



From Mythology to Symbolic Meanings: Spices and Aromatic Herbs in Ancient Times

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Abstract

Myths and symbolic meanings have an important place in human beings' understanding of the past. In a similar vein, spices and aromatic herbs, have been an important part of cultures and have given information about the beliefs and lifestyles of societies. From this point of view, the aim of the present study is to compile folk beliefs, symbolic meanings and mythological stories about spices and aromatic herbs that have an important place in gastronomy culture for centuries. At the end of the study; it has been determined that spices and aromatic herbs have an important place in the myths that a society interpreted with belief, emotion and imagination to explain the universe and natural events in prehistoric times, and the symbolic meanings that people attribute to spices and aromatic herbs, which they consider valuable, and sacred, differ according to changing conditions and time.

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INTRODUCTION

The term mythology, which is formed from the combination of the Greek words “Mythos” (myth) and “Logos” (speaking, telling) (Ulutürk, 2012; Koç & Çaylak Dönmez, 2020) refers to a body of stories that attempt to explain the origins and fundamental values of a given culture and the nature of the universe and humanity (New World Encyclopedia, 2022). Since they contain many symbolic elements, mythologies are a comprehensive method of expression that helps to express everything that the ancients wanted to tell (Ateş, 2001).

Myths, which consist of great legends that play a fundamental role in the management of societies according to them, are defined as stories from the past life of a particular society (Singh & Singh, 2020: p.197). In the past centuries, societies have preserved their cultures, lifestyles, national and spiritual values by transferring them from generation to generation with myths (Yayan & Kartal, 2018: p.1995). Myths, which are as old as human history, have given a symbolic expression to the system of relations between man and the universe (Vambe & Khan, 2009: p.65). Myths and symbols in mythology provide information about the origin of the world and life, natural events, gods, legendary heroes, lifestyles and spirits (Yayan & Kartal, 2018: p.1995). As a matter of fact, symbols are a product of the system of compromises that people come to terms with and create in social life. On the basis of the social and cultural structure of the society lies the system of symbols that individuals agree on and that belong to a culture with these features. They are symbolic markers that distinguish one community from another. The symbols of the community are mental constructs. It provides people to create meaning (Beşirli, 2017: p.70). It is seen that spices and aromatic herbs are frequently included in many myths transferred from ancient times to the present day. It is stated that spices and herbs, which were considered as the most valuable gift given to humans by the god’s centuries ago, are sometimes identified with the lives of people in mythology, and they also play a role in influencing some events (Tarhan, Arslan & Şar, 2016: p.1).

When the literature is examined, it has been determined that spices and aromatic herbs are generally discussed with topics and titles such as general usage areas of aromatic herbs (Göktaş & Gıdık, 2019), therapeutic use (Aslan, 2019), women's spice use habits (Demircioğlu, Yaman & Şimşek, 2007), antimicrobial effects of spice essential oils (Çon, Ayar & Gökalp, 1998), province-based spice consumption habits (Kılıçhan & Çalhan, 2015), the use of spice types in cheese (Göncü & Akın, 2017), antimicrobial activities of spices (Arora & Kaur, 1999), the place of spices in culinary culture (İflazoglu & Sarper, 2021). The limitation of the studies in which the mythological stories, beliefs and symbolic meanings of spices and aromatic herbs were examined together has been an encouraging factor for this study. For this reason, the aim of the study is to compile folk beliefs, symbolic meanings and legends about spices and aromatic herbs, which have an important place in gastronomy culture for centuries. The fact that spices and aromatic herbs were effective in conveying and interpreting many cultural elements such as beliefs, rituals, and legends in ancient times reveals the importance of this study. Therefore, in the present study, spices and aromatic herbs are discussed within the scope of mythological stories, folk beliefs and symbolic meanings. It is foreseen that the study will contribute to the literature and will shed light on researchers who want to examine the subject from a deeper and broader perspective.

