**PRIMARY SOURCE ACCOUNTS**

This passage from the Bible shows the rituals for anointing the tabernacle in the Sinai wilderness:

*“Moreover, the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 'Take thou also unto thee principal spices, of pure myrrh five hundred shekels, and of sweet cinnamon half so much, even two hundred and fifty shekels and of sweet calamus two hundred and fifty shekels. And of cassia five hundred shekels after the shekel of the sanctuary, and of olive oil an hin: And thou shalt make it an oil of holy anointment, an ointment compound after the art of the apothecary: it shall be an holy anointing oil.”*

Exodus 30: 22-25

Welch, Jeanie. T*he Spice Trade: a Bibliographic Guide to Sources of Historical and Economic Information*, p. 36.

The Assyrian king recorded his disputes with Samsi, an Arabian queen whose territory was south of his territory. His successor Sargon II received "all kinds of aroma-tics" as presents from Queen Shamshi.

*“As for Samsi, Queen of Arabis, I took from her 1,100 prisoners, 30,000 camels, 20,000 oxen, 5,000 measures of spices of all kinds, and she fled for her life, like a wild ass, to the waterlesss town of Bazu. The people of Mas'a, Tema, Saba', Haiappa, Badana, Hatti, and the tribe of Idiba'leans from far away to the west, knew of my power and bowed to my rule. As one, they brought me tribute; male and female camels and all kinds of spices.”*

Annals of Tiglathpileser III

King of Assyria, 744-727 BC

Dalby, Andrew. *Dangerous Tastes: the Story of Spices*, p. 32

A description of the Queen of Sheba in the Bible:

*“She came to test him with difficult questions. She brought immense riches to Jerusalem with her, camels laden with spices, great quantities of gold, and precious stones. On coming to Solomon, she opened her mind freely to him; and Solomon had an answer for all her questions, not one of them was too obscure for the king to expound. And she presented the king with a hundred and twenty talents of gold and great quantities of spices and precious stones; no such wealth of spices ever came again as those given to King Solomon by the Queen of Sheeba.’*

Kings 10.1-3.10)

(translation of the

Jerusalem Bible)

Dalby, Andrew. *Dangerous Tastes: the Story of Spices*, p. 32

An anonymous Latin poet describes the magical lifestyle of a phoenix on the imaginary island of Panchaea, thought to be the source of myrrh:

*“She collects the spices and aromas that the Assyrian gathers, and the rich Arab; those that are harvested by the Pygmy peoples and by India, and that grow in the soft bosom of the Sabaean land. She collects cinnamon, the perfume of far-wafting amomum (cardamum), balsams mixed with tejpat leaves; there is also a slip of gentle cassia and gum arabic, and the rich teardrops of frankincense. She adds the tender spikes of downy nard and the power of Panchaea's myrrh.*

Anonymous (Rome)

79-88 AD

Dalby, Andrew. *Dangerous Tastes: the Story of Spices*, p. 12

Passage from the Bible:

*“Yours are the rarest of spices:*

*nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, and all the trees*

*that bear incense;*

*myrrh and aloes, and all the subtlest of aromas.”*

The Song of Songs

Dalby, Andrew. *Dangerous Tastes: the Story of Spices*, p. 107

Spices came from the dangerous edges of the known world:

*“One day, as we sailed rather far on along the African coast beyond Zanzibar, a place that is called the Mouth of the Ocean, we saw to our right a mass of birds in flight, called albatrosses, at least twice as big as kites. The air was bad there, too. We were all afraid, and the crew and the merchants who had experienced this before said that we were close to Ocean. 'Turn back,' they said to the captain, 'or we shall be taken by the currents and fall towards the Ocean and we shall all be*

*lost.' Where the Ocean meets the known sea it creates a monstrous wave, and there is an undertow from the sea towards the Ocean. We were terrified. Some of those*

*birds called albatrosses flew with us a long way, high in the sky, as if to warn us that Ocean was still near.”*

Cosmas Indicopleustes

Christian Topography 2.29

Dalby, Andrew. *Dangerous Tastes: the Story of Spices*, p. 12

On how cinnamon and cassia are obtained:

