emperor in the spring of 659. The name indicates their elongated shape, as distinguished, for instance, from a spherical variety called "dragon beads (or pearls)." It has an imagistic parallel in one of the five poems describing vividly the more bewitching parts of a woman's body, written by the Ch'ang-an courtier. Chao Luan-lun; the five are "Cloudy Chignons," "Willow Brows," "Sandal Mouth," "Cambriac Fingers," and "Creamy Breasts." In the last of these, the nipples appear under the metaphor "purple grapes," but respectful courtesy demands that we see in some other kind of grape the original underlying the tasty image, smaller and better proportioned than the "mace test."

Cuttings of the Western "mace test" grapevine were brought to China after the conquest of Qoč in 659, though the exact date of the introduction is unknown.

Foods

They were successfully planted in the imperial park, and we may presumably discern their progeny in the two "Grape Gardens" in the Taboed Park at Ch'ang-an, toward the end of the seventh century. In due course they spread beyond the holy premises, so that we find them in a poem of Han Yu, who reproaches the owner of a dilapidated vineyard:

The new twigs aren't yet everywhere—half are still withered;
The tall trellis is dismembered—here overturned, there uplifted.
If you want a full dish, hopped with "mace test,"
Don't decline to add some bamboo, and insert some "dragon beard."

We do not know where this vineyard was, but vines were extensively grown in arid Kansu, and we shall tell presently of the vines of Western Liang in that province. The other paramount grape-producing region of T'ang China was the Ta-shian district of northern Shansi, "where charmers of Yin offer goblets of grape." Local varieties were developed in these much-praised vineyards; in addition to wine grapes, we read of a large edible grape of Ho-tung (Shansi) in the tenth century, so delicate that it became worthless when transported to the capital.

Grapes were sufficiently well known in the seventh century to deserve the published opinions of professional dieticians: Meng Shen avowed that eating too many produced symptoms of anxiety and darkened the eyes, though grape juice was useful in lowering a fetus which was pressing against the heart.

But grapes were still not quite familiar fruits. Even in the eighth century, when they were well established in Chinese soil, Tu Fu could employ them in a series of images of a strange, non-Chinese country, pairing "grapes ripening" with "alfalfa abounding" (both rather classical figures, as both had been introduced by Chiang Ch'ien in the second century a.d.); these were matched in turn with "Tibetan women" and "Western lads."

Probably Tu Fu was writing of some frontier town like Liang-chou. And indeed the wine of Liang-chou (an exotic enclave in T'ang, like Chinatown in San Francisco) was regarded as a fine, rare drink with glamorous associations. Even in Tun-huang, however, further out on the camel road, grape wine was an expensive addition to an important celebration, like champagne for our festivals. The unofficial life of Yang the Precious Consort shows her drinking grape wine, the gift of the town of Liang-chou, from a glass cup decorated with "the Seven Gems."

A cup of this admirable wine was given to the emperor Mu Tsung early in the ninth century, and he remarked of it, "When I drink this, I am instantly conscious of harmony suffusing my four limbs—it is the true 'Princeling of Grand Tranquillity!'" The title is suggestive of the honorific name of Lao Tzu, and also seems to echo the Greek notion that wine is a god.

The admiration for the wines of the West had a respectable history: some were imported during the Han-T'ang interval, and the old encyclopedia, Po wu chih, which is full of third- or fourth-century wonders, says:
The Western Regions possess a grape wine which is not spoiled by the accumulation of years. A popular tradition among them states that it is drinkable up to ten years, but if you drink it then, you will be drunk for the fullness of a month, and only then be relieved of it.41

In T'ang times there was the strange wine made from the myrobolans of Persia, available in the taverns of Ch'ang-an;42 the "dragon fat" wine, as black as lacquer, brought from Alexandria (1) at the beginning of the ninth century,43 was, however, probably a product of the fertile mind of the romancer Su O. Grape wine, made in the Iranian fashion, undoubtedly came from Châeh in the eighth century,44 when grape wine technology was already established in China.

