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## A Botanical Mystery: The Elusive Trail of the Datil Pepper to St. Augustine

by JEAN ANDREWS

Since December 1984, when *Peppers: The Domesticated Capsicums* was published, interest in growing and eating capsicums has increased dramatically. Prior to that publication, little attention had been given to the historical aspects of the genus *Capsicum*, which is comprised of all the green and red peppers (*pimientos*) in the world, but does not include its namesake black pepper (*pimienta*) or *Piper nigrum*, a native of India, and a much wanted item in the pre-Columbian spice trade. Five-hundred years ago, while Christopher Columbus was searching for a shorter route to India and the East Indies in order to break the Muslim monopoly on the highly desired spices of the orient, he came upon the islands he called Indies, a people he considered to be Indians, and a burning spice he called pepper— the capsicums. Historians and *Capsicum* fans alike have had to deal with his misnomers ever since.

Columbus returned to Europe with many unknown plants, including *Capsicum* peppers. Some of these were carried by the Portuguese to their Atlantic islands, to Africa, India, and the Far East where they were accepted and added to the culinary schemes of the peoples of those distant lands.<sup>1</sup>

A story of long standing tradition in St. Augustine, has the Datil, one of the New World capsicums, being brought to that city over 200 years ago by a mixed group of Mediterranean indentured laborers commonly lumped under the category of Minorcans. Associated with this tale in some obscure way is a group of enslaved Africans referred to as Mandingos. The golden Datil pepper has

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1. Jean Andrews, "Diffusion of Mesoamerican Food Complex to Southeastern Europe," *Geographical Review* 83 (1992):194-204; Andrews, *Red Hot Peppers* (New York, 1993); Andrews, "The Peripatetic Chili Pepper: Diffusion of the Domesticated Capsicums Since Columbus," N. Foster and L. S. Cordell, editors, *Chiles to Chocolate*, (Tucson, 1992), 81-93; Andrews, "Around the World With the Chili Pepper: The Postcolumbian distribution of domesticated *Capsicum*," *The Journal of Gastronomy* 24 (1988):21-35.

been grown commercially in St. Johns County, for 75 years or more. In 1990 it was identified as a cultivar of *Capsicum chinense* Jacquin.<sup>2</sup> At that time it was the only variety of *C. chinense* cultivated for profit in the continental United States.

The four principal questions considered in this paper are: (1) Who were the groups called Minorcans and Mandingos? (2) Why was it impossible for the Minorcans to have introduced the Datil pepper to Florida from the Mediterranean area? (3) How did the pepper called Datil get to Florida? (4) How did it acquire the name Datil. Direct answers to these questions cannot be found in the existing literature but by reconstructing and documenting events before and after 1768, some possible solutions to the puzzle are proposed.

Late in 1986 a report from Florida of a pepper called Datil that had been grown there for over 100 hundred years inspired the interest that resulted in this study. At that time, few people living outside St. John's County, Florida, had ever heard of the Datil. The report was followed with examples of the Datil, along with a request for an opinion on its pungency in relation to other peppers grown commercially in the United States. From the description recounted in a telephone conversation,<sup>3</sup> it was impossible to relate it to any pepper being grown commercially in this country at that time. However, as soon as examples of the peppers were received it was realized that the peppers were a variety of *Capsicum chinense*, a pepper not known to be grown commercially in the United States in 1986 except around St. Augustine, Florida.

There was no way to test it except by mouth, but after that test there was no hesitation in replying that it was hotter than the *C. annuum* var. *annuum* (Jalapeño, Serrano, Cayenne) and *C. frutescens* (Tabasco) species being grown in the United States, but it was probably about the same as the Mexican Habanero, another *C. chinense*. Several attempts to germinate seed from the samples received were unsuccessful. Although interest remained undiminished, it was not until the summer of 1990 that I was able to go to Florida.

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2. Jean Andrews, "A Newly Recognized Variety of Chili-pepper (*Capsicum Solanaceae*) Developed in the United States," *Phytologia*, 69 (1990): 413-15.

3. Telephone call from Hugh Holborn of St. Augustine, Florida in early fall of 1986.

Some of the inhabitants of St. Augustine, the oldest permanent European settlement in the United States, are descendants of early European settlers and they have not forgotten their ancestors or a fiery fruit, the Datil, bequeathed to them according to legend, by those forebears,<sup>4</sup> Many grow Datils and make their own special sauces.