*“The Arabians cover their bodies and faces, all but their eyes, with ox-hides and other skins before going out to collect kasie. It grows in a shallow lake. The lake and all the country round are infested by winged creatures like bats, which screech horribly and are very fierce. They have to be kept from attacking the men's eyes while they are cutting the cassia.*

*The process of collecting the cinnamon is even stranger. In what country it grows is quite unknown. The Arabians say that the dry sticks, which we call ‘kinamomon’, are brought to Arabia by large birds, which carry them to their nests, made of mud, on mountain precipices which no man can climb. The method invented to get the cinnamon sticks is this. People cut up the bodies of dead oxen into very large joints, and leave them on the ground near the nests. They then*

*scatter, and the birds fly down and carry off the meat to their nests, which are too weak to bear the weight and fall to the ground. The men come and pick up the cinnamon. Acquired in this way, it is exported to other countries.*

Herodotus,

Greek historian

(c. 484 - 420 B.C.)

Dalby, Andrew. *Dangerous Tastes: the Story of Spices*, p. 37

The best Roman cookbooks required pepper in most recipes. The following lines are from a satire at the time:

“*The greedy merchants, led by lucre, run*

*To the parch'd Indies and the rising sun;*

*From thence hot Pepper and rich Drugs they bear,*

*Bart'ring for Spices their Italian ware. . .”*

Persius, Satirist

(34 - 62 A.D.)

Dalby, Andrew. *Dangerous Tastes: the Story of Spices*.

*“Those old tales were invented by the Arabians to raise the price of their goods. There is an accompanying story that under the reflected rays of the sun at midday an indescribable sort of collective odor is given off from the whole of the peninsula, which is due to the harmoniously blended exhalation of all those aromas, and that the first news of Arabia received by the fleets of Alexander the Great were these odors, wafted far out to sea.*

*All these stories are nonsense. In fact cinnamomum, which is the same thing as cinnamum, grows in 'Ethiopia', which is linked by intermarriage with the Cave dwellers. These buy it from their neighbors and bring it over vast seas on rafts that have no rudders to steer them, no oars to push them, no sails to propel them, indeed no motive power at all but man alone and his courage. What is more, they take to sea in winter, around the solstice, which is when the east winds blow the hardest. These winds drive them on the proper course across the bays. When they have rounded the Cape, a west-north-west wind will land them in the harbor called Ocilia, so that is the trading place they prefer. They say that their traders take almost five years there and back, and that many die. On the return journey they take glassware and bronze ware, clothing, brooches, bracelets and necklaces: so here is one more trade route that exists chiefly because women follow fashion.”*

Pliny the Elder,

*Natural History*

(23 - 79 A.D.)

Dalby, Andrew. *Dangerous Tastes: the Story of Spices*, p. 37

Leaena, an aged slave, praises her favorite wine (from a Roman comedy):

*“My beauty of Bacchus! You're old, and so am I, and how I need you!*

*Compared with you, every other essence is as bilge water! You are my myrrh, my cinnamon, my ointment of rose, my saffron, my cassia, my rarest of perfumes! Where you are poured, there would I fain be buried!”*

Plautus,

Playwright

(c. 254 - 184 BC)

Dalby, Andrew. *Dangerous Tastes: the Story of Spices.*

Chinese sailor’s description of the sea route to the Mediterranean (Ta-ts'in was the Chinese word for "Rome"):

*The sea is vast and great; with favorable winds it is possible to cross within three months; but if you meet slow winds, it may also take you two years. It is for this reason that those who go to sea take on board a supply of three years' provisions. There is something in the sea that is apt to make a man homesick, and several have thus lost their lives.*

Kan Ying

Chinese ambassador (97 A.D.)