When the king of Qocho, along with such other trophies as his best musicians, was brought captive before T'ai Tsung early in 641, a three-day drinking holiday—a kind of public bacchanal—was declared in the capital.45 The character of the celebration was well adapted to the occasion, for it was from the new dependency of Qocho, renamed "Island-Province of the West" (Hsieh-hou), that the art of making grape wine was introduced to T'ang and the eight "colors" (varieties) of this highly pungent and aromatic beverage became known to the people of north China.46 The "maret teq" grapes seem to have been important to the new industry, and the manufacture of wine was an appendage of the vineyards of T'ai-yüan, which submitted quantities of the delicious drink annually to the imperial court.47 The high repute of the wines of T'ai-yüan, made from "maret teq" grapes, appears in a poem of Liu Yü-hsi, charmingly rendered into English by Theo. Sampson in 1869 as "The Song of the Grape." The "men of Tsin" are the men of the T'ai-yüan region in Shanxi.

The grape vine from untrdden lands, Its branches gnarled in tangled bands, Was brought the garden to adorn With verdure bright; now, upward borne, The branches climb with rapid stride, In graceful curves, diverging wide; Here spread and twin, there languid fall, Now reach the summit of the wall; And then with verdure green and bright, Enchanting the beholder's sight, Beyond the mansion's roof they strive, As though with conscious will alive. And now the vine is planted out, It clings the wooden frame about, The lattice shades with tender green, And forms a pleasant terrace screen, With dregs of rice well soak the roots, And moisten all its leafy shoots, The flowers like silken fringe will blow, And fruit like clustered pearls hang low, On "maret's milk" grasp the heart'sfist gleams,

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The new art of making grape wine was even transferred to a small wild Chinese grape, which has purple black fruit and still grows in Shanung. Its name is ying-zi. The herbs of T'ang tell of a wine made of this fruit, just like that from the exotic grapes of Kansu and Shansi. It may be that these very grapes are the ones of which Tuan Ch'eng-shih tells in an anecdote about "Grape Valley" (but he uses the imported word for "grape"). The valley was apparently in Shanung;39 there the fruit could be picked freely, but the eater was likely to lose his way. The fruits were known as "grapes of the Royal Mother," linking them with the fruits of immortality on the world mountain. In the middle of the eighth century, a certain Buddhist monk, who had converted a piece of this vine into a temporary staff, planted it at his temple, where it flourished mightily and produced an arbor studded with purple fruits, which was called "Canopy of the Vegetable Dragon Pearls."40

Myrobalans

In 746 a joint mission from the Turgâch, Châeh, Kish, Mâmarsh, and Kupâ brought to the T'ang court, among other valuables, an offering of emblic myrobalans.43 More usually, however, these fruits were imported by the sea routes of the South, especially by Persian ships.44

The three classical myrobalans of India were collectively called triphâla, the "Three Fruits," in Sanskrit;45 in Chinese they were named the "Three Fruits" and also the "Three *-kâṭa, *-kâṭa being the final syllable of each of their names in the Tocharian tongue,46 an important Indo-European language of Central Asia; it was from this direction, it seems, that the Chinese obtained their names. The three are "emblic myrobalans," Sanskrit damaśkâ,47 "belleric myrobalans," Sanskrit vibhâkâ; and "chebulic myrobalans," Sanskrit haritaśkâ.48

To these three astringent fruits the Indians and Tibetans, and other peoples under Indian influence, ascribed the most wonderful properties. A Tibetan text describes them collectively as an elixir of life, and says of the chebulic myrobalan, which grows on the Perfumed Mount of the God Indra, and is everywhere the one
most extravagantly admired, that "... when ripe, it has six tastes, eight efficacies, leaves three (tastes) upon digestion, accomplishes the seventeen qualities, and dispels all varieties of illness." The belleric kind, however, is in India thought to be inhabited by demons; but all have genuine worth in tanning and in medicine, especially as purgatives when ripe, and as astringents when unripe.

The pharmacologists of T'ang, especially the official reviser of the pharmacopoeia, Su Kung, state that all three of these important drug plants grew in Annam, then under Chinese control, and that the emblic and belleric, at least, also grew in Lingnan. The Sung pharmacologist, Su Sung, states that in his time, the eleventh century, the chebulic myrobolan also grew in south China, especially around Canton. It seems likely, however, that, though the classical "Three Fruits" were imported by Indian ships on the Persia run, other species, peculiar to Indo-China and possessing the same essential properties, were imported from close at hand. But perhaps we must accept the identifications of the learned Su Kung, and concede that the three fruits were also cultivated in the environs of the great southern port. The sea-roving monk, Chien-chien, also tells that he saw a haritaki tree, with fruits like large jujubes, at the Buddhist office-temple of the Great Cloud at Canton, and may be that he was right in his identification. But it seems likely that related species from closer at hand were often confused with them, both preserved fruit and transplanted tree.