Like the Tabasco, which came to Louisiana in the 1840's from Mexico and through isolation and selection became a cultivar so different from its original Mexican parent that no *Capsicum frutescens* variety like it exists in Mexico today, the first Datil probably came to the United States from the West Indies, and has remained confined principally to the St. Augustine area. Floridian growers recognize that their peppers are different from the familiar peppers (*C. annum* var. *annuum*) found in supermarkets. They also sense their peppers are related to each other, but not knowing about *C. chinense*, most Floridians call all of them Datil (rhyming with "that"-el) In order to recognize the differences they modified the name of each "Datil" with a descriptor— "Puerto Rican" Datil, "Bull-nose" Datil, "Minorcan" Datil.

The tradition that the Datil was introduced to Florida by Minorcans begins with the Treaty of Paris in 1763, when England acquired Florida from Spain. Five years later, Dr. Andrew Turnbull, a Scotsman who had acquired more than 100,000 acres for himself and his partners to grow indigo, brought a large group of indentured laborers, some with families, to Florida from Mediterranean countries by way of Minorca, an island the British had acquired from Spain.

Turnbull planned to recruit Greek Orthodox settlers for the Florida property which he called New Smyrna after the home of his Greek wife Maria Garcia Dura Bin. He left the Greek conscripts in the favorable harbor of Mahón, Minorca while he went to Italy and Corsica for additional recruits. During their wait, several of the Greeks married Mahónese women. Learning of the adventure, some of the Catalan speaking Minorcan families sought also to go to Florida. Deprivation of civil and religious rights in Minorca by the British, caused the Minorcans to seek a better life in America.

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4. P. C. Griffin, *Mullet on the Beach, the Minorcans of Florida, 1768-1788*, (St. Augustine Historical Society, 1991) and J. Quinn in *The Minorcans of Florida*, (St. Augustine, 1975) are two books that provide historical accounts of that group of immigrants.

Turnbull spent a year collecting sufficient colonists to qualify for his land grant in Florida.<sup>5</sup> During that period he indentured a polyglot group of 1,400 Mediterranean farmer/laborers with contracts that seemed to provide them the choice for a better life in the future.<sup>6</sup> Turnbull was the first man ever to transport such a large number of people at one time to colonize a region in North America. The voyage to their new homeland in Turnbull's eight small ships was a stormy two-and-one-half to four month passage that claimed the lives of over ten percent of the immigrants.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, Turnbull's little fleet arrived at the bleak Florida plantation with a sizable band of colonists. Conditions on the voyage and in New Smyrna were severe, causing the death of 450 of the Mediterranean settlers during the first five months after their departure from Minorca.<sup>8</sup> Visitors to the plantation described a working situation that was so hard and long the indentured men had no time for personal gardening or fishing.<sup>9</sup> Around 1777, after nine years of misery, the survivors fled the unbearable restrictions and living conditions of the east Florida plantation by trudging 85 miles north to St. Augustine. In that little port city during 1778, the 419 illiterate laborers who were still alive settled down to make homes, work their own gardens north of the city, and become good British citizens.<sup>10</sup> Later, when all of the English colonizers and royalist refugees in Florida fled to Nova Scotia, the Bahamas, and other British possessions in the West Indies following the British defeat during the American Revolution, all but a few of the Minorcans remained in Florida.<sup>11</sup> There were no English citizens among

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5. Carita D. Corse, *Dr. Andrew Turnbull and the New Smyrna Colony of Florida*, (Jacksonville, 1919), 35, gives yet another condition which required one-third of his land to be settled in the proportion of one person to every hundred acres within three years or default it all.
  6. A. Turnbull, "The Refutation of a Late Account of New Smyrna" *The Columbian Magazine*, Dec. 1788:684-688.
  7. J. Quinn, *The Minorcans*, 14-27, gives many details of the recruitment, travel, and settlement of the Turnbull colony at New Smyrna, Florida.
  8. W. H. Siebert, "Slavery and White Servitude in East Florida. 1726-1776" (part 1); 1776-1785 (part 2), *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 10 (1931):3-23; 10 (1931):139-161.
  9. B. Romans, *A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida* (New York, 1775), 268; W. W. Dewhurst *The History of St. Augustine, Florida with an Introductory Account of the Early Spanish and French Attempts at Exploration and Settlement in the Territory of Florida* (New York, 1881), 115.
  10. E. P. Panagopoulos, *New Smyrna: An Eighteenth Century Greek Odyssey* (Gainesville, 1966), 174.
  11. G. R. Fairbanks, *The History and Antiquities of the City of St. Augustine Florida* (Gainesville, 1975 [1858]), 173.