Miller, J. Innes. *The Spice Trade of the Roman Empire*. p. 134

A Chinese description of the people in Syria:

*“They (the people of Ta-ts'in which is also called Li-kan) traffic by sea with An-hsi and T'ien-chu, the profit is ten-fold. They are honest in their transactions and there are no double prices. The budget is based on a well-filled treasury.”*

Chinese official

*The Annals* *of the Eastern Han*

Later Han (25 - 220 AD)

On account of the trade with India and new communications open to it, there was a drain of precious metals out of the Roman Empire:

“*And it will not be amiss to set out the whole of the voyage from Egypt, now that reliable knowledge of it is for the first time available. It is an important subject, since in no year does India absorb less than 55 million sesterces of our Empire's wealth, sending back merchandise to be sold to us at one hundred times its prime cost.”*

Pliny the Elder

*Book VI*

(23 - 79 A.D.)

Loane, Helen Jefferson. “Vespasian’s Spice Market and Tribute in Kind.” *Classical Philology*, 1994: 10-21.

*“At the smallest reckoning 100 million sesterces is the sum which every year India, the silk-growing country of northern China, and the Arabian Peninsula take from our Empire. Such is the cost to us of our exquisites and our women.”*

Pliny the Elder

Book VI

(23 - 79 A.D.)

Dalby, Andrew. *Dangerous Tastes: the Story of Spices*. p. 124.

On using cloves in cooking:

“*When the beef is boiled, put in the casserole about half a cup of sharp vinegar, some leeks and a little pennyroyal, some celery and fennel, and allow to cook for one hour. Then add half as much honey as you had vinegar, or make it sweeter than that if you like. Cook over a low heat, stirring the pot frequently so that the sauce is well mixed with the meat. Then grind 50 peppercorns, half a solidus each of putchuk and spikenard, one tremissis of cloves. Carefully grind all these spices together in an earthenware mortar, adding a little wine. When well ground, add them to the pot and stir well. Allow time for them to lose some of their individual force and to blend their flavors into the sauce before it is taken off the fire. If, besides honey, you have must or concentrated must available, you may choose any of the three to add as sweetener.”*

Anthimus' dietary manual

Greek physician in Roman era

Dalby, Andrew. *Dangerous Tastes: the Story of Spices*. p. 52.

On India’s Malabar Coast, ancient Nelkynda near the entrepot of Muziris was described this way:

*“Bales of pepper are brought to market from each house, and gold received in exchange from the Roman ships is brought to shore in sackfuls, at Muciri, where the music of the singing sea never ceases and where King Kudduvar loads his guests with the ambergris of the sea and the cardamom of the mountains.”*

A Tamil poet

Second Century, AD

Dalby, Andrew. *Dangerous Tastes: the Story of Spices*. p. 93.

The holy book of Islam mentions ginger as one of the aromatics in the next world:

*“The righteous shall drink of a cup tempered at the Camphor Fountain. God will reward them for their steadfastness with robes of silk and the delights of Paradise. Reclining there upon soft couches, they shall feel neither the scorching heat nor the biting cold. Trees will spread their shade around them, and fruits will hang in clusters over them. They shall be served with silver dishes, and beakers as large as goblets, silver goblets which they themselves shall measure; and brimming cups from the Fountain of Ginger*.”

Qur ' an

Dalby, Andrew. *Dangerous Tastes: the Story of Spices*. p. 23.

Description of the Malay Peninsula:

*"...The kingdom of Tun-sun is a dependency of Funan. Its king is called K'un-lun . . . the people of Tun-sun practice their doctrine and give them their daughters in marriage; consequently many of the brahmans do not go away. They do nothing but study the sacred canon, bathe themselves with scents and flowers, and practice piety ceaselessly by day and night. In times of sickness, the people vow a bird burial. With songs and dances they are escorted outside town, where birds devour them. The remaining bones are burnt to ashes, put in an urn and sunk in the sea. If the birds do not eat them, they are put into a basket. Burial by fire entails throwing oneself into the fire. The ashes remaining are put in a casket and entombment sacrifices are offered for an indefinite period. There is the wine-tree that resembles the pomegranate. Its flowers are gathered and their juice is allowed to stand in a jar. After a few days it becomes an excellent intoxicating wine.”*

T'ai-p'ing Yu Lan

Third Century, AD

Wheatley, Paul. *The Golden Khersonese*, p. 17

Description of trading in Ethiopia, an important link between the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea:

