

British Library, London

India Office Records

IOL Reel 273

Moorcroft Collection vol. D 259 (starts at frame 583 of the reel)

Microfilmed July 1959 107 pp.

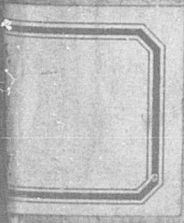
Pp. 1-5 transcribed by Janet Rizvi, June 2016

This concluding part of the Memorandum respecting Rhubarb occupies the first five pages of the volume titled Tenth Fasciculus of a Journal. After the end of the Memorandum, however, the daily Journal of events at Leh doesn't resume; the rest of the volume consists of copies of letters, some of inordinate length, and long Notes on various subjects.

Published in the Mountains of Central Asia Digital Dataset (MCADD) on the www.pahar.in website.

J
XXXII
MSS. Eur.
D.259

Tenth Fasciculus of Journal
Lch.



[1]

Memorandum respecting Rhubarb continued

It is difficult to form an estimate of the quantity of Rhubarb brought from China by this Caravan annually that will even approach towards accuracy. This difficulty is formed partly by the great Caravan sending off many detachments in the course of its journey, and partly by the policy of the Chinese Traders. For, if the price of the Drug fall considerably below that they have been long accustomed to receive they warehouse it at Yarkund, and bring no more until this be sold at the usual rates, and until the Tooranee Merchants inform them that there is a considerable demand for a fresh supply. It is thought by my informant that the Rhubarb annually brought to Yarkund my amount to about a hundred horse loads, or three hundred Maunds, but of this he speaks with doubt.

There are three kinds of Rhubarb in the Caravan characterised and named from the resemblances of the pieces to certain well known forms.

The first and most valued is called [Urdu script] Umroodee or Pear-shaped of somewhat oval resembling the Umrood fruit, which is either a Pear, a Guava, or a non descript.

The second is named [Urdu script] Attoeeaghee, or Horse-hoof-shape, from its likeness to the hoof of a Horse, and

The third [Urdu script]ⁱ Zurdikee from its resemblance to a Carrot.

The price of Rhubarb differs considerably in different years but frequently is as follows For the Umroodee 60 Pool or Puesa for one Jing.

A Pul of Yarkund weights 3 Rs 5 as & 4 P[illeg., possibly Pice] of Silver and 16 Pul make one Jing. Seventy five Pool, or Puesa, are equal to one Rupee.

[2]

One Jing is equal to about Rs 53.5.4 of Silver, so that a Jing and a half is equal to about a Ser Dehlee weight, and according to the foregoing values roughly take a Ser Dehlee, is procurable for about 1 Rupee & 4 Anas. [this sentence appar. sic]

Of Attoeeaghee a Jing is bought for 40 Pool and of Zurdikee for 30 Pool. In other terms a Kucha Ser and a half Punjabee of Umroodee is bought for a Tungee. Three Kucha Sers are equal to one Ser Dehlee, a Tungee is equal to ten Anas, or one Rupee Kashmeeree. The price of two Rupees a Ser is accounted rather high but it sometimes is as dear as one Rupee 12 As for a Kucha Ser, or five Rupees 4 As for a Pucka Ser.

Every piece of Rhubarb has a hole in it through which a string has passed whilst the root has been hung up to dry. The Rhubarb brought by that Detachment of the Caravan which goes to Kiachta is said to be “received from the Bucharrians by a Russian Apothecary who examines it. The bad is immediately burnt and the good is freed from its bark, woody parts and every impurity, in the most careful manner. It is then sent to Moscow, and to Petersburg where it is again examined” —————

“There is a distinction made in Commerce between the Russian and Chinese Rhubarb although they both come from the same Country” —————

“The Russian is dearer and always good as very great attention is paid both in purchasing and transporting it, by order of the Government — It is commonly in round pieces of a reddish or whitish yellow colour, feels gritty under the teeth and is often perforated with a large hole [so] that many pieces have the appearance of a mere rind ——— The Chinese or East Indian Rhubarb is brought by sea

from Canton. It is heavier, harder and more compact than the other, seldom perforated with holes and either in long pieces, or with two flat sides, as if they had been compressed. Dr Lewis thinks that this is less aromatic but stronger than the Turkey, and that it has acquired less care in drying from having been lifted when the root was less watery." Ed. Disp.

