

A Forgotten Ceylonese Cinnamon-tree (*Cinnamomum capparucoronae* Bl.)

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During my collecting trip in 1969 under the auspices of the Smithsonian Flora of Ceylon Project, I discovered near Rassagalle, above Balangoda, a cinnamon tree, which could not be identified with Trimen's Flora.

It was a sizeable tree of about 10 m high and 90 cm girth. Intensive searching to locate other specimens was fruitless, although a cut and debarked bole was found and a local informant told us that the bark, which strongly smells of cloves, was sold to Colombo as a medicine.

The tree was not in flower and fruit ; it was duly marked, but after two years no fertile material was obtained, although a good financial reward had been promised to local people.

In 1971 I had again the opportunity to visit the spot, at the same time of the year, and the tree bore no flowers or fruit. However, another specimen was located along the road from Laxapana to Maskeliya very near to the junction called Doublecutting and again rewards were promised for fertile material of this tree.

Some months later (June 1971), after intensive searching and inquiry, I was lucky to obtain more detailed information and some more trees in a forested area north of Ratnapura (north of the road Rassagalle-Ratnapura) and also the proper Sinhalese name of this tree : *Kapuru kurundu* (Kapuru = camphor, kurundu = cinnamon). The species is becoming extinct, as numerous trees are felled for its valuable medicinal bark.

It took some sleuthing to find out the real taxonomic status of this species. No parts of the tree had a camphor smell, but by letting numerous people smell bark-specimens, I soon found out, that no difference was made between the smell of camphor and of cloves, both were called kapuru.

In 1836 (Rumphia 1 : 34, t. 9, fig. 2-3 and in a note on p. 33) Blume had described *Cinnamomum capparucoronae*, but the description was based on a single detached leaf, which I had already examined in the Burman collections at Geneva ; in Leiden I discovered another leaf of the same collection.

Formerly, I believed this to represent a leaf of *C. dubium* Nees (synonym : *C. multiflorum* Wight), the well-known *sewel kurundu* in Sinhalese (*sewel* = slime, *kurundu* = cinnamon), characterized by a taste- and odourless, slimy bark. Incidentally, local people sometimes confused *sewel* and *kaparu kurundu*.

There is no doubt that the unknown cinnamon tree with the bark smelling of cloves represents Blume's *C. caparu-coronde*, of which after two centuries we know now only the vegetative parts.

The earliest date, where this species is mentioned, is 1719, in a treatise of Goeller, *Disputatio de Cinnamomum* (p. 18), who named it *Capperu coronde*, *cinnamomum camphoratum*. Most of this is repeated in *Acta Acad. Caesar. Nat. Curios.* 1, Appendix 4, t. 14 (3), p. 14 and 15 in 1727.

Burman (*Thesaurus zeylanicus* 63. 1737) mentioned it as *Cappare coronde* and it is possible that he was the first who saw leaves of this species.

Thunberg (*Voyages au Japon* 4 : 237. 1796) mentioned in this French edition : *Capoure couroundou* (cannelle camphrée), and added that camphor was extracted from the roots and that it grew only in the interior in the realm of the Kings of Kandy.

We find nothing new in De Candolle (*Essai propriétés médic. Pl.* 68. 1804), who misspelled it *Capuru Carundu*.

Th. & C. G. Nees (*de Cinnamomo Disputatio* 27 and 63, 6. t. fig. 3. 1825) gave more precise information on *Capperoe Coronde*, stating that the leaves were smaller, elliptic, slightly acute, trinervous with many transverse veinlets and not reticulate but striate and that it grew in the western and central parts of Ceylon.

Presl (*Priroz Rostlin* 2 : 39. 1825) called it *Kapuru kuurundu*.

Hasskarl (*Tweede Catal. Plantentuin Buitenzorg* 87. 1844 and *Pl. Jav. rar.* 212. 1848) refers to a variety of *C. zeylanicum* as *C. camphoratum* (kamfer kaneel, kapuru kurundu). This is apparently a misunderstanding and mixing of a variety of *C. verum* Presl (synonym : *C. zeylanicum*) of which the roots yield a camphor, with the real *Kapuru kurundu*.

As mentioned before, Blume gave the species its first official name, but as it was unrecognizable from the leaf alone, it was referred to the synonymy of *C. verum* (synonym : *C. zeylanicum*) by Thwaites and Miquel (*Ann. Mus. bot. Lugd. bat.* 1 : 256. 1864) and to the synonymy of *C. iners* by Meissner (in *DC., Prodr.* 15 (1) : 20. 1964) under its variety *trinervia*.

The Sinhalese name was misspelled : *Cappara coronde* by Guibourt & Planchon (*Hist. nat. drogues simples* 2 : 405. 1876) and *Cappara caronde* by Dragendorff (*Heilpflanzen* 240. 1898). Miquel added the synonym : *forma angustifolia* Herb. Seba.

Blume's type material (Herb. Burman, Geneva and Leiden) conforms with the younger leaves of the unknown cinnamon species, of which the mature leaves are broader, larger and less acuminate than those of *C. dubium* and lack the smooth reticulation of *C. verum*.

Trimen did not mention this species in his Flora and Index Kewensis spelled it wrongly : *C. cappara-coronde*.

As this species apparently has a medicinal bark which was and is in some esteem, it is worthwhile to try to protect it from complete extinction and forest officers and botanists are invited to be on the look-out for flowers and fruit.

It is about time after two and a half centuries that we know the source of this commercial bark.

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ADDENDUM

From the marked tree near the road of Doublecutting, in April 1972, fertile material was collected for the first time by Professor Dassanayake, Dr. S. Balasubramaniam and Mr. Magden Jayasuriya, with the assistance of Miss Karunaratne of the tea shop near Doublecutting (who provided information on the time of flowering).

Comparison of this material with the type leaf in Geneva confirmed its identity.

A complete description of this forgotten, commercial cinnamon species will appear in the treatment of the Lauraceae of the new edition of the Flora of Ceylon.