*“Azania is situated beyond the country called Barbaria which produces frankincense. . . The region that produces frankincense is situated at the projecting part of Ethiopia, and lies inland and is washed by the ocean on the other side. From here the inhabitants of Barbaria, being near at hand, go up into the interior, and, engaging in traffic with the natives, bring back from them many kinds of spices, frankincense, cassia, calamus, and many other articles of merchandise, which they afterwards send by sea to Adule, to the country of the Homerites, to Further India and to Persia . . . And beyond Barbaria near the ocean and in the remotest part of Ethiopia, is the land of Sasu, in which there are many gold-mines. From Axum to Sasu there are fifty stages more or less. The King of the Axumites, accordingly, every other year, through the governor of Agau, sends there special agents to bargain for the gold, accompanied by many other traders, upwards, say, of five hundred, bound on the same errand as themselves. They take along with them to the mining district oxen, lumps of salt, and iron-ware, and when they reach its neighborhood they make a halt at a certain spot and form an encampment, which they fence round with a great hedge of thorns. Within this they live, and having slaughtered the oxen, cut them in pieces, and lay the pieces on the top of the thorns, along with the lumps of salt and the iron-ware. Then come the natives bringing gold in nuggets like lupin seeds called tancharas, and lay one or two of these upon what pleases them -- the pieces of flesh, or the parcels of salt, or the implements of iron, and then they retire to some distance off. Then the owner of the meat approaches, and if he is satisfied he takes the gold away, and upon seeing thi,s its owner comes and take the flesh or the salt or the iron. If, however, he is not satisfied, he leaves the gold, when the native seeing that he has not taken it, comes and either puts down more gold, or takes up what he has laid down and goes away. Such is the mode in which business is transacted with the people of that*

*country, because their language is different and interpreters are hardly to be found. The time they stay in the country is five days more or less, according as the natives more or less readily coming forward buy up all their wares. On the journey homeward they all agree to travel well-armed, since some of the tribes through whose country they must pass might threaten to attack them from a desire to rob them of their gold.”*

Cosmas Indicopleustes

Merchant from Alexandria

*Christian Topography*

Miller, J. Innes. *The Spice Trade of the Roman Empire.* p. 167

Description of Fa-Hsien's return to China by sea:

*“ ... Took passage on board a large merchant-vessel, on which there were over two hundred souls, and astern of which there was a smaller vessel in tow in case of accidents at sea and destruction of the big vessel. Catching a fair wind, they sailed eastwards for two days; then they encountered a heavy gale, and the vessel sprang a leak. The merchants wished to get aboard the smaller vessel; but the men on the latter, fearing that they would be swamped by numbers, quickly cut the row-rope in two. The merchants were terrified, for death was close at hand; and fearing that the vessel would fill, they promptly took what bulky goods there were and threw them into the sea. Fa-Hsien also took his pitcher and ewer, with whatever else he could spare, and threw them into the sea; but he was afraid that the merchants would throw over his books and his images, and accordingly fixed his whole thoughts on Kuan-Yin, the Hearer of Prayers, and put his life into the hands of (the bodhisattva), saying, 'I have journeyed far on behalf of the Faith. O that by your awful power you would grant me a safe return from my wanderings.'"*

*The gale blew on for thirteen days and nights, when they arrived alongside of an island, and then, at ebb tide, they saw the place where the vessel leaked and forthwith stopped it up, after which they again proceeded on their way.*

*This sea is infested with pirates, and to meet whom is death. The expanse of ocean is boundless; east and west are not distinguishable; only by observation of the sun, moon, and constellations is progress to be made. In cloudy and rainy weather our vessel drifted at the mercy of the wind, without keeping any definite course. In the darkness of the night nothing was to be seen but the great waves beating upon one another and flashing forth light like fire, huge turtles, sea-lizards, and such-like monsters of the deep. Then the merchants lost heart, not knowing whither they were going, and the sea being deep, with*out bottom, they *had no place where they could cast their stone-anchor and stop. When the sky had cleared, they were able to tell east from west and again proceed on their proper course; but had they struck a hidden rock, there would have been no way of escape.*

*And so they went on for more than ninety days until they reached a country named Yeh-p'o-ti, where heresies and Brahmanism were flourishing, while the Faith of Buddha was in a very unsatisfactory condition.*

Fa-Hsien,

Buddhist monk

Written 413-14 A.D.