Whatever their source, the natural properties of the fruits, and the complex of beliefs about them, brought from India with Buddhist civilization, made them important in Chinese medicine. We are not surprised to find them, much shriveled, among the medicinal treasures preserved from the eighth century in the Shōtōin in Nara. The emblic myrobolan will blacken the hair, wrote Chen Ch'üan, a doctor of the early seventh century; this was clear evidence of its youth-resorting properties. Foreigners make a hot liquor of the peachlike fruit of the belleric myrobolan, wrote the eminent Su Kung; this may refer to a drink, apparently alcoholic since it was classified as a "wine," which enjoyed some popularity in northern China; the art of making it was said to have been learned from the Persians. "Astringent gaffer" was a playful name given to the chebulic myrobolan early in the tenth century; -"gaffer" must refer to the wrinkled skin of the commercial product. Perhaps the name was an allusion to ripe old age; the eighth-century poet Pao Ch'i, when he was taken ill, received merely the leaf of the tree which bears that fruit as a gift from a sympathetic friend, and wrote a set of extravagant verses praising its divine qualities, "age- and ill-dispelling."

Vegetables

A number of vegetables, leafy and otherwise, were introduced into China in the of a number of rare transplants sent in 647 by the king of Nepal—known to the men of T'ang as a cold country inhabited by perfidious men. The plant seems ultimately to have been of Persian origin, and indeed was called by the Taoists "Persian herb," as a kind of cabalistic name, though this may not have been until after T'ang. The Taoists do seem to have taken a special interest in this novelty, for Meng Shen, the specialist on dietary problems, says of it that "... it releases the poisons of wine, and men who dose themselves with cinnamon stone do very well to eat it." That is to say, Taoist adepts who try to make themselves immortal by taking cinnamon elixirs may counteract the unpleasant effects of ingesting a mercury compound by eating spinach. In any case, the history of spinach is improved by cooking. The name given the new vegetable by the Chinese seems to register a foreign name like *palunga*, and pseudo-Kuo Tzu-tzu's *Book of Planting Trees* says that this is the name of a country.

Then there was the kohlrabi, a kind of cabbage, which Ch'en T'ang-ch'i calls both "sweet indigo" and "indigo from Western lands," having observed something about the broad leaves which reminded him of the Chinese indigo plant. He recommends it as a general tonic. Kohlrabi is ultimately a European plant, and clearly came to China by way of the Serindians, the Tibetans, and the Kansu corridor. Among the new plants sent from Nepal in the seventh century were a white plant "like the onion" (possibly a leek or shallot), a "bitter leaf vegetable" resembling lettuce, another broad-leafed vegetable called "vinegar leaf vegetable," and an aromatic "Western celery." None of these are really Nepalese plants; all were evidently fancy exotics passed on by the king of Nepal to his distant cousin of T'ang.

The rattan worth a thousand metal-pieces brought by the composite mission from the Turgutch and others in 745 is a mystery now—Ch'en T'ang-ch'i tells of a number of Chinese plants known by the same complimentary name.

A modern scholar thinks that the sugar beet, under a Persian name, may have been introduced to China during T'ang, "... perhaps by the Arabs."

None of this practical greenery was noticed by the poets.

Delicacies

The large, sweet, and aromatic seeds of the Korean pine, called "sea pine seeds," or "Silla pine seeds," were imported, peeled, and eaten. The pistachio, a favorite nut in Sogdiana, Khurasan, and Persia, where several species grow, was also imported and, from about the ninth century, was grown in Lingnan. It was styled "hazelnut of the Westerners" by the men of T'ang, though strange-sounding Iranian names for it were sometimes heard. It was not only tasty but was reputed to increase sexual vigor, and the glow of health generally.
like a proper walnut; it was sometimes styled "seed of the ratten from among the Man." 98 The true walnut was called "peck of the Westerners."

