**Etrogim: The Magic and Mystery**

*Etrogim* were extensively cultivated in the Holy Land at the time of the Second Temple, and images of *etrogim* are found at many archaeological sites of that era, including mosaics at the Maon Synagogue, Beth Alpha Synagogue, and Hamat Tiberias Synagogue. The *etrog* is also found on numerous Bar Kochba coins.

After the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE, exiled Jews planted citron orchards wherever the climate allowed: in Southern Europe (Spain, Greece, and Italy) as well as in North Africa and Asia Minor. Jews who settled north of the warmer citron-growing areas depended on imported *etrogim*, which caused much anxiety given the dangers and uncertainties of sea travel. By the 17th century, some of the most popular sources for *etrogim* were the islands of Corsica and Corfu.

Since the late 1850s, the Fruit of the Goodly Tree Association in Palestine represented *etrog* farmers who marketed their crops to Jews in Europe. Some Jewish communities still preferred citrons from Italy, Greece, Morocco, or Yemen, but many Jews seeking citrons turned back to *Eretz Yisrael*, the Land of Israel.

**Diamante Etrog**

The Cedro diamante is a cultivar of citron that grows in the citron coast, located in the province of Cosenza, Calabria, on the southwestern coast of Italy, which is its most known cultivation point.

Many religious Jews call it Yanova Esrog (Genoa citron), because of its long association with the trading port of Genoa in northern Italy, from where it was exported to other countries. Genoa was known to supply citron for the Jews since the times of the Tosafists, along with surrounding municipalities Sanremo, Bordighera, and the rest of Liguria. Most adherent to the diamante variety of Calabria are still the Chabad sect, whose late Rabbis were always in support of this traditional variety, even claiming by virtue of a legend that Moshe himself obtained his *etrog* from this location. Among the other Hasidic sects, it is most used by the Satmars.

**Greek Etrog**

The Greek citron was also called pitima, or the cedro col pigolo ("citron with a pitom"), because of its usually persisting pitom (carpel).

The following description is from the Nurenbergische Hesperides (2nd Volume; 8th Chap.) by Johann Christoph Volkamer, titled “About the Cedro col Pigolo.” He was growing that kind in his botanical garden in Nuremberg, and writes that it can also be called the “Jewish Citron,” since it is mostly used for the Four Species.

“This tree does not become particularly big. The leaves are smaller than those of other citrons, and serrated, oblong, pointed towards the front, mixed with many thorns. The bloom is small and reddish from outside. The fruit blossoms are not less oblong from the beginning, appearing as reddish and dark-green; thereafter they turn entirely green, and when they ripen, straw-yellow, remaining, however, rather small all the time and never growing to a proper size, like other kinds of citron.”

**Balady Etrog**

The balady citron is a variety of *etrog*, grown in Israel, mostly for Jewish ritual purposes. Not native to the region, it was imported around 500 or 300 BCE by either Jewish or Greek settlers.

During the 1800s, the Balady was grown on the outskirts of Nablus, Nazareth, Tiberias, Safed and Alma al-Shaib, in Umm al-Fahm and in Lifta village near Jerusalem. In the 1870s, Rabbi Chaim Elozor Wax devoted himself to its cultivation and organized shipments to Europe.

He felt the Balady citron had the strongest traditional lineage of pureness of species, and claimed it was to be found in the wild when Ramban arrived in the county. He wrote many letters to the rabbis hoping to influence the diaspora to use the Balady citron.
Balady citron varieties are still grown and sold today in the Diaspora as well as in Israel and are favored by the followers of the Brisker Rov and the Chazon Ish.

Moroccan Etrog
The Moroccan citron is a true citron variety native to Assads, Morocco, which is still today its main center of cultivation. It was described by the Moroccan professor, Henri Chapot, as being a sweet citron, meaning its pulp is low in acid.

The exact date when the variety came into use for the etrog is unknown. According to local Jewry, it has been with them since they were exiled to Morocco after the destruction of the Second Temple. From then on it was highly revered by all the rabbis and communities of North Africa, without any interruption or controversy.

Yemenite Etrog
The Yemenite citron is a distinct variety of citron, usually containing no juice vesicles in its fruit segments. The bearing tree and the mature fruit’s size are somewhat larger than the trees and fruit of other varieties of citron.

Etrog haCushi is mentioned in the Mishnah as well as in both the Babylonian (Sukkah 36a) and the Jerusalem Talmud (Sukkah 3:6). The most common interpretation is that the Biblical Cush refers to Ethiopia and therefore Etrog haCushi should also refer to something which could be called the Ethiopian citron. The Ethiopian Jews did not observe the mitzvah of the Four Species, even though they did anticipate the Sukkot festival. This may have been due to their lack of ability to procure the species. Some believe this is due to some Karaite influence, whose biblical interpretation indicates the Four Species are only used as roofing for a sukkah (s’chach), and not for a separate waving ritual. However, the Yemenite citron is available in Ethiopia and its markets, where it is sold for consumption. According to Erich Isaac, the late researcher of citrus distribution, the Yemenite citron is synonymous with the Ethiopian citron, as a result of Ethiopian rule in Yemen in the past.

Did You Know?

- Eating the etrog or etrog jam is considered a segula (efficacious remedy) for a woman to have an easy childbirth.
- The heaviest etrog recorded weighed 7.5 kilo (16.5 lbs).
- Known botanically as citrus medica, the etrog has been used as a remedy for seasickness, muscular pain and skin disease.
- In India, the etrog peel is eaten to overcome bad breath.
- In Panama, citron leaves are ground up and combined with other ingredients and given as an antidote for poison.
- The etrog is also called “Adam’s apple,” or “paradise apple,” and is one of the suggested candidates for the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden.
- Today Israel is the world’s leading supplier of etrogim for Sukkot, and most Jewish communities worldwide pride themselves in using the holy fruit from the Holy Land.