Spices and Aromatic Herbs

Spices and aromatic herbs have been in a central position for all material and spiritual aspects of life since the first humans. Spices and aromatic herbs, which are as old as human history, have played an important role in the

development stages of civilizations such as first humans, Ancient Egypt, Early Chinese Dynasty, Ancient Mesopotamia, Indian, Ancient Greek and Roma, Medieval Europe and America for centuries. It revolutionized the economy and medicine, and changed the course of history. Spices and aromatic herbs are not only products for which wars are fought, lands are conquered, and they are a source of wealth for their owner, but also gain social and religious importance (Rosengarten, 1969; Peter, 2004: p.1). In addition, their taste and aroma have made them indispensable in the preparation of delicious dishes (Parthasarathy, Chempakam & Zachariah, 2008: p.1). As a matter of fact, with the existence of humanity, spices and aromatic herbs has been used for many different purposes such as medicine, cosmetics, flavoring, aphrodisiac, superstition, ritual, magic, incense, embalming. In addition, spices and aromatic herbs which are indispensable elements of culinary culture, is the history of the rise and fall of lands discovered, empires established and destroyed, wars won and lost, treaties signed and rejected, tastes sought and avoided, and different religious beliefs (Rathore & Shekhawat, 2008: p.85).

There are various definitions and benefits of spice and aromatic herbs, which are discussed from different perspectives in the literature. Spices and aromatic herbs are often used interchangeably, but are defined differently. While aromatic herbs are defined as leafy plants with nutritional and medicinal benefits; spices can be processed foodstuffs used for aroma, odor and taste enhancement (Egharevba & Gamaniel, 2017: p.1436). Spices are dried seeds, fruits, roots, bark or herbal substances used for flavoring (Rathore & Shekhawat, 2008: 85; Olife et al., 2013: p.12). Aromatic herbs are defined as leafy plants with nutritional and medicinal benefits (Egharevba & Gamaniel, 2017: p.1436). Aromatic herbs store flavor components in their leaves, while spices store in seeds, bark, and roots. A spice can be the bud (clove), bark (cinnamon), root (ginger), aromatic seed (cumin) and flower stigma (saffron) of a herbs (Ogbunugafor et al., 2017: p.171). In addition to flavoring, coloring or preserving food, spices can also be used to mask other flavors, and many have antimicrobial properties (Olife et al., 2013: p.12). Spices appetize and add visual appeal to foods. It is also stated that it has positive effects in the treatment of many diseases, especially chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases (Ogbunugafor et al., 2017: p.171-172).

The first real records of the use of spices and aromatic herbs are dated between 2600 and 2100 BC, known in Ancient Egypt as the Pyramid Age. Workers working in the construction of the Cheops pyramid consumed aromatic herbs such as onions and garlic to protect their health. In the 2500s B.C., cumin, anise, marjoram, cassia and cinnamon were imported from China and Southeast Asia to be used in processes such as embalming (Rosengarten, 1969: 26). In 3000 BC, the Chinese started the spice trade based on the sale of cinnamon, cardamom, ginger and turmeric. The spice trade, which was initiated by the Chinese, later developed into the hands of the Arabs, and the Arabs, who did not want to lose this profitable trade to others, hid the source of the spice for centuries (Tayar, 2012). The use of spices has spread from the Middle East to the Eastern Mediterranean and Europe. Spices from China, Indonesia, India, and Sri Lanka were first transported overland by caravans of donkeys or camels. Arabs controlled the spice trade until European explorers discovered a sea route to India and other spice-producing countries in the East. Wars were fought and countries were discovered thanks to precious spices. In the stories of Marco Polo's trip to China in the late 1200s, the spice trade in these unknown lands was described, and this led many Europeans to seek spices (Rathore & Shekhawat, 2008: p.85-86).

The discoveries of Christopher Columbus in 1492 were on the search for spices and aromatic herbs. In Mesopotamia, the cradle of civilization, where agriculture began, there is evidence that people used thyme for its

health properties as early as 5000 BC and cultivated garlic until 3000 BC (Ogbunugafor et al., 2017: p.171). It is seen that spices and aromatic herbs, which are indispensable products of kitchens, have been used for various purposes throughout history and are important products that have been traded. On the other hand, spices and aromatic herbs have taken their place in mythology as the most valuable treasure given to humans by the gods even in prehistoric times (Özdek & Fakir, 2019: p.433).