the 1,700 people left in St. Augustine when the exiled Spanish colonists began returning from Cuba in 1784.<sup>12</sup> The second Spanish occupation was a period of stagnation with so many problems that the English were permitted to continue supplying the colony. The stable, Catalan speaking Minorcan population, which outnumbered any other group in St. Augustine, now became loyal citizens of Spain. Most of the remaining "Minorcans" owned from three to five acres of land, and some of them owned one or more slaves.<sup>13</sup>

Tradition has the Datil pepper being brought to St. Augustine around 1777 when the Minorcans fled to that city after the plantation at New Smyrna failed. Some claim that the Minorcans acquired the Datil pepper from Turnbull's Negro slaves, who were referred to as Mandingos; while others declare they were brought from Minorca. The question is, where and how did they acquire the pepper plant? I suspect that the Minorcans did not bring the Datil with them to America along with all the other seeds and cuttings from Minorca, because there were no *Capsicum chinense* being cultivated in the Mediterranean region.

In 1756, the British historian John Armstrong wrote a history of the Island of Minorca, located between latitude 39° and 40° north, in which he listed the foods cultivated there. According to Armstrong, "Here is a great plenty of Guinea-Pepper, the green Pods of which the Minorquins are especially fond of. Of these a valuable pickle is made. Such as they suffer to hand until the seeds are ripe, acquire a red colour, and being dried, and reduced to a fine Powder, are much used in their cookery, and are well known to the World under the Name of Cayan-Butter."<sup>14</sup> That is an excellent description of the red Cayenne type of *Capsicum annum*, a pepper that had originated in temperate Mesoamerica and had been acquired by the Portuguese from the Spanish shortly after the discovery of the new world. They introduced it to their west African colonies in Guinea. From the Portuguese African colonies that versatile cayenne type pepper was distributed throughout India and the Far East, and then to the Middle East and Central Europe. It went to the western Mediterranean via Lisbon and Seville.<sup>15</sup> The

12. E. L. Williams, Jr. "Negro Slavery in Florida, 1565-1863," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 28 (1949), 28 (2):93-110, 28 (3): 182-204.

13. J. R. Dunkle, "St. Augustine, Florida: A Study in Historical Geography," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Clark University, 1955), 94.

14. J. Armstrong, *The History of the Island of Minorca* (London, 1956), 180.

15. J. Andrews, *Red Hot Peppers*, 30-32.

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Portuguese were also the probable agents for its introduction into England where it was also described in 1597 by the herbalist John Gerard as the Guinea pepper.

The Mandingos enter the story early with the introduction of slavery by Pedro Menéndez de Avilés in 1565 when he founded St. Augustine.<sup>16</sup> Most of the blacks in Florida during the first Spanish period came after 1733 when Spain offered religious sanctuary to fugitive slaves from English colonies.<sup>17</sup> More black slaves arrived during the British occupation (1763-1783.)

A German traveler to British Florida in 1783 reported that Turnbull acquired 500 slaves from Africa to work on his indigo plantation in addition to the Mediterranean recruits.<sup>18</sup> Allegedly the ship carrying those unfortunate Africans sank enroute and all were lost at sea.<sup>19</sup> Whether or not that story is true, Turnbull did acquire some sixty blacks of unknown origin.<sup>20</sup>

At least as early as 1726, Spanish Florida granted unofficial religious sanctuary to free blacks and runaway slaves from the British colonies of Georgia and North Carolina, as well as Port Royal on the British island of Jamaica.<sup>21</sup>

After the runaways arrived in the bleak Spanish colonies of East Florida, they lived in an ethnic mixture with Indians and mulattoes in settlements apart from the Spaniards who lived with their own slaves in St. Augustine. A British and Indian invasion from Georgia in 1740 destroyed those outlying communities, such as Fort Mose, forcing the Spaniards to allow the free blacks to live in St. Augustine for the 12 years it took to rebuild their settlements.<sup>22</sup> Upon their arrival in Spanish territory, both the free and the runaway blacks became loyal Spanish citizens and members of the militia. All of them went into exile in Cuba along with most of the

16. E. L. Williams, Jr. "Negro Slavery in Florida, 1565-1863," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 28 (1949):94.

17. W. H. Siebert, "Slavery and White Servitude in East Florida, 1728-1776," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 10 (1931):3.

