

LASCA LEAVES

Quarterly Journal of the

LOS ANGELES COUNTY STATE and ARBORETUM

A CALIFORNIA ARBORETUM FOUNDATION, INC. PUBLICATION

R. J. SEIBERT, *Editor*

VOL. I

JULY, 1951

No. 4

THE POMEGRANATE

CHARLES GIBBS ADAMS

A few paces south of the *adobe* ranch house, near the Arboretum lake, stands the stump of an ancient pomegranate tree, bravely putting out new growth to reward the Historical Committee's revival work. It is well over one hundred years old—a survivor of Hugo Reid's orchard, listed in a letter to Abel Stearns on June 1, 1844. Our cover design is even older, derived from a color plate made in 1828.¹

Probably no other tree has so venerable a written record as the pomegranate. Three thousand years ago, King Solomon sang to his love, "I will cause thee to drink of spiced wine of the juice of my Pomegranates;" and had them carved on the capitals of his temple columns. Centuries before Solomon's time, pomegranates were featured in the arts of Assyria, Egypt and Persia as symbols of fertility.

Ancient Jews considered the fruit sacred and the design appeared in their church vestments. So fond were they of the refreshment of pomegranates that certain Israelites complained of the desert to which Moses led them out of Egypt, saying it was "no place of Pomegranates." The liberator comforted them with the promise that their new land of Canaan would be a region "of wheat and barley, vines and fig trees and Pomegranates."

Greek Theophrastus, Aristotle's successor as head of the Peripatetic School and an authoritative horticultural writer, described the sacred fruit over three hundred years before Christ. While Pliny, the great Roman naturalist of the first half-century of the Christian era, named it one of the most valuable trees for garden beauty, deliciousness of its fruit and medicinal properties. Nearer to our day, Shakespeare placed Juliet's window above a pomgranate tree, among whose glistening foliage and lovely blossoms the nightingale sang so sweetly.

The sheer beauty of the tree,—with its

fountain-like form, its glossy clean foliage, often red-veined, its exquisite blossoms of orange-scarlet with petals like crumpled silk, its crimson winter fruit, hanging long after the leaves have fallen and finally splitting open to reveal a treasure trove of rubies within—such beauty alone would render it a treasure in decoration, even if it were not of signal service to man in food, drinks, crafts and medicine.

Valuable astringents are derived from the bark of the roots, as well as medicines for throat and intestinal ills. Morocco leather owes its fine quality to being tanned with the rind of the fruit. The rind also makes fine black ink. John Parkinson, the famous herbalist of Elizabethan days declared it "the best sort of writing ink, which is durable to the world's end." In countries around the Mediterranean Sea, red dye is made from the flowers, and wine from the fruit, and a favorite refreshment is sherbet of its juices.

The pomegranate can be depended upon for continuous performance of these good works; there is written record of one tree that has borne steadily for two hundred years. In culture the pomegranate is the least demanding of good fruit trees. It will prosper in almost any soil from dessert to black *adobe*; it asks but little of food and drink, cultivation and pest control.

The tree's botanic name, *Punica Granatum* L., means "the granulated (fruit) of Carthage." From that city it was introduced into Europe; and Spain's Granada was named for it. Botanically the Pomegranate belongs to the limited genus *Punicaceae*, consisting of but two species, in the vast family of *Myrtaceae*. This brings it into at least distant relationship with such widely separated plants as Myrtle, *Eugenia*, *Feijoa*, *Guava*, *Melaleuca*, and even *Tristania* and *Eucalyptus*.

¹ Johann Gottlieb Mann, *Deutschlands Arznei-Pflanzen*. 2, 1828.



Adams, Charles Gibbs. 1951. "The Pomegranate." *Lasca leaves* 1(Summer 1951), 25.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/129410>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/120476>

Holding Institution

Missouri Botanical Garden, Peter H. Raven Library

Sponsored by

Los Angeles Arboretum

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: In copyright. Digitized with the permission of the rights holder.

Rights Holder: The Arboretum Library at the Los Angeles County Arboretum and Botanic Garden

License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

Rights: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/permissions>

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.