Religious forms of worship, as well as the beliefs of the ancient Greeks and Romans, were closely tied to nature. Wreaths of aromatic herbs sacred to the gods were presented in homes and public altars, placed on the corpses and tombs of the dead, and worn in cult rites. Although there was a great diversity of beliefs over the five hundred years from Homer's time to the fall of Rome, most Greek myths and Roman rituals were designed to promote abundance and well-being. Since ancient times, spices and aromatic herbs have been not only a real but also a symbolic power in both religion and healing (D'Andrea, 1982: p.13). On the other hand, under the influence of superstitions, bundles of spices and aromatic herbs were prepared and tied to the doors of houses in order to drive away witches and evil spirits and to prevent diseases. It was sometimes burned as incense for similar purposes (Rosengarten, 1969). In order to better understand this process, the mythological stories and symbolic meanings of some spice and aromatic herbs are given below.

Spices and Aromatic Herbs in Mythology

Spices and aromatic herbs, which were the first products to travel around the world through trade networks, have been mentioned frequently in written and oral sources for thousands of years. For example, when his brothers sold the Prophet Joseph, those who bought him were spice traders from Arabia to Egypt. When the Queen of Sheba visited the Prophet Suleiman and tested his virtue, she gave him the royal gift of Arabian spice as a reward (Ardali, 2018). There are several references to herbs and spices in the Bible; they were grown in the Garden of Eden and were therefore considered sacred. Priests used them in worship, magic and rituals, and shamans used them as talismans to exorcise evil spirits (Brassfield, 2017). Moreover, it is seen that spices and aromatic herbs are frequently included in many myths transferred from ancient times to the present.

The mythological stories and symbols of some spices and aromatic herbs, which have been used for various purposes from ancient times to the present and are frequently used in cuisines, are listed below in alphabetical order.

Fennel: In his work named *Theogony*, Hesiod details Prometheus stealing fire with a hollow fennel stalk and giving it to people (D'Andrea, 1982: p.7). According to legend, Prometheus stole fire from the gods with a tool he invented. This tool is the stem of the fennel. Along with this fennel stalk which is a fast-burning herbs, Prometheus stole fire from the gods in the sky and gave it to people by descending to earth. In fact, fire is a secret that the gods refrain from teaching mankind. But Prometheus broke the laws of nature and attained the divine secret. When Prometheus began to teach the divine secret to people, he went beyond his limits. Prometheus was punished by Zeus for obtaining and disseminating this information (Tökel, 2009; Akçayoğlu, 2020).

Garlic: According to the myth, Apollo fell in love with Koronis, the daughter of the Lapit King Phlegias, who came to the Lake of Beobeis in Thessaly and bathed every day. One day, when Apollo had to go to Delphi, the center of prophecy, he assigned the crow, whose feathers were white until then, to watch over Koronis. Although Koronis was pregnant with Apollo's child, she took advantage of Apollo's absence and had a relationship with Iskhys, the son

of Elatos from Arcadia. Witnessing this infidelity of Koronis, the crow went to Delphi to tell everything to Apollo. Apollo, who has the ability to foresee everything, immediately learned that his lover was cheating on him and was angry. Apollo started the punishment from the crow who came to inform him. He cursed the crow, who brought such bad news, by turning its white feathers black. When Apollo told his sister Artemis about Koronis's infidelity, Artemis got very angry and killed Koronis with his arrows. Apollo was very upset over the death of his lover, but it was too late. The spirit of Koronis has reached Tartaros, and his body is prepared for cremation. At this very moment, Apollo asked Hermes for help to save the child in the womb of Koronis. Hermes immediately took action and pulled the child out of the body engulfed by the flames. The boy, called Asklepios, was given to Chiron, the wisest of the Centaurus, to be raised. He learned all nature knowledge and hunting from him, and started medicine to transfer his knowledge and help those in need. Asklepios, who became a successful doctor in a short time, found a cure for death as well as diseases. While the blood flowing from the veins on the left side of Medusa, who was killed by Perseus with the help of Athena, contains an effective medicine against death, there is poison in the veins on the right side. Athena, who seized this blood after Perseus killed Medusa, gave the blood to Asklepios, which was a cure for death. Asklepios, who was sorry for the death of people and tried to cure them, started to resurrect the people who died with great enthusiasm. Zeus, who could not bear the deterioration of the mortal system he had established, immediately seized this situation and killed Asklepios by striking him with the lightning bolts he sent. The medicine of immortality, which Asklepios was holding at that time, fell from his hand and mixed with the soil, and garlic, which was a panacea, came out of the soil (Kılıç & Eser, 2017: p.146-147).