Wheatley, Paul. *The Golden Khersonese*, p. 38

Description of western Java:

“*The kingdom of Tan-tan was heard of during Sui times. It is situated northwest of To-lo-mo and southeast of Chen-Chou. The king's family's name is Sha-li;, his personal name is Shih-ling-chia. There are something over 20,000 families in the capitol. The king holds audience for two periods each day, in the morning and the evening. They often daub his person with fragrant powder...he hangs a number of precious ornaments about his neck. . . and wears leather sandals on his feet. When he travels a short distance he is carried in a litter, on longer journeys he rides on an elephant. In battle conch-shells and drums are sounded while banners and flags (are waved). Under the criminal code all robbers and thieves, irrespective of the seriousness of their crimes, suffer execution. The products of the country are gold, silver, white sandalwood . . .”*

T'ung Tien,

*Chapter 188, #4,*

Third Century, AD

Wheatley, Paul. *The Golden Khersonese*, p. 51.

Early Roman description of Southeast Asia:

“*Apart from those areas too warm for human settlement, the region between the Indus and the Ganges is occupied by black peoples resembling Ethiopians. Between Colis and Tamus the coast runs straight. It is inhabited by retiring people who garner rich harvests from the sea . . . In the vicinity ofTamus is the island of Chryse; in the vicinity of the Ganges that of Argyre. According to olden writers, the soil of the former consists of gold, that of the latter is of silver; and it seems very probable that either the name arises from this fact or the legend derives from the name.”*

Pomponius Mela,

43 AD

Wheatley, Paul. *The Golden Khersonese*, p. 127-129

Another description of Java:

*“The country (Java) abounds with rich commodities. Pepper, nutmegs, spikenard, galangal, cubebs, cloves and all other valuable spices and drugs . . . which occasion it to be visited by many ships laden with merchandise, that yields to the owners considerable profit.”*

Marco Polo

Welch, Jeanie. *The Spice Trade: a Bibliographic Guide to Sources of Historical and Economic Information*, p. 41

On where cloves come from:

*“Also somewhere near India is the island containing the Valley of Cloves. No merchants or sailors have ever been to the valley or have ever seen the kind of tree that produces cloves: its fruit, they say, is sold by genies. The sailors arrive at the island, place their items of merchandise on the shore, and return to their ship. Next morning, they find, beside each item, a quantity of cloves.*

*One man claimed to have begun to explore the island. He saw people who were yellow in color, beardless, dressed like women, with long hair, but they hid as he came near. After waiting a little while, the merchants came back to the shore where they had left their merchandise, but this time they found no cloves, and they realized that this had happened because of the man who had seen the islanders. After some years' absence, the merchants tried again and were able to revert to the original system of trading.*

*The cloves are said to be pleasant to the taste when they are fresh. The islanders feed on them, and they never fall ill or grow old. It is also said that they dress in the leaves of the tree that grows only in that island and is unknown to other people.”*

Ibrahim ibn Wasif-Shah

c. 1000 AD

Dalby, Andrew. *Dangerous Tastes: the Story of Spices.*, p. 50.

Description of island in the Caribbean which Columbus mistakenly believed were islands of Southeast Asia:

*“When I discovered the Indies, I said that they were the richest dominion that there is in the world. I spoke of the gold, pearls, precious stones, spices . . .”*

Christopher Columbus

Welch, Jeanie. T*he Spice Trade: a Bibliographic Guide to Sources of Historical and Economic Information,* p.51.

Passage from a letter from Zamorin of Calicut to the King of Portugal, carried by

Vasco de Gama:

*“In my kingdom there is an abundance of cinnamon, cloves, ginger, pepper, and precious stones. What I seek from thy country is gold, silver, coral and scarlet.”*