

SPICES



JOHN W. PARRY

SPICES

Volume I

The Story of Spices



The Spices Described

by

John W. Parry



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Dedicated
to the memory of my mother
ANN ELIZABETH PARRY

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THE SPICE FAMILY



NOT a botanist's family, but a spice merchant's family—the group of aromatic and pungent products of which the goods of spice merchants throughout the world are composed. It is about these that this story is written. All their names follow. And for those who wish to know something about the spice plants, they are described in Part 2 of this book.

ALLSPICE	CORIANDER	ONION
ANISE	CUMIN	ORIGANUM
BLACK PEPPER	DILL	PARSLEY
CAPSICUM SPICES	FENNEL	POPPY SEEDS
[Chillies, Cayenne, paprika pods]	FENUGREEK	ROSEMARY
CARAWAY	GARLIC	SAFFRON
CARDAMOM	GINGER	SAGE
CASSIA	LAUREL LEAVES	SAVORY
CELERY	MACE	SESAME
CHERVIL	MARJORAM	STAR ANISE
CINNAMON	MINT	TARRAGON
CLOVES	MUSTARD	THYME
	NUTMEG	TURMERIC

PROLOGUE



IN a brightly illuminated and well-organized groceteria of a local department store, we noticed a woman shopper gazing at rows of neatly arranged, colorful, sifter-type containers. The little tins were filled with cinnamon, cloves, ginger, nutmeg, mace, pepper, sage, paprika, marjoram, and all the other delightfully aromatic and pungent spices which help milady to please her family and friends with the choicest of delectable dishes. She stood a long time, probably saying to herself, “I’ve got enough cinnamon and nutmeg, but I must have some cloves for the spice cookies, some sage for the dressing, yes—and hubby likes his poached eggs dusted with paprika and I’m out of that,” and so on. Maybe she was just wondering about spices—where they came from; the history behind them. Perhaps she was seeing, in the kaleidoscopic array of fascinating names and multicolored labels before her, the panorama of the spices.

If she was, she saw in the passing scenes: Primitive men attracted to the spice plants by their alluring scent; Ishmaelite traders leading camels burdened with bales of spices along the road from Gilead to Egypt; the children of Israel preparing the anointing oil from the chief of all spices for use in the tabernacle; ancient Egyptians pounding spices, in stone mortars, with which to embalm their dead; Egyptian and Babylonian priests crushing spices to obtain fragrant oils for offerings in holy ritual to their gods; weary Egyptian laborers, resting from their task of building the Great Pyramid, munching on garlic; slow-moving camels bearing the spice gifts of the Queen of Sheba to wise King Solomon; and the guests of Solomon drinking spiced wine at his magnificent banquets.

She saw: Spices growing in the gardens of Babylon; busy spice traders in the hot and dusty market squares of that ancient city; bales of spices piled high on rafts moving slowly along the Euphrates and Tigris rivers; spice caravans winding their way across hot desert sands from Arabia “the blest” to distant points in all parts of the Middle East; Arabs, drowsy from the heavy odor of aromatics, plying a jealously guarded spice trade.

Physicians of the ancient world applying spice balms to the wounds of warriors, or easing the pains of the sick with doses of grateful aromatics; Egyptian ladies perfuming their bodies with the fragrant fumes of cinnamon; the preparation of scented oils and unguents from sweet-smelling spices; mighty oriental kings and princes presenting gifts of costly spices to great temples; Eastern lovers nestling in the sweet odors of the aromatics.

Victors in ancient games crowned with wreaths of laurel leaves before applauding multitudes; maidens pinning sprigs of anise to pillows to keep away disagreeable dreams; Persian mothers planting sweet basil on the graves of departed sons.

Staunch little spice-trading ships swept by warm monsoons to the Malabar coast of India; bags of pepper passing through the customs of the great Kublai Khan; Marco Polo shopping in the spice markets of the magnificent city of Hangchow.

Bales of spices arriving by boat or camel train in the markets of Hormuz, Bagdad, Constantinople, Alexandria, and Venice; busy merchants, in a babel of tongues, buying and selling precious aromatics.

The beautiful canal city of Venice grow rich from trafficking in spices; Portugal enviously watching her from afar.

Prince Henry the Navigator in his Sagres study conferring closely with skilled navigators, astronomers and cartographers, and pouring over charts, plotting routes that might lead to the Eastern spice lands; busy workmen in Portuguese shipyards turning out sturdy little caravels with which to bring the spices to Lisbon from India.

She saw: Daring navigators sail from Portuguese ports to discover island after island, cape after cape, as they push southward on the trail of the spices; the triumph of Bartholomew Diaz when his ship doubled the Cape of Good Hope; Vasco da Gama greet the prince of Calicut, and return to Lisbon with the first Indian spices carried over an all-water route from India to Portugal; the joy and enthusiasm of Portugal; the crestfallen face of Venice.

Christopher Columbus make his first voyage across the Western Ocean and discover the New World in his search for the spice lands.

Albuquerque the Great attack Hormuz, Aden, and the Malabar ports of India in his struggle with the Moslem world for supremacy over the spice trade; his conquest of the ancient spice port of Malacca; his expeditions to the Moluccas, Burma, Siam, and China, in his attempt to bring all the spice-producing lands and trading ports under the dominance of Portugal.