The olive was known in China, at least by reputation, under the Persian name zeitun, as a fruit of Persia and Rome, where it yielded a useful cooking oil, 99 but there is no proof that either fruit or oil was ever brought to T'ang. The so-called "Chinese olive" is, of course, no olive at all, but the fruit of two native trees: 98 the sap of one of them (Caranxius pinnula) yields a black brea or elemi, which was used in varnish and for calking ships.

From Sumatra came an aromatic and acrid kind of seed, apparently the dill. 91 It was known in T'ang by the name jia, which is either sandal jia or Middle Persian dired. 92 Indeed, Li Hsin the pharmacologist quotes an old book which says that it came from Persia, but this was often said of things formerly brought in Persian ships. Li Hsin reported that dill seeds were usefully stimulating to the taste, but that "... they should not be eaten at the same time as asafetida, for they will rob it of its flavor." 93

The chieftain of the Tung-ko tribe in what is now Kweichow, then a mountainous wilderness, sent a gift of pickled meat. 94 Lacking further information about it, I have optimistically included it here among the "delicacies."

Seafoods

The striped mullet, 95 which lived both in rivers and seas and is a favorite food of the otter, was well known to and liked by the medieval Chinese. In T'ang times it was netted off the coast, 96 but it must be counted also among the exotic foods of T'ang, since the Po-hai Mo-lo sent envoys from Manchuria in 726 with a gift of this fish for the emperor. 97 The Chinese of the south made from the striped mullet a kind of sauce or relish which had the curious name of "leaping fish sauce" (Yinou ring). The salted fish were "ouched with vinegar and dipped in wine," which gave the preparation a delicious taste. One explanation given for the name was that the mullets traveled in enormous schools, "... like clouds in battle array," so that it was not necessary to put out the nets, for the fish leaped into the fishing boats in great numbers, even endangering them with their weight. 98

Some years later, the same Manchurian fisherfolk sent a hundred dried "striped fish." 99 The name has a mythological ring to it: it appears in the Li Sao, the great epic of the soul in flight: "Riding the white turtle, ah! chasting the striped fish!" We find it again early in the third century of our era, in Ts'ao Chih's "Rhapsody on the Goddess of the Lo":

There is prancing of striped fish to warn that she rides by,
There is calling of jade simurghs as they go away together.

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(The "jade simurghs" are harems bells.) But a connection between these classical swimmers and the anonymous preserved fish from the Northeastern barbarians can be shown only in fancy.

Finally, the medicine men, at any rate, knew of and could probably obtain a kind of Korean bivalve mollusk from Silla, where it was an article of diet. Ch'en Teang-ch'i recommends a soup made of these and the edible liver called kompo 100 as a remedy for "knotted-up breath." 101 This is undoubtedly a Korean recipe, but we do not know whether it was eaten except on the advice of a physician. The name of the shell is *elm-ih, which is evidently the old name of Quelpart Island, or Cheju, that is, *Tamaa. 12 The island is famous for its shellfish, and the Chinese have plainly transferred the name of the place of origin to the tasty mollusk itself.

Condiments

Before the Chinese had pepper they had their own pungent condiment, fagara. 102 Various kinds of fagara take the place of true pepper in India, China, and Japan, where the fruit wall, sometimes along with the seed, is used both in cookery and in medicine. 103 "Fagara of Ch'in," 104 the variety used in antiquity, had a number of applications in medieval medicine. It could, for instance, help delayed menstruation, cure certain dysenteries, and grow hair; 105 Tuan Ch'eng-shih says that it also had the rather peculiar virtue of attracting quicksilver, but how this was put to use is not stated 106—perhaps it was a mineral prospector's indicator. Closely allied to it was "Fagara of Shu," the Szechwanese fagara, which grew as far north as the Ch'in-lung, south of the capital, but one authority states that the best of this kind was brought in from the "Western Regions." 107

This familiar seasoning, like other aromatic herbs, was added to sacrificial wines and meats, both to preserve them and to make them attractive to the gods. 108 In particular, a nectar spiced with fagara was an ancient and medieval libation appropriate to the rites of the New Year. 109 But drinks and dishes seasoned with fagara and other aromatics were gradually secularized, and went from the altars of the gods to aristocratic tables, 110 and even to quite ordinary tables. It is reported that the emperor Te Tsung (late in the eighth century) used curds and fagara in his tea, 111 and the mysterious Buddhist poet Han-shan (also of the eighth century), describing with scorn the viands on a selfish gourmand's table, writes of