Whether the Rhubarb that enters Russia by other routes than that of Kiachta is purchased for the Government and undergoes the same process of cleaning, I am ignorant, or whether it be wholly retained for home consumption or be in part exported.

According to the report of Tavernier, as far as my memory serves, very great attention is required in the package and transport of Rhubarb, as it soon spoils, if put up before it be thoroughly dry, or if it be wetted on the road. The Chinese are said to pack it in hempen bags and to cover them with raw hides whilst somewhat moist. The Hides contract very much in drying and if the sewing be properly managed it is very difficult for humidity to penetrate into a package of this kind. Besides, during the season in which the Caravan travels scarcely any rain falls and the height of the Camels prevents their burthens being wetted in fording rivers in the cold months when the water is low. From the large perforation which reduces many pieces of the Russian Rhubarb to a mere rind it is presumable that the disease of rottenness has affected these roots and that their core has been scooped out. And the circumstance of the pieces from Canton

[4]

being long with two flat sides, as if they had been compressed, renders it probable that the same disease has existed in that Rhubarb also, and that the Roots may have been slit lengthwise and the slices actually compressed the more quickly to drive off the superfluous moisture and so to condense the substance of the root that the disjunction of its fibres by the rottenness may not be discovered. The deficiency of aromatic flavor remarked by Dr. Lewis in this Rhubarb is also in favor of this supposition as I have frequently observed that the sound portion of those roots, which were rotten at the heart had less aromatic flavor than those which were sound throughout their whole substance. And it is farther supported by the Chinese practice of compressing other articles of exportation as for instance all the coarse black Tea sent into Tibut (or Tibet) Kashmeer, Chinese and Oosbuk Toorkistan being condensed into compact Masses obviously by means of a Press, after having been wetted. It is desirable to ascertain whether the Chinese Rhubarb possess any natural superiority as to less frequency of rottenness or as to activity over that of Tibut, or the Himachal, or whether its superiority derive wholly from the more judicious preparation to which it is submitted by drying &c. in China and by selection rasping &c. in Russia firstly trials on the relative operation of each kind have been too limited and too unmethodical to be conclusive on the question of respective activity. [this sentence sic] If we cannot get admission into Yarkund it may be advisable to try the effects of compression on the Rhubarb, which grows on the Mountains in the Hon. Company's territory, or in their vicinity. But if we can obtain admission into

that City this will not be worth while as it seems reasonable to suppose that arrangements may be made by which through the sale of some varieties of British Merchandise now manufactured and of others to be made from the patterns of Tatory we may procure as much

of the best Rhubarb as may be required for the use of Great Britain. And through the profits probably at as easy a cost as that purchased by the Russians. Nor will it be difficult to adopt precautions to ensure that of superior quality alone being sent to Britain. It is difficult at present to estimate the expense of package and transport but if our negotiation with Ladakh prove successful and the Neetee Ghat be opened from this side I apprehend the first cost will be little more than doubled by the transport to Calcutta and this valuable Drug can well support this increase if it maintain a tolerable near approach to the price it bore when I left Britain.

It might have been more prudent in respect to my own character to have waited for an opportunity of personally investigating the particulars of this branch of Commerce and of examining the Rhubarb at Yarkund but considering the uncertainty in which I now am as to visiting that City and the chance of accidents I have thought it better to submit the information I have received, in its present form, and to incur the risk of having fallen into errors, which may be detected by some future Traveller in this country than through an ill-timed scrupulousness that it should be wholly lost.

Leh. Capital of	}	[signed] William Moorcroft
Ludakh. Feb.	}	Supt. Hon. Compys Stud
26 1821	}	On deputation to Chinese & Oosbuk Toorkistan

ⁱ The three Urdu words, which don't fill up the blank space allotted to them, were presumably inserted by an Urdu- or Persian-knowing informant.