Ferdinand Magellan sail through the straits he discovered in his quest for the Spice Islands; his death in battle at Matan; his surviving ships *Trinidad* and *Victoria* reach the Moluccas; *Victoria* arrive in the harbor of Seville heavily

laden with cloves—the first ship to circumnavigate the world!

Sir Francis Drake sail through Magellan's straits and bring his famed *Golden Hind* safely to the Spice Islands, make the first spice-trading contract in behalf of England, and duplicate the feat of the Spanish *Victoria* in circumnavigating the world; Sir Thomas Cavendish follow the aromatic trail to the Moluccas and accomplish the third circumnavigation of the world.

Cornelius Houtman reach Java and stake the interests of the Netherlands in the coveted spice producing islands of the East Indies; Van Neck bartering with haggling native merchants at Bantam for cargoes of pepper and nutmegs.

The founding of the English East India Company under the seal of Queen Elizabeth, its efforts in the Spice Islands and on the Malabar coast of India, and its subsequent domination of India; the founding of the Dutch East India Company and its victory over the Portuguese and English in the East Indies.

All these things, and much more, would she see, for all these things, and much more, are found in the story of the spices.

Part 1

THE STORY OF SPICES

I. SPICES IN THE ANCIENT WORLD



IN the beginning, untouched and undisturbed save by the hand of God, the cumin and the anise of Egypt gave up their scent to the gentle Mediterranean breezes which cooled that arid land. In neighboring Asia, sweet marjoram grew and unknown monsoons brought rains to wet the cardamom and cinnamon of Malabar and Ceylon, while away in the volcanic islands of the Moluccas the fragrant cloves and nutmegs were fruiting on the mountain sides. How long it was before man, struggling through the mists of the primeval world, came to know and use these and all other aromatic plants, we cannot tell, but he must have gathered early the leaves, fruits, seeds, and roots of fragrant herbs common to his locality and attributed to each a special virtue in his clouded scheme of things.

Primitive man would know nothing about cooking, but he would have his likes and dislikes for foods as we have today. He would choose his food plants for their smell and taste; the sweet flavored herbs would be preferred, and the bitter ones rejected.

Roaming through the woods in search of food, he would suffer injury from thorns and nettles; rotten trees lying on the wet forest floor would crumble under his foot, and he would stumble and bruise himself. He would suffer accidents and wounds while hunting wild beasts. And he would have times of sickness and bodily pain from diseases he could not understand. In his distress, he would turn to the fragrant oil-bearing spice plants, intuitively sensing that those herbs which are so pleasant to the nostrils must also be healing to his wounds and grateful to his sickness.

He would marvel at the sun during the day and at the moon and stars during the night; at daylight and darkness; at sky and water. He would think of them as good or bad, and thus affected he would come to believe them gods of virtue or evil. From raging storms he would seek shelter in natural caves, where, with fastbeating heart and perplexed mind, he would cower from the downpour of the tempest, the brattles of thunder, and the terrifying flashes of lightning. In the darkness of his earthy refuge he would

conjure up fearsome creatures in an exaggerated and frightful image of himself, and he would believe them responsible for these natural manifestations. He would seek to appease the fearful demons, and he would want to please the virtuous gods of his imagination. And he would do so by making offerings of the sweet-smelling spices in the belief that those which so delighted him must also delight the gods.

And so, no doubt, began the uses and customs which have endured through the ages—spices for food, spices for healing, and spices to placate the gods.

Beyond these assumptions about the thoughts and practices of primitive man we cannot go. The stone implements and cave drawings tell us something about these early people and indicate the observing and inventive nature of their minds, but give us nothing on which to base the story of the spices in those very remote times. Not until after the passage of thousands of years did men develop a system of writing, and for the earliest records, we must go to the fertile valleys of the Euphrates, the Tigris, and the Nile.

Out of the darkness of unrecorded time came the Sumerians to southern Mesopotamia. A nonsemitic people of unknown origin, their civilization was highly developed, and by about 3300 B.C. they had devised a system of writing. The Mesopotamian earth was well adapted to molding, and the Sumerians made cylinders and tablets of clay on which they inscribed their wedge-shaped letters. Politically, their territory was divided into a number of city states, each ruled by a priest king known as a "Patesi." The leading Sumerian cities were Nippur, Lagash, Larsa, and Ur.

Among the Semitic peoples who settled to the north of Sumer were the Akkadians, whose chief cities were Babylon and Kish. The land of Sumer and Akkad became the country of Babylonia. Out of Kish came Sargon who subdued Sumer, built the city of Agade, and extended his sway from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean. Through the centuries, Babylonia knew many wars and political upsets, and produced a number of great kings including the brilliant Khammurabi, whose name is famed for his monumental Code of Laws.

In the north, on both sides of the Tigris, a warlike people, the Assyrians, established themselves about 3000 B.C. Their chief cities were Ashur and Nineveh. For centuries, these people were in conflict with Babylonia and other places and peoples, and eventually became a great power in the Middle East. Among the great kings of the Assyrian Empire, the most notable were Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhahhon, and Ashur-bani-pal.

The gods of these early Mesopotamian peoples, like the gods we supposed to have existed for primitive man, represented natural phenomena as, for example, *Shamash* the sun-god, *Sin* the moon-god, *Anu* the sky-god, and

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