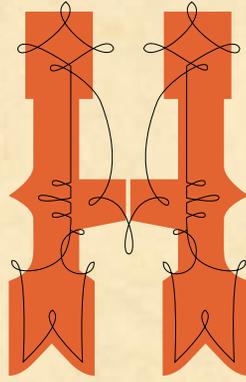


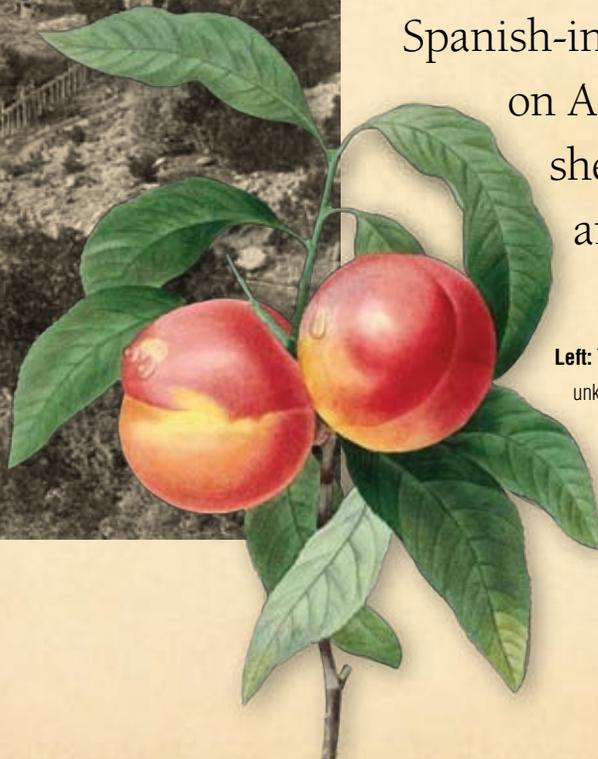
FRUIT COMES FROM THE ARCHBISHOP

For the Table and the Soul

BY GARY PAUL NABHAN



OME COOKS and chefs of the Southwest have never lacked for delicious fruit, given the fact that native prickly pears, wild plums, elderberries, wolfberries, blackberries, hackberries, and persimmons grow along streams and in canyons from Texas to California. But a turning point occurred in southwestern agricultural and culinary history roughly 400 years ago, after the first Spanish-introduced fruit took root on American soil in the watersheds of the Rio Grande and the Rio Colorado.



Left: The Bishop's Lodge (Villa Pintoresca), ca. 1900, photographer unknown. Courtesy Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), Neg. No. 010647. Today the property in the Tesuque Valley, north of Santa Fe, is the Bishop's Lodge Ranch Resort & Spa. Archbishop Lamy's original chapel and dwelling, and many of the apple trees lining the drive, remain.



Above: Archbishop Jean Baptiste Lamy, second from left, in the Archbishop's garden in Santa Fe, ca. 1880, photographer unknown. Courtesy Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), Neg. No. 049017.

Suddenly, large, edible, or fermentable fruits were available to be grown in this semiarid region, and whether dried, jammed, pickled, or fermented then distilled, they began to offer fruity fragrances and flavors to farming communities year-round.



Missionaries, miners, and Mediterranean fruits

Perhaps no other introductions were as rapidly adopted and distributed across the Southwest as were the Mediterranean fruits carried along by missionaries and miners. Arguably, the impact of these Spanish-speaking immigrants on America's horticultural legacy dwarf those of Thomas Jefferson and Johnny Appleseed. And yet, few American horticultural historians have bothered to pay as much attention to the northward cultural diffusion of fruits and nuts from Spain and the Canary Islands to Mexico as they have to the westward diffusion from Williamsburg, Plymouth Rock, and New Amsterdam. Nevertheless, prior to the arrival of the Spanish themselves, as far north as the Gila River near present-day Phoenix, watermelon fruit and their seeds had been traded up from Spanish colonies in Mesoamerica. When,

in his 1610 epic poem *Historia de la Nuevo México*, Gaspar Pérez de Villagrà described fields and gardens in the Rio Arriba of northern New Mexico as they were in 1598, he declared that the indigenous farmers there were “much inclined to cultivate the earth and steward the same. They harvest beans, corn, and squashes, melons and the rich sloes of Castile.”