Mint: In mythology, mint is the name of Minthe, the lover of Hades, the god of the underworld. Although it is not known exactly how this love started, it is known that Hades' wife Persephone was jealous of Minthe. Because Persephone senses this relationship, she hurts Minthe at every opportunity and makes the young nymph suffer. There are two rumors about this. According to the first of these, Persephone finally could not stand this jealousy any longer and crushed the nymph under her feet. Very upset by this situation, Hades turns Minthe into a fragrant mint herb. According to the second rumor, Persephone turns Minthe into dust. Hades couldn't resist his lover, and he made these dusts sprinkled on the ground turn into mint. Therefore, mint bears the name and scent of the beautiful nymph (Gezgin, 2007: p.106; İlhan, 2013).

Parsley: According to legend, Opheltes is the son of the Nemean King Lycurgus and Queen Eurydice. When Opheltes is born, Lycurgus goes to the oracle of Delphi to try to find out how best to ensure the happiness and health of the child, and the oracles advise the king that the child should never be put on the ground before he can walk. One day, Adrastos and his soldiers meet Hypsipyle in Nemea. Adrastos and his soldiers, who are on a long journey and are very thirsty, ask Hypsipyle where they can find the nearest water source. Hypsipyle fell for a moment into the void, laying Opheltes on the ground, and goes with them to show the men the way to the water source. However, Opheltes, who should never be left on the ground until he can walk, is killed by a snake after being left on the ground. Amphiaraus, one of the soldiers of Adrastos, says that the death of the child is an omen of bad luck and that the men will lose their lives in the conflicts that await them (Anonymous, 2020). Thus, Opheltes is called Archemoros (Herald of Death). Opheltes has become a symbol of death, and it is said that the first parsley sprouts were formed from drops of blood that fell to the ground in a snake attack. These parsley sprouts are collected and made into a small crown wreath and hung over his grave (Troop, 2013; Encyclopedia Mythica, 2022).

Poppy: Hades falls in love with Persephone, the daughter of Demeter and Zeus, known as the goddess of agriculture and fertility in Greek mythology, and plans to kidnap her. He asks permission from his brother Zeus for this, and Zeus accepts and says that he will help him. As soon as Persephone, wandering in the countryside, reaches for daffodils with a dizzying scent, Hades ascends to the surface and takes her and returns to his underground palace. The cries of pain of the abducted Persephone scatter from the underground to the earth. Although Demeter followed the voices, she could not find her daughter and searched for her daughter for nine days without eating or drinking. Demeter, who was deeply saddened because she could not find it, neglected her duty as the goddess of fertility, causing the earth to become barren. Demeter learns everything and leaves Olympus. Zeus talks to Hades because he wants Demeter to return. Hades feeds Demeter a pomegranate seed and sends her to earth at certain times of the year so that she does not want to be separated from her husband and remains attached to him the place of the poppy in this story is as follows; It is said that Demeter ate poppy seeds and poppy leaves to overcome her sadness. Also, in Roman mythology, Demeter was called "Ceres". Ceres is depicted in association with poppy pods and weasels. Due to the numerous seeds in the poppy capsules, Demeter's being the goddess of abundance and fertility has been associated with this aspect as well. It is also referred to as a "sacred herbs" in mythology (Chatfield, 2014; Kara, 2020).

Rosemary: The myth about rosemary is that rosemary flowers were once white. When the Virgin Mary was fleeing from Herod, they turned blue after covering her blue cloak over a rosemary bush. Still associated with the Virgin Mary today, rosemary is used to decorate homes and churches at Christmas (Bogren, 2022).