Steamed shooats dipped in garlic sauce,
Roast duck tinctured with fagara and salt. 112

This makes good sense to us, attuned as we are to pepper and salt together. The combination may have been especially characteristic of southern cooking then, anticipating the rich preparations we now recognize as "Cantonese." Han Yü, poetizing on his first introduction to the southern cuisine, wrote:
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Coming here I fended off goblins,
So it's right that I taste southern cookery—
Blended with saline and sour,
Mixed with fagara and oranges.114

Pepper did not come as a complete novelty, then, but as an exotic and probably expensive substitute for fagara. Indeed, the name created for it emphasized its proxy status: "fagara of the Westerners."115 At the same time, just as "fagara of Shu" (as opposed to the homely old fagara of Ch'in) was regarded as an excellent variety, so "Au fagara" was even better—but all were used for the same purposes. But the new variety probably brought new dishes with it; we read, for instance, of the pepper "... which comes from the country of Magadhia, where they call it maricha ... the seeds are shaped like those of the fagara of Han, but it is acrid and pungent in the extreme. It is gathered in the sixth month. Men of our time always use it when they make 'Western plate' meat dishes."117 Foreign recipes demanded foreign spices.

Black pepper is prepared from the berry spikes of *Piper nigrum* "... piled into heaps for fermentation, during which they turn black, and are then spread on mats to dry." White pepper is made from the same berries, the largest and best being soaked in water until the outer surface sloughs off.118 The pepper plant is native to Burma and Assam, and has been introduced into India, Indochina, and Indonesia,119 and from India into Persia, whence Persian ships carried it, along with sandal and drugs, to all parts of medieval Asia.120 The T'ang pharmacopoeia says simply that it grows among the Western Jung,121 that is, among the barbarians, but we have already noticed that it had an especial association with Magadhia, and indeed "Magadhia" is an epithet of "pepper" in Sanskrit,122 and we must suppose that the region was a great center of production. The immense value of pepper in late medieval and early modern times, bringing wealth to the merchants who monopolized its trade, is now a familiar fact of history. But the spice appears to have been very costly in the eighth century too, for when the confiscated property of the disgraced minister Yuan Ts'ai was registered in 777, it was found that he possessed, among other rich goods (such as five hundred ounces of stalcite, a powerful medicine), one hundred piculs of true pepper—a tremendous quantity, and evident index of his riches.123

In the main, the medicinal value of pepper, once nearly as important as its worth as a condiment, depends on its irritant action, which stimulates secretion in the intestines, and so helps digestion.124 Meng Shen recommends taking it in pure wine for "coldness and pains in heart and belly."125 But it had its drawbacks too, for, writes another expert, "... if eaten in quantity it damages the lungs, and makes people spit blood."126

The Chinese of T'ang also knew another pepper, "long pepper."127 They called it by its Sanskrit name *pippali* 114 or, more commonly, shortened this to *pippal* (mispronounced *papal* or *pipal*). Our word "pepper," of course, comes from the same source.128 Long pepper spread through southern Asia even before ordinary black pepper,129 and in Rome of Pliny's time it was more valuable than black pepper.130 Tuan Ch'eng-shih tells us that it grew in Magadhia, like black pepper,132 but Su Kung calls it a product of Persia, because of its importance in the "Persia clipper" trade. He adds that "... the Westerners bring it to us; we use it, for its flavor, to put in food."133 It seems not to have been planted in China during T'ang, and does not appear in T'ang poetry, but it was grown in Lingnan in the eleventh century,134 and the great Sung poet Su Shih mentions it frequently because of its aroma. In fact, long pepper is even more fiery than betel pepper, which it resembles, and in consequence was regarded as a more potent drug than the other peppers. It was prescribed as a tonic for loins and legs, as a digestive aid, to abolish coldness in the stomach, and so forth.135 After T'ai Tsang himself, suffering from an intestinal affliction, had tried the recipes of his doctors in vain, a concoction of long pepper simmered in milk, suggested by an officer of his guards, proved efficacious.136