The significance of the phrase “rich sloes of Castile” eluded me and many others who, over the years, have read Pérez de Villagrà's narrative poem of the colonization of New Mexico. The sloe of Castile is a cultivated blackthorn tree or shrub with dark blue plums native to southern Europe and northern Africa which was called *dendrìna* or, more generally, *ciruela* in Spanish. Although native wild plums do occur in the headwaters of the Rio Grande, the phrase “sloes of Castile” not only signals that they were introduced, but that they were fully domesticated, just as the “rose of Castile” is differentiated from the wild roses of the Americas. If they had arrived in New Mexico with Oñate in 1598, it appears that they were immediately adopted, because most of the other produce noted in Pérez de Villagrà's poem were New World crops or immediate sensations as introductions.

In his book *Gardens of New Spain: How Mediterranean Plants and Foods Changed America* (University of Texas Press, 2004),

historian William W. Dunmire has done a lasting service to southwesterners by registering the earliest dates and earliest places of introduction for at least two dozen fruit and nut tree species introduced to the northern “rim of Christendom,” including the region we now refer to as the US/Mexico borderlands. But there remain several common but faulty assumptions (not made by Dunmire, but his predecessors) regarding these horticultural and culinary introductions:

- That all of the fruits, nuts, and vegetables introduced by missionaries to New Mexico and adjacent colonies were originally from the Old World. The missionaries and miners also brought northward on the Camino Real routes several Mesoamerican varieties of prickly pear and *capulin* sand cherries, Mexican hawthorns (*tejocotes*), plum-like *ciruelas*, and chile peppers to the border region (including the Baja California peninsula). These fruits were not known in this region prehistorically.
- That the Old World varieties came from Catholic-dominated countries in southern Europe, rather than from the Canary Islands of the Madeiras—key stopovers on the way to the Americas. There is accumulating genetic evidence which suggests much of the horticultural propagation material taken to the Americas came directly from the Canary Islands, which had centuries of trade with Berbers, Phoenicians, and other ethnicities in Morocco but had only been under Spanish control for a half century before Columbus. In short, their long-term horticultural legacy is aligned more with the Moslem Moors than with the Spanish Catholics or Sephardic Jews.
- That all of the fruit and vegetable varieties which arrived in the Southwest were introduced by *Spanish* missionaries, and therefore originated (as cultivars) on the Iberian Peninsula. In reality, the first Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries to the New World came from many places—Italy, Germany, Austria, Sicily, Tunisia, etc.—and could have brought with them or later received from relatives seeds or cuttings from many places in Europe or Africa other than Spain.
- That none of Mission-era introductions failed due to climatic or other environmental factors, or because of lack of cultural interest in them. In truth, we have little record of what happened to the aloes, the medlars, or even the true plums introduced to the Southwest. While some varieties of citrus, dates, grapes, olives, apricots, apples, pears, figs, pomegranates,

and almonds persisted in some or all of the Southwest border states, others—from rice and oats to medlars and plums—failed miserably or slowly fell into neglect.

- That all of the uses of these fruit and nut introductions were ultimately derived from culinary traditions that originated and have persisted in Spain. Instead, more of them may have linked superficially to the Moors and Sephardic Jews of al-Andalus, and more deeply to Arab and Persian cuisines. However, despite the interesting crypto-Jewish scholarship now being pursued in New Mexico, the origin of *caprotada* fruit and bread puddings cannot be used exclusively as a link to Sephardic Jewish traditions. It appears to be rooted more deeply in Moslem traditions, and similar recipes have been found in ancient culinary manuscripts from Persia and the Arab world. This particular food, and the sesame-covered *pan de semita*, has more recently been associated with religious holidays in Coahuila, New Mexico, Durango, and Sonora, where early settlers may have been crypto-Jews, crypto-Moslems, or *conversos*. In short, peoples of several faiths and ethnicities relished these foods, before, during, and after the Spanish Inquisition.

Revelations from genetics



What do new genetic tools tell us of the origins of southwestern fruits? First of all, they tell us that certain clonally propagated fruits like mission figs and mission grapes found in our region also persist in Central Mexico, part of South America, the Caribbean, the Canary Islands, Spain and/or Portugal, and Italy and/or Sicily. Because they are vegetatively propagated (without sexual reproduction) from fig tree scion wood and grapevine slips, they are essentially identical in a genetic sense to their forebearers from the Old World. Amazingly, a few long-lived trees—such as those of mission olives—are still represented in Baja California by their original plantings some three centuries later. However, a University of California team from Santa Barbara has recently discovered some “genetic divergence” from the parental type of mission olives introduced to the Catalina Islands off the California coast, suggesting some hybridization between introduced varieties.