Sage: According to the legend, when King Herod learn from the oracles that the baby Jesus will be a prophet and will rule the lands he is in, he wants him to be killed. The Blessed Virgin Mary hears the voice of the soldiers as she flees with her baby. He hides Jesus in a hollow of rock. He asks all the flowers to hide his son. Roses and other flowers with thorns will not accept this. Only the sage agrees to hide the baby. Thanks to the sage whose leaves grow and become a bush, the soldiers who cannot see the baby Jesus go away. Thereupon, the Virgin Mary blesses sage and says that from that moment on, it will forever be the most beloved herbs of mankind. Since then, the sage herbs has been considered sacred and believed to have many healing powers (Indobase Holidays, 2022)

It has been claimed that when the Virgin had begun her flight into Egypt she sought refuge from the hunters of Herod in a sage, which she blessed, whereupon the herbs put forth a blush of fragrance in all its leaves. A later tale, which may have its roots in a sun or season myth of pre-Christian time, represents the sage as a nymph living in a hollow oak beside a pool where jonquils sprang, dulling her shy beauty. But she had no jealousy. She looked into the water mirror and saw her own face there, without pride, and she looked on the blossoms of the wood and loved them. Long she lived there in peace and happiness, and did not know the human face. But the silence of the wood was disturbed by a call of horns and baying of hounds, and the king rode that way, hunting. As he came to the foot of the oak, where sage flower stood, her modest beauty charmed him. It was death for her to love a mortal, yet so deep was the affection which the sight of the young king stirred in her breast that she made no attempt to check it. He had only to tell her of his love to receive her confession. "The fine days are gone," she said, but solitude is still beautiful. Let us remain here alone together. It lightens my heart to be with y you. You ask my love: I give you my life. The king did not understand, and he folded her passionately in his arms. Sage flower returned his caress, but her arms relaxed, her head drooped. The king placed her on the bank and hurried to dip water from the pool to revive her. But the heat of love had been more than the fragile sage flower could endure. She had faded out of life. And the

king went away, mourning. This is a poetic way of saying that the flower loves the sun and fades in the heat after fertilization (Skinner, 1911: p.262-263).

Saffron: Krokos is a handsome boy in love with the nymph Smilax. However, Hera is jealous of them and turns Krokos into saffron and Smilax into climbing herbs (Caiola & Canini, 2010; Gezgin, 2007: p.119). According to ancient Greek mythology, Krokos (Crocus) was a friend of god Hermes. One day, as they were playing, Hermes killed Krokos by mistake by hitting his head. Three blood drops from his head fell on the top of the flower of the herbs and the stigmata were created. Since then, the herbs obtained the name Krokos (Crocus) (Christodoulou, Kadoglou, Kostomitsopoulos et al., 2015: p.1634; Cid-Pérez, Nevárez-Moorillón, Ochoa-Velasco et al., 2021). According to another legend, Til, a hero from Sardis, died as a result of a snake bite in winter. However, when the saffron flower that blooms in the spring was smelled, Til woke up from his death sleep and reopened his eyes to life. This situation turned into something symbolic and symbolized as the herald of the arrival of spring. The protagonist of the spring festival, which is traditionally celebrated every year in Lydia, is Til. Because of this, the saffron flower became the symbol of spring and these festivals were called the "golden flower" festival. In addition, this myth is symbolized by the depiction of a golden branch on Lydian coins (Gezgin, 2007: p.119; Çımar & Önder, 2019: p.81).

Bay Leaf: According to the legend, Apollo, the son of Zeus, the God of Light, sees a young and beautiful girl by the river. The name of this unique beauty is Daphne (Daphne). Apollo wants to talk to her. But Daphne begins to run away from the God of Light. She runs away, while Apollo chases her, he shouts "don't run away, I love you". Daphne is frightened and continues to run away. As for Apollo, he definitely wants to catch this beautiful fairy. The distance between them gets shorter and shorter, and there comes a moment when Daphne feels Apollo's breath. Realizing that there is no escape, Daphne suddenly stops and scrapes the ground with her foot and shouts: "Mother earth, cover me, hide me, and protect me." Upon this sincere plea, Daphne feels that her organs are getting heavy and woody. A gray bark covers her chest, her fragrant hair turns into leaves, her arms grow into branches, and her young feet become roots and dive deep into the earth, becoming a laurel tree. Surprised by this sight, Apollo watches Daphne's tree formation with amazement and sadness. Then he hugs her and calls out: "Daphne, from now on you will be the sacred tree of Apollo. Those leaves that do not fade and fall will be the wreath of my head. Dear heroes, those who are victorious in wars will always adorn their foreheads with your leaves. Our names will go side by side in songs and poems". Upon these sweet words, Daphne bows her branches to Apollo respectfully. In distress and excitement, Apollo takes that tree as a symbol and makes a crown of its bright leaves. Since then, victory in poetry and weapons is rewarded with Laurel branch (d'Andrea, 1982; Türkiye Kültür Portalı, 2021; Brooklyn Museum, 2022).