The leaves of the betel pepper are widely chewed in Southeast Asia, normally along with a slice of the nut of the betel palm,137 as a mild stimulant and a sweetener of the breath. The commercial product was sometimes called "betel sauce" in T'ang, referring to the way it was chewed in Lingnan, where betel-chewing was an ancient custom;138 but sometimes it was called "earth pippala."139 It was taken as a condiment in wine and in food, and was also prescribed for stomach disorders, like the other peppers.131 Su Kung states that it also grew in Szechwan, and that foreigners from Western countries sometimes brought it in.112

Another pepper known to the men of T'ang was the cubeb,140 a native of the Indies. In T'ang times it was brought from Srivijaya,141 and it was in Indonesia that the medieval Arab traders obtained it; in India it came to be called *kasub chiin*, that is, "Chinese cubeb," possibly because the Chinese had a hand in the trade;142 but more likely because it was important in the "China trade," vaguely so-called. Cubehs were also used as a spice in early medieval Europe.143 In China this pepper was called both *vielung* (apparently the name of an adulterant of black pepper in an Indic dialect, transferred to this Malayan plant)144 and *vidang*, the cognate Sanskrit word. Li Hsin thought it grew on the same tree as black pepper.145 In any event, the physicians of T'ang administered it to restore the appetite, to cure "demoon vapors," to darken the hair, and to perfume the body.146 There is no evidence of its use as a condiment, but I include it here to keep it with the other peppers.

The Chinese have a native mustard,147 but in T'ang times a Western species of this plant, which is closely related to the cabbage and turnip, was brought in by foreign traders. This was "white mustard,"148 which they called by that name, and also "mustard of the Westerners."152 It is a native of the Mediterranean world, but
was being grown in Shansi by the eighth century. The large, very pungent white grains were given in warm wine for respiratory disorders, but, as with cubeb, their role in cookery is unknown.

**Sugar**

Sweets were very popular in T'ang times, and honey was commonly used to make them. Southern Shensi produced honeyed bamboo shoots, and honeyed ginger was made in both Yang-chou and Hang-chou near the mouth of the Yangtze. A honey-water pothu, taken over a long period of time, was thought to impart an admirable rosy glow to the face. Yet, despite its antiquity and familiarity in China, a superior kind of honey was imported from the Tibetan peoples.

Cereals were another familiar source of sugar in China. Such grains as glutinous millet and rice provided the ancients with tasty syrups and confections, and "barley sugar" was made as early as the second century B.C. By T'ang times these must have seemed rather tasteless, inferior products, since they are not mentioned in the tribute lists. An important reason for this was that the juice and crystals extracted from the sugar cane had long since been introduced to the Chinese, and welcomed.

Cane sugar is the most widely popular of all plant sugars, although the extract of the sugar beet, sorghum, and palmyra have their many devotees. Innumerable races of the sugar cane grow in tropical Asia and Oceania. From this vast region the plant was transmitted westward, reaching Persia, it seems, by the fifth century, Egypt by the seventh, and Spain by the eighth. Sugar could be extracted from the cane in several ways. The simplest way was to chew it, or to crush it to make a pleasant drink. On a more sophisticated level, the juice could be boiled down to make a solid substance, suitable for sweetening foods. Finally, impurities could be removed by a refining process, to prevent deterioration. Each of these three stages is represented in Chinese cultural history.

Sugar cane was known to the people of late Chou and Han as a product of the warmer parts of the South, especially of Annam. The "sugar liquor" mentioned by Soo-ma Hsiang-ju may even refer to a drink fermented from it by the southerners. At any rate, the Chinese liked the juice, and in time learned to grow the plant, so that by T'ang times it was growing well in central Szechwan, northern Hupeh, and coastal Chekiang. Even so, it was not as everyday sort of plant, and stalks of sugar cane remained costly in the north. This was so even as late as the eighth century; we may read how Tai Tsung gave twenty sticks of sugar cane to a subject as a rare and wonderful gift. Moreover, the sugar cane was one of the many natural things, like the peacock and lotus, which were involved in complicated imagery surrounding the Buddha. Shakumuni was summoned Ikowu, "sugar cane," since one of his ancestors was said to have been born from that plant, and Wei Kao, conqueror of the Tibeto-Burmese tribes on the Burmese frontier, sent to the court of T'ang, along with other dances of Nan-chao, one called "King of the Sugar Cane." "... which means that the instruction of the people by the Buddha is like the sugar cane in its sweetness, and all rejoice in its flavor." One form in which sugar was prepared for everyday consumption was as little cakes or loaves which passed under the name of "stone honey." These were made in T'ongking as early as the third century from sugar produced by drying the juice of the cane in the sun. Sometimes these were shaped into little men, tigers, elephants, and the like. The "lion sugars" of Later Han are an example of these sweet figurines, but it is not certain that the sugar in them came from the Southern cane. In T'ang times this "stone sugar" was manufactured in several towns; sugar cakes destined for the imperial tables came from Lu-chou in southeastern Shansi, which sent them northward, along with ginseng, linn, and ink; they also came from Yüeh-chou in northern Chekiang, along with cinnamon, porcelain, and damasks, and from Yung-chou in southern Hunan, along with kudzu, arrow shafts, and interesting fossils.

