

## An Artifact Speaks • Artifact Information Sheet

**Spices and Herbs:** Turmeric, mustard seed, coriander, and cumin.

### **Background Information:**

#### **Turmeric**

Turmeric is a plant that belongs to the ginger family. It is native to southern India and Indonesia. The root is bright yellow with a tan skin.

This plant has been used for thousands of years for a variety of purposes. In foods, it's used to flavor curry spice blends and add color to mustards, butters, and cheeses. In fiberworking, it is a beautiful dye for cloth. As a medicine, it has been used as an anti-inflammatory. It was also used as a perfume in ancient times.

#### **Mustard Seeds**

Mustard is in the same family as cabbage, broccoli, and brussel sprouts. The plant is native to Asia Minor, but is also grown today in Canada, India, China, and some parts of Europe. There are three main varieties of mustard: white, black, and brown. The black variety is the most pungent. Its use as a spice is recorded in Indian and Mesopotamian texts as far back as 3000 BCE.

Mustard is seen as a healthy food, for it is rich in vitamins, minerals, and anti-oxidants. Mustard seed and mustard oil have been traditionally used to relieve the pain of sore muscles, rheumatism, and arthritis.

#### **Cumin**

Cumin is an aromatic spice in the parsley family that is sold both whole or ground. What is called the seed is actually the fruit of the plant. It is native to the Mediterranean and an important ingredient in Middle Eastern, Asian, Mediterranean, and Mexican foods. Cumin is a main ingredient in curry powder. Its peppery flavor made it a good replacement for pepper in ancient times, when pepper was expensive and hard to acquire.

Cumin seeds are an excellent source of iron, and the spice has traditionally been thought to aid in digestion.

#### **Coriander**

Coriander is an herb of the parsley family. Like cumin, the seed is actually the fruit of the plant. It is native to the Mediterranean and Middle East. The seeds are used to flavor sausages, curries, and some kinds of sweets. The leaves are used in Latin American, Indian, and Chinese dishes. In medicine, it is used to mask the bad tastes and odors of drugs.

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