Thyme: According to Greek mythology, the Trojan War is a war about the Greeks attacking the city of Troy in Anatolia as a result of the escape of Helen, the daughter of Zeus and the wife of King Menelaus, with the son of the Trojan King. Helen, who caused the Trojan wars and caused great destruction, then leaves pain, death and sadness and returns to her country after the war. She lives the next life silently and in tears. According to the belief, the Olympian gods see that Helen's tears contain courage, sadness and nobility, and they present those tears to the earth as a thyme herbs. It is also believed that the bitter essence of thyme comes from Helen's grief and sadness (Gezgin, 2007: p.87; Yaşın, 2020).

Symbolic Meanings of Spices and Aromatic Herbs

The symbolic expressions of some spices and aromatic herbs that are frequently used in the cuisines are listed below.

Basil: In ancient Greece, basil was known as a symbol of misfortune and bad luck. In Indian culture, unlike the Ancient Greeks, it was accepted as sacred herbs symbolizing love and loyalty, and it was believed to bring good luck and protect from evil. Hindus planted basil in temples and all holy places in order to benefit from the protective power of basil (Gezgin, 2007: p.58). The Romans associated basil with love and fertility. The French called basil "herbe royale". Medieval Europeans thought it was a sorcery herb. The Italians saw it as a symbol of love. Another known effect of basil throughout history is its use as an aphrodisiac (Keykubat, 2016; Bogren, 2022).

Celery: Celery is the herbs of sorrow and sadness of ancient times. That's why it is the most important herbs that adorns the dead in old tombs. Celery, which later turned into a wreath worn on the necks of people as a result of victory, became the herbs of joy and victory over time. Therefore, celery represents the double symbolism of "death and victory" (Ewbank, 2018).

Cinnamon: The earliest use of cinnamon is in religious ceremonies. In the Bible, God commands Moses to anoint the temple with cinnamon oil. Ancient Greeks and Romans used cinnamon as incense both in temples and at home to focus the mind and increase clairvoyance (The Spice Academy, 2017). It is known that when the Roman emperor Nero killed his second wife, Poppaea Sabina, in a sudden anger in 65 AD, he had all the cinnamon sticks he found burned together during the funeral ceremony, thus he wanted to make his wife forgive him (D'Andrea, 1982).

Dill: In ancient Greek and Roman cultures, dill was considered a symbol of wealth as well as being known for its healing properties. In the Middle Ages, dill was burned both in witchcraft and especially to clear clouds and thunderstorms and used to protect against witchcraft (Bogren, 2022).

Garlic: According to ancient Christian myths, the garlic that sprang from his left footprint as he took his first step into the world after Satan was expelled from the Garden of Eden is demonic. Eastern European folklore, on the other hand, has the opposite view and believes that garlic protects them from evil spirits (Gezgin, 2007: p.123).

Marjoram: Used in ancient Greece and Rome to bring love, honor and happiness to newly married couples, marjoram has long been a herb of love and happiness. It has been used as a wedding herb in love potions, spells, and bridal bouquets (The Herb Society of America, 2005). Marjoram was also traditionally planted in tombs in ancient Greece, and it was believed that if the flower blooms, it guarantees a happy life after death (D'Andrea, 1982: p.66).

Myrtle: Myrtle is the sacred herbs of the Greek goddess Aphrodite and the Roman goddess Venus, and the messenger god Hermes fashioned his magical sandals from myrtle branches. Fragrant myrtle was associated with both love and death in antiquity (D'Andrea, 1982: p.60). In ancient Greek mythology, myrtle symbolized beauty and youth with its evergreen leaves, pleasant scent and elegant flowers (Gençler Özkan & Gençler Güray, 2009: p.160).

Mint: The ancient Greeks used mint to rub their arms and believed that the scent of mint symbolized the scent of strength. Mint is an herb attributed to Venus. It symbolizes love, passion, devotion and virtue. In addition, mint has been seen as a medicinal herbs in every age and has been used in funeral ceremonies with the thought that it purifies the soul by revitalizing it. The Greeks believed that the smell of mint symbolized the smell of power (İlhan, 2013). Mint was also used in mysterious rituals such as divination and exorcism, and was also considered an aphrodisiac (Raghavan, 2007).