Though the source of sugar in these preparations differed from place to place, milk was a constant ingredient. A good, lasting variety was made near the capital from white honey and milk curds; in some places it was prepared by boiling rice powder in carabao milk, which produced a hard, heavy cake; but the finest and whitest was made from sugar cane and milk, a process employed exclusively in Szechwan and among the "Persians." These "Persians" must have been east Iranians generally, since there were gifts of "stone honey" to the emperor from Bukhara and Khandzithen in the eighth century. Samarkand had it too, for we read of it there:

The people are addicted to wine, and like to sing and dance in the streets. Their king has a hat of felt, decorated with gold and various jewels. The women have coiled chignons, which they cover with a black kerchief sewed with gold foil. When one bears a child, she feeds it with stone honey, and places glue in its palm, desiring that it speak sweetly when grown up.

The superior quality of the "stone honey" from the Far West induced Tai Tsung to send envoy to Magedha to learn its secret, which seemed to depend on a superior ingredient. The art was accordingly imparted to the sugarmakers of Yang-chou. They prepared a sugar by boiling the juice of the cane, which "... was in color and taste far beyond that which was produced in the Western Regions." It was called sha tsung, "sandy (or granular) sugar." This seems to have been no more than a rather good "brown sugar," granular, but not truly refined. Sugar cakes made of unrefined sugar contain much else besides sucrose, and will decompose into a sticky mess fairly soon. A pure, white, crystalline sugar must be made by repeatedly and efficiently removing the scum from the boiling liquid. It does not
seem that this was done in Tang times, even by the methods imported from Magadha. Refined crystalline sugar was called in Chinese *tang xiang*, “sugar frost,” and seems to have been a development of Sung times. But tradition tells that one man knew the method in Tang, and he may well have been the father of the Sung refining industry. In the sixties or seventies of the eighth century, a certain monk named Tsou came to live on Umbrella Mountain, just north of the town of Hsiang-ch'i (“Little Torrent”) in central Szechwan. He knew the art of making “sugar frost” and passed it on to a farmer named Huang; in time there were many sugar refiners operating by the cane fields about the mountain.

Who is this that cometh up out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke,Perfumed with myrrh and frankincense,With all powders of the merchant? Song of Solomon 3:6

\[x=Aromatics\]

Incense and Braziers
It is worth saying again that in the medieval world of the Far East there was little clear-cut distinction among drugs, spices, perfumes, and incenses—that is, among substances which nourish the body and those which nourish the spirit, those which attract a lover and those which attract a divinity. In this chapter we are concerned with those substances whose most important feature was their odor, whether this appealed primarily to man or to god. In Tang, a man or woman of the upper classes lived in clouds of incense and mists of perfume. The body was perfumed, the bath was scented, the costume was hung with sachets. The home was sweet-smelling, the office was fragrant, the temple was redolent of a thousand sweet-smelling balsams and essences. The ideal and imaginative counterparts of this elegant world were the fairylands, paradises, and wonder-worlds of folk tale and poetry, especially those inspired by Taoism (but Buddhist legend is richly perfumed too). These dreamlands are always suffused with marvelous odors, which were conceived as a kind of sustenance of the soul, and therefore uplifting and purifying in their effects, and making for the spiritualization of life and the expansion of the higher faculties.

The holy atmosphere which invested the rites of the Confucian cult was accordingly strengthened by the liberal use of odoriferous gums and resins and of compound perfumes. The center of the cult was the “emperor,” that is (more rigidly considered), the divine king, nexus of the spiritual forces emanating from Heaven, and responsible for the well-being of all creatures. An illustration: in 775, a certain