



FELFEL

FELFEL (arabicized from archaic Pers. *pelpel* < Skt. *pippalī*, which designated both the vine and the berries of *Piper longum* L. “Indian long pepper”; Monier-Williams, p. 628), modern Persian term designating the fruits and/or berries of two botanically different groups of plants: the pepper proper and the capsicum peppers (Rosengarten, pp. 128-47, 352-65).

1. *Felfel-e siāh* (lit. black pepper) designates the common black pepper, *Piper nigrum* L. (fam. Piperaceae). The whitish *felfel-e safīd* (lit. white pepper) is just hulled (black) peppercorns (*dāna-ye felfel*). The so-called long pepper, *P. longum* (from the same family), with elongated spikes that are ground whole to produce a condiment less pungent than the common pepper, is called *felfel-e hendī* (Indian pepper), *felfel-e derāz* (long pepper) in the past, and *dār-felfel* (tree pepper; e.g., Heravī, p. 154, Tonokābonī, p. 373). Both black and long peppers were of Indian origin (Rosengarten, p. 352; concerning the old trade routes of pepper to and through Persia, see Bāstānī PāFELFELrīzī). The root of the long pepper was called *felfel-mūl/-mūr/-mūy (a)/-mūna* (< Hind[^] *pippalī-mūla* < Skt. *pippalā-mūl*, lit. “long pepper root”; Platts, s. v.) in classical Persian medico-pharmacological works (e. g., Heravī, p. 246 n.; Bīrūnī, p. 468; ‘Aqīlī, pp. 661-66).

Black pepper is the most commonly used “hot” (*garm*) spice in Persia. According to the latest published statistics (Gomrok ..., p. 11), in 1372 Š./1993-94 a total of 467,754 kg of black pepper, worth \$543,045, was imported from the United Arab Emirates, Sharja, and South Korea (serving only as trade intermediaries). In the past, many Galenic medicinal properties were



attributed to *felfel*, all derived from its “hot and dry” nature (“in the third degree,” according to Heravī, p. 243; “in the fourth degree,” according to Donayserī, p. 111). The *felfel-mūl*, less potent, considered “hot and dry in the second degree,” was used as a substitute (*badal*) for the long pepper (Heravī, p. 246; Bīrūnī, p. 468; for the most detailed account in Persian of the medicinal uses of pepper, see ‘Aqīlī, pp. 658-60). Nowadays, pepper is medicinally used only as a stimulant and as a “hot” simple to be added to one’s food (cf. its Māzandarānī name *garmāri/garm(-e) dārī* “warm drug”).

Pepper was believed to have magic virtues. Jamālī Yazdī mentions white pepper as an ingredient of a compound incense to be burned in a ritual for invoking the planet Venus to grant one’s wishes (p. 367). Šams-al-Dīn Donayserī, reporting “the nature and temperament of the seven planets,” attributes to “the great sinister” Saturn several simples, including *pelpel*, alum (*zāj*), and myrobalan (*halīla*; p. 51). E’tezād-al- Saṭṭana reports (p. 74) that, in areas where oak trees and pepper vines grow, people believe that if these plants bear a lot of fruit, that year will have a long winter. Šādeq Hedāyat (p. 29) reports the custom of boiling vinegar, *qalyāb* (sodium or potassium carbonate), and white pepper in a coffeepot during the ceremonies of marriage contract (*‘aqd*). Henri Massé (*Croyances II*, p. 312; tr., p. 302) reports the belief that “if you pour pepper between two persons who are quarreling, their quarrel will get worse.”

2. *Felfel(-e)farangī/derāz* (European/long pepper), etc., various kinds of *capiscum* (fam. Solanaceae), originally from South America, are cultivated in Persia. Long, slender, pungent varieties of *Capsicum frutescens* L. (cf. chili pepper, cayenne pepper, etc.), when green (*felfel-esabz/toršī* “green/pickling pepper”), are used as vegetables and especially for pickling; the red variety (*felfel-e hendī/qermez* “Indian/red pepper”) is used, whole or ground, as condiment. The *felfel-e dolma’ī* (pepper for stuffing) is said of large, mild-tasting, somewhat rounded varieties of *C. annuum* L., used, when green, as a vegetable or, especially, for stuffing (*dolma-ye felfel*; see [DOLMA](#)). Several varieties of capsicum peppers are cultivated in Persia for domestic use only (Ṭabāṭabā’ī, pp. 397-407). According to The Customs Administration (Gomrok-e Īrān), “*felfel-e qermez*” (probably referring to exotic products such as chili and cayenne powder; Gomrok, p. 11) is imported, too; the data for 1372 Š./1993-94 are: 15,921 kg, worth \$56,544.00, imported from the United Arab Emirates, South Korea, and Singapore.



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