Onion: In ancient Egypt, the onion sometimes represented the universe and sometimes immortality. It was also common practice in Ancient Egypt to bury the deceased with their onions. Thus, it was symbolized by this onion that the person whose bodily death went on the journey of immortality (Gezgin, 2007: p.125).

Parsley: Parsley, which symbolizes death in the story of Opheltes, symbolizes rebirth in the story of Persephone. Therefore, parsley was a symbol of both death and rebirth in Greeks and Romans (Gezgin, 2007: p.94). In Jewish tradition, parsley symbolized new beginnings as it was associated with Passover (Raghavan, 2007).

Rosemary: In ancient Greece and Rome, rosemary was the herb of memory and a symbol of both love and death (D'Andrea, 1982: 73). In addition, it was accepted as a symbol of "devotion" by the ancient Greeks and Romans and was attached to the bridal crown in wedding ceremonies (Polat, 2020: p.39). The ancient Greeks used rosemary as incense to banish evil spirits and diseases. In the middle ages, it was believed that burning rosemary leaves and branches would scare away evil spirits and purify the environment from bad energies (Sasikumar, 2004). Rosemary has also been named the "Rose of Mary" in memory of the Virgin Mary (Brassfield, 2017).

Sage: It is known that the Romans considered sage sacred and collected it with care in a special ceremony. The sage, which represents immortality, wisdom and protection, is also one of the symbols of the Virgin Mary in Christianity (Keykubat, 2016). The ancient Greeks believed that eating sage brought great wisdom, and that sage could give longevity and even immortality simply by growing it in the garden. According to traditional Celtic belief, sage symbolizes wisdom. In the middle ages, the belief that sage prolongs life expressed in the proverb as "Why would a man die if he grows sage in his garden?" (Harding, 2017).

Bay leaf: In ancient Greek mythology, bay leaf symbolizes impossible love as she turns into a bay tree while Apollo is chasing her. Bay leaf is also the herbs of poets, seers, warriors, statesmen and doctors. Bay leaves, which are worn like a wreath, are also symbols of victory, courage and fame (Kemer, Çelik Gençoğlu & İflazoğlu, 2021: p.39). The ancient Greeks, who saw the bay as sacred, believed that it protected people from disease, witchcraft and lightning. Ancient Romans wore bay leaf wreaths on their heads as a symbol of victory and peace (Rigsby, 1998).

Thyme: Thyme, which has a history of thousands of years, has been the symbol of nobility, courage and wealth in ancient times. Giving thyme-smelling and thyme-patterned gifts to the soldiers who went to war until the time of the Crusades, and incensing by burning thyme in temples always stemmed from this belief (Bozdemir, 2019: p.583). In Greek mythology, it is told that thyme was born from the place where the tears of Helen of Troy fell. His silent tears have turned into thyme. That is why thyme is known as the herbs of nobility and courage in Ancient Greece (Gezgin, 2007: p.87). In order to summarize the symbolic meanings, and uses of some spice and aromatic herbs are given below (Table 1).

Table 1. Symbolic Meanings of Spices and Aromatic Herbs in Antiquity and Their Uses

Spices and Aromatic Herbs	Symbolic Meanings and Purposes of Use
Anise	Protection from evil, preventing nightmares, aphrodisiac
Basil	Hatred, enmity, love, abundance, happiness, hospitality, love, aphrodisiac
Black pepper	Negativity, exorcism, protection from evil
Black seed	Greed, love
Celery	Death and victory
Chili pepper	Loyalty, love, breaking the spell
Cinnamon	Spirituality, success, healing, protection, power, love, luck, prosperity, incense
Clove	Protection from evil forces, aphrodisiac

Table 1. Symbolic Meanings of Spices and Aromatic Herbs in Antiquity and Their Uses (cont.)