It also appears that the first wave of apple introductions—the *manzanos mexicanos* that to some extent persist in both the Rio Arriba and the Manzanos Mountains east of Albuquerque—have been intermixed and naturally hybridized with nineteenth-century apple introductions from the East and Midwest. The feral or naturalized apple populations that grow “wild” along certain streams in the highlands of New Mexico display a mixture of traits derived from both southern Europe and northern Europe.

Lamy's horticultural legacy

One of the most historically important waves of horticultural introductions made in New Mexico, Colorado, and Arizona was accomplished largely through the genius and perspicacity of just one person—Archbishop Jean Baptiste Lamy. In 1814, Lamy was born in an agricultural valley below the Alps in southeastern France; by 1839, he had left Europe for America to live the rest of his life in the service of the Catholic Church. By the time he arrived in Santa Fe as its new bishop in 1851, he was not merely concerned with the spiritual conversion and welfare of the people he was sent to serve, but their economic and nutritional welfare as well. In his 1866 report as bishop to the Church's central council, he explicitly concerns himself with the impacts of the Santa Fe Overland Trail and the potential arrival of railroads on the rural populace of New Mexico: “As soon as these are established, the working of mines, the raising of flocks, the cultivation of vineyards, will change entirely the condition of things.” The bishop—later archbishop—then took it upon himself to intentionally introduce fruit and nut trees to each village with a church in his diocese, so that the residents' material as well as spiritual life would be improved, or at least, made more self-sufficient. He began acquiring European varieties of grafted fruit



Left: This iron *escogedor para frutas* (fruit picker) is from Guanajuato or Aguas Calientes, Mexico, late nineteenth to early twentieth century. Similar fruit pickers were used in New Mexico during this period. IFAF Collection. FA.1970.37.110. On exhibit in *New World Cuisine: The Histories of Chocolate, Mate y Más*, at the Museum of International Folk Art. Photograph by Blair Clark.

Opposite: Edward S. Curtis, *The Fruit Gatherer*, San Ildefonso Pueblo, New Mexico, ca. 1905. Courtesy Palace of the Governors Photo Archives (NMHM/DCA), Neg. No. 143723.

trees through contacts in Durango, Mexico; New Orleans; St. Louis; Los Angeles; and even directly from France.

What is known today as the Bishop's Lodge Resort outside of Santa Fe near Tesuque became Lamy's major experimental orchard for horticultural evaluation and propagation, but he also planted well over an acre of fruit trees and berry vines on the grounds of the Saint Francis Cathedral in the heart of Santa Fe. The fruits harvested from these sites were given to orphanages, schools, and nursing homes to improve the nutrition of the poor and unfortunate; his nursery also provided thousands of cuttings or grafted saplings for transport to and transplanting in Catholic communities across three states. Some were exceptional, such as an oxheart cherry which bore delicious fruit twice a year.

A few of the trees planted by Lamy himself persist to this day at the Bishop's Lodge, and the current management has reintroduced grape-growing, planting a small vineyard with cuttings that are believed to have been taken by viticulturist Elmer Townsley from the original Lamy vines before they were destroyed in the 1960s. Alas, virtually all of Lamy's trees around the cathedral have died of senescence, neglect, or land clearing for parking lots. Despite the fact that a portion of the cathedral grounds has been memorialized as "the Bishop's Garden" and designated a national historical landmark, the diocese has put hardly an effort into preserving Lamy's horticultural introductions there, while spending millions over the same period on historic preservation of architectural structures and artistic relics. That is a shame, for many yards in Santa Fe and the Rio Arriba watershed undoubtedly harbor descendants of Lamy's introductions—fruits that literally nourished the poor. What more fitting way would there be to honor Lamy and the horticultural as well as culinary legacy which he fostered than to seek out those remaining trees, take cuttings, and



reinsert them as living, fruit-bearing entities into the historic landscapes which he once personally tended?

Horticulturists and historians have accomplished similar feats at Santa Barbara Mission's La Huerta Project in California, at the Friends of Tucson's Birthplace and Tumacacori Mission in Arizona, and around many missions in Baja California. A team of volunteer historians, horticulturists, and geneticists stand ready to assist the diocese that Archbishop Lamy shepherded as soon as its administrators recognize that "his flock" was not merely the human residents of northern New Mexico, but all of Creation. ■

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