18. J. D. Schöpf, *Travels in the Confederation, (1783 - 1784)*, Vol. 1, edited by A. J. Morrison, (Philadelphia, 1911).

19. P. C. Griffin, *Mullet on the Beach*. (St. Augustine, 1991), 27, emphasizes the doubtfulness of Schöpf's account of the slave ship from Africa.

20. J. Quinn, *The Minorcans*, 21.

21. S. Mintz and R. Price, "An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past: A Caribbean Perspective," *ISHI Occasional Papers in Social Change* (Philadelphia, 1976).

22. Jane Landers, *Fort Mose, Garcia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose: A Free Black Town in Spanish Colonial Florida* (St. Augustine, 1991), 23.

inhabitants of the Spanish East Florida colony after the Treaty of 1763. Those Negroes, who came from the southern Atlantic colonies during the first Spanish period could not have brought *Capsicum chinense* with them because the plant would not grow in temperate South Carolina.

The absence of West Indian peppers in the Carolinas, coupled with the entrenched tradition of a Minorcan origin for the Datil, effectively eliminates as a source the Mandingos and other Africans from the Carolinas and Georgia who may have arrived in Florida before the Mediterraneans came in 1768. More will be said about these blacks during the second Spanish occupation, but the pepper had not arrived in Florida during the first Spanish period.

More black slaves came to Florida during the British period, including those brought in by Turnbull. Those who came from Africa via the West Indies found the natives there using the extremely pungent, highly aromatic fruits profusely. They readily adopted West Indian peppers to satisfy their innate craving for their spicy African foods. Although *Capsicum annuum* is grown in the West Indies, the tropical *Capsicum chinense* was (and still is) the most common pepper grown in the Caribbean area where it had been brought from South America during pre-Columbian Indian migrations between 250 B.C. and A.D. 1000.<sup>23</sup> Writing in the early eighteenth century, Philip Miller, an English herbalist, reported that peppers were consumed by everyone in the West Indies, but especially the Negroes. He surmised that the fiery pods were called "Negro" or "Ginnie" (Guinea) peppers by the inhabitants because that part of the population favored them.<sup>24</sup> Miller's reasoning lends support to another Datil-Minorcan-Mandingo tradition, which is— that Turnbull's black slaves were Mandingos.

Most of the captive Africans who came to Mexico and the Spanish Indies in the early sixteenth century were probably of the Mande-speaking groups who lived then— as they still do— in lands behind the western bulge of the Guinea Coast.<sup>25</sup> Those captives were generally known as Mandingos. People, as well as plants, from that region were called "Ginnies." The Portuguese slave trade with the Americas, which began in 1509, augmented the rapid introduc-

23. J. Andrews, "Diffusion of Mesoamerican Food Complex to Southwestern Europe," *Geographical Review*, 83 (1993) 194-204; (1993b), 5-7.

24. P. Miller, *The Gardener's and Botanist's Dictionary*, 8th Edition (London, 1768).

25. B. Davidson, *The African Slave Trade* (New York, 1980), 120.



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tion of New World foods to earlier Portuguese colonies in Africa, including *Capsicums*. Even if Turnbull's slaves had come directly from the Guinea Coast to Florida, would they have been permitted to bring such things as peppers with them? Probably not. But if they had been it would probably not have been *C. chinense* because, as previously noted, *C. annuum* was the species commonly traded by the Portuguese from the west coast of Africa.<sup>26</sup> Because their ships were denied legal passage to the West Indies by the Treaty of Tordesillas, the Portuguese did not have ready access to the tropical *Capsicum chinense* until 1530 when they began the colonization of Brazil, where it also grew.

With little doubt, the 60 New Smyrna Negroes came from the West Indies, and there they would have had available the most common peppers on the islands—the tropical *C. chinense*. Although Spanish ships could have transported the slaves, it was more likely British ships that carried the people of Mandingo origin from a West Indian slave market such as Havana to Florida. Spanish ships were more intent on hauling precious metals, from Mexico and Peru to Spain. After the early part of the eighteenth century, when British slavers became more active, they included chilies among the staples provided in the shipboard diet of slave vessels because that seasoning had become so important to Africans.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, when the slaves were loaded on the ships, so were chili peppers. Cuba and the West Indies would have been the closest source of peppers for those trading along the North American Coast, and existing trade routes would have provided the means for their arrival in Florida where the seeds could be cultivated to provide a regular supply of the favored spice. Another variety of golden pepper of the same species, the Habanero (meaning from Havana, Cuba) has long been cultivated in Yucatan, Mexico. Three golden *C. chinense*, the Habanero of Yucatan, the Scotch bonnet of Jamaica, and the St. Augustine Datil probably came from the same ancestral plants in Cuba.

No matter where the peppers came from, it is not likely that the Africans at New Smyrna introduced the Datil to the Minorcans. That British plantation had little or no contact with Cuba and its owners took their slaves with them when they departed after Flor-

26. J. Andrews, *Red Hot Pepper*, 19.

27. D. P. Mannix, *Black Cargos: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1518-1865* (New York, 1978), 115.

ida was returned to the Spanish in 1783. Although the free blacks who had taken sanctuary in Spanish East Florida had fled British colonies north of Florida, where *Capsicum chinense* was not grown, they chose to go into Cuban exile with the Spanish and their slaves rather than risk reenslavement by the British.<sup>28</sup> Even though none of the tropical peppers had grown in the territories from which the free blacks fled to Florida, the exiles would have come into contact with *C. chinense* in Cuba just as the English herbalist Miller had done during his research prior to the publication of the first edition of his *Gardener's Dictionary* in 1731.<sup>29</sup> After seasoning their food with them during two decades of exile, they almost certainly took them when they returned to Florida. After the American Revolution, Florida was retroceded to Spain. Many of those who had gone into exile in Cuba—both Spaniards and blacks—returned to East Florida when the British departed. By that time the Minorcans were long out of British indenture and had their own homes and gardens in a climate where they could grow the new golden Cuban pepper. It would have been readily accepted by the Minorcans who had customarily used the red Guinea pepper in their soups and stews in their homeland.

That familiar Guinea pepper, not the Datil, could have been the undescribed "*Capsicum*" seen by Bernard Romans at New Smyrna in 1775.<sup>30</sup> It would have been natural for the Minorcans to have brought the easily transported Guinea pepper seed with them from Minorca. But the pepper Romans listed could also have been the wild, red "bird pepper," which grows on a little shrub and is much smaller than the Guinea pepper, and which the naturalist William Bartram saw when he traveled in Florida about the same time.<sup>31</sup>

28. J. Landers, *Fort Mose*, 32.

29. The Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge encouraged collectors in North America. Phillip Miller was but one of the plant explorers who collected and exchanged New World plants during the colonial period and until 1820, when the interest shifted from the Caribbean islands and the Atlantic coastal area to the western United States. An annotated list of most of these men can be found in the Appendix of J. B. Dutton's *Plants of Colonial Williamsburg* (Williamsburg, 1979). The activities of those naturalists, coupled with an interest in gardening and collecting new plants evidenced by a number of colonial gardeners, may have increased the probability of the Datil making its Florida entrance during the British period.

30. B. Romans, *Natural History*: 179.

31. J. E. Harman, *Trade and Privateering in Spanish Florida, 1732-1788* (St. Augustine, 1958), 21.

Another possible means of Datil introduction depends upon other types of trade connections. St. Augustine was established in 1565 to protect shipping lanes between Spain and her colonies in the New World. Spanish laws prohibited foreigners from trading directly with the Spanish-American ports and reserved the external trade of the colonies exclusively for Spain. But St. Augustine never became self-sustaining. There were insufficient local supplies of basic food, clothing and other necessities, much less luxury goods. During the first Spanish period neither Spain nor Havana could provide their outposts with enough supplies, and the few food shipments that arrived in St. Augustine were often spoiled.<sup>32</sup> This dependence on goods from external sources often resulted in periods of extreme want. Authorities at St. Augustine frequently ignored the Spanish trading restrictions and purchased British goods which were less expensive and easier to acquire aboard English, Dutch, or French trading vessels.

Florida produced and exported oranges, deerskins, hides, and sea turtles, among other things, but the Spaniards at St. Augustine lacked adequate local supplies of flour, cloth, and other necessities. These vital supplies came indirectly from Spain via the ports of Vera Cruz, Campeche (Yucatan), and Havana, but Cuba was the main "trading partner" of Florida.<sup>33</sup>

Although the Spanish-owned Havana Company of Cuba was the official supplier for St. Augustine, it was the British South Seas Company, along with illicit British traders operating out of their North American ports, that kept the remote Spanish colony from complete destitution.<sup>34</sup> But there was no steady stream of supply ships to St. Augustine. In fact, during the first Spanish period, three years sometimes passed between ship arrivals off that isolated Florida colony.<sup>35</sup> Although welcome and sanctioned, Spain never gave British ships a legal right to trade with St. Augustine.<sup>36</sup> The clandestine trade continued for 50 years following the 1713 treaty. West Indian peppers could have been a part of it, but it is unlikely since they did not grow in the North American trade area.

32. J. Landers, *Fort Mose*, 27.

33. B. G. Boniface, *A Historical Geography of Spanish Florida circa 1700* (Athens, GA, 1971), 190-196.

34. J. E. Harman, *Trade and Privateering*, 21.

35. B. G. Boniface, *Historical Geography*, 193.

36. J. E. Harman, *Trade and Privateering*, 54.

A considerable amount of supplies also arrived from the southern colonies, especially South Carolina and Georgia. Cattle came overland from Georgia, and foodstuffs—beef, pork, butter, flour, rum, but not such tropical fruits as peppers—frequently made the five-day sail from Charleston to St. Augustine where they were exchanged for produce, such as oranges, sea turtles, deer skins, marine stores, and fish.<sup>37</sup> Goods from those southern British colonies were seldom, if ever, transported on Spanish ships.

Journals of early North American gardeners, such as that kept by Thomas Jefferson, provide evidence of another type of trade or exchange—pepper seed. During a 50 year period that ended about 1820, and included the arrivals of the Minorcans, the English and the Dutch carried on an active plant exchange between their New World colonies (North American and West Indian) and their homelands. Attesting that seed trade are the peppers that have been grown from heirloom *C. chinense* seed dating back to the late 1700s that are still maintained in Pennsylvania gardens.<sup>38</sup>

Still other trade was by sea-going Indian canoes. Paddling those sturdy, small vessels, the Indians of Florida carried on trade with Cuba and with Cuban fishing vessels in Florida waters from 1763 until the 1840s. During the British period in Florida the Cuban fishing trade was permitted to continue. Some of those Cuban fishermen moved to the coastal islands of Florida.<sup>39</sup> During the fishing season they fished; the remainder of the year they cultivated small gardens. Most of these Cuban fishermen intermarried with the Indians but few of them ever went further than ten miles inland. A number of runaway blacks joined them. This arrangement continued after the United States acquired Florida in 1821.<sup>40</sup> Did they grow peppers?

The final diffusory possibility is tied to the requirements of Minorcan Catholicism. The Roman Catholic Minorcans who were part of the 1400 recruits of the Turnbull colony were granted a contractual right to practice their religion freely. In the Peace of Utre-

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37. *Ibid.*, 80.

38. The seeds were acquired from William Woys Weaver of Philadelphia, a recognized food historian, author, and authority on early American culinary practices.

39. J. W. Covington "Trade Relations Between Southwest Florida and Cuba, 1600-1840," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 38 (1959), 114-128.

40. J. W. Covington, "Trade Relations Between Southwest Florida and Cuba 1600-1840," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 38 (1959), 114-128.

cht, the British sovereign had promised the citizens of Minorca religious freedom. When the English acquired Spanish Minorca, however, that promise was not honored and those oppressed people hoped for better treatment in America. At the urging of his wife, Turnbull included two Roman Catholic priests among his would-be colonizers. Fortunately for the Datil story, those clergymen kept excellent records of their little parish, which came under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Havana.<sup>41</sup>

When the Spaniards departed after 200 years in Florida, they took with them to Cuba all their records, church vessels, and everything of value which was portable.<sup>42</sup> By means of letters sent on Cuban fishing vessels, Padre Pedro Campos, the Minorcan's parish priest, and his vicar, supplicated the Bishop in Havana for "faculties and holy oils" and other supplies necessary for church ceremonies<sup>43</sup>. These same Cuban fishermen carried the supplies "secretly" to the Catholics in Florida. The Cuban Bishop reasoned that "It is very necessary to provide for the spiritual care of Catholics permanently settled in Florida; and it is not improper to put it within the purview of the Diocese of Cuba, for it fell within the jurisdiction of that Island, before [Florida] was occupied by the English." In short, during the years the Protestant British controlled Florida, Cuban fishermen plied the waters between Havana and New Smyrna carrying communications and supplies between the Bishop of Cuba and the parish priest. Knowing that the daily diet of Cubans included quantities of pungent peppers, it is reasonable to assume that the "secret" Cuban messenger-fishermen brought the future Datil pepper to New Smyrna as part of their personal food supplies. When discovered by the Minorcan priest in Florida, the Cuban pepper traveling as an adjunct to the cargo of holy oil and incense might have looked like a windfall to spice his own monotonous diet.

By whatever means, once a *Capsicum chinense* arrived in Florida with its favorable climate, both Africans and Minorcans used it to gratify