Coriander	Eternal love, lasting passion, prosperity, immortality, aphrodisiac
Cumin	Magical power (to protect valuables and prevent the lover from walking away), Loyalty
Curry	Protection
Dill	Magic potion (against witchcraft), love charm, aphrodisiac, wealth
Fennel	Holiness, victory, courage, protection from witches
Garlic	Strength, courage, protection from evil spirits, aphrodisiac
Juniper	Protection from evil spirits and witches, good luck
Lavender	Love, romance, stress reliever, opiate, protection from evil spirits and witches
Marjoram	Youth, romantic love, happiness, aphrodisiac, love charm
Mint	Hospitality, exorcism, aphrodisiac, love, passion, devotion, virtue
Mustard	Fertility
Nutmeg	Status, aphrodisiac
Onion	Immortality
Marjoram	Love, romance, protection from evil spirits and witches, joy, good luck
Parsley	Bad luck, cunning, power, new beginning (in Judaism), love of life, death
Poppy seed	Abundance, sleep, death, remembrance
Rose	Life, mystery, serenity, divine power, love
Rosemary	Loyalty, love, memory, exorcism (in funeral, wedding, ritual)
Sage	Memory, immortality, longevity, wisdom, health
Sesame	Magical power, good luck, immortality
Bay Leaf	Wealth, protection from the evils of the devil, victory, courage, success, mind
Thyme	Courage, nobility, wealth, love
Turmeric	Abundance, goodness

Source: Compiled by researchers

In addition to the spices and aromatic herbs mentioned above, coriander seeds were planted in the tombs as a symbol of eternal love and lasting passion. Cumin was accepted as a symbol of loyalty, soldiers and merchants carried cumin seeds in their pockets as a souvenir of their loved ones (Dalby, 2002). Clove is also closely associated with the fate of the newborn baby, so its herbs is planted in the name of every baby born. Rose petals, a symbol of love and victory, were generously scattered on the roads of weddings and war winners by the Romans (Rigsby, 1998).

Conclusion and Recommendations

In ancient times, people attributed a symbolic meaning to the things they saw as valuable and sacred. Symbols, one of the important elements of culture, have different meanings according to changing conditions and time. Attributed symbolic meanings differ from culture to culture and are similar at the same time. Spices and aromatic herbs are one of the elements that have symbolic meanings in ancient times. With the existence of humanity, spices and aromatic herbs have many different purposes such as medicine, cosmetics, flavoring, aphrodisiac, superstition, ritual, magic, incense, embalming. Legends-symbolic meanings of spices and aromatic herbs in different cultures and time periods are inextricably linked to culture and religious belief. Many have symbolic meanings dating back centuries or even millennia. Many aromatic herbs and spices from anise to rosemary, sage to cumin had symbolic functions such as protection from evil, aphrodisiac, loyalty, memory, wisdom, and magical power in this age. While some symbolize love, devotion, victory, power, bad luck; some were used as a way to protect from evil spirits.

Today, spices and aromatic herbs are most commonly used as flavoring in kitchens. These spices and aromatic herbs grown in different geographies also affect the culinary culture of them. With the recent increase in the demands for gastronomic tourism, the importance of local products, dishes and even the materials used in the meals, which are an important part of the culture in every destination, is increasing. Individuals who participate in gastronomic tours especially want to get information about the cooking and stories of the dishes belonging to a destination. In this

context, knowing the mythologies and symbolic meanings of spices and aromatic herbs that are grown in a certain destination or that are frequently included in the culinary culture of these destinations will contribute greatly to the promotion of the culinary culture of that destination.

Since the present study is limited to examining the symbolic meanings and mythological stories of spices and aromatic herbs in ancient times, other foodstuffs are not discussed. Therefore, this study is capable of guiding future studies on the mythological stories and symbolic meanings of foodstuffs. For this reason, it is recommended to examine the subject from a wider perspective. On the other hand, it is thought that the results obtained from the current study will also benefit the students who receive gastronomy education, the academicians working in the field of gastronomy and tourism, as well as the gastronomy guides. For example, the mythological story and symbolic meanings attributed to spices and aromatic herbs can serve as a resource for related courses in this field. In addition, knowing and telling the symbolic meanings and mythological stories attributed to spices and aromatic herbs in the storytelling of the dishes can increase the promotion and retention of the dishes. In gastronomy tours, transferring this information to tourists by guides can add an interesting feature to both tours and spices and aromatic herbs.

Declaration

All authors of the article contribute equally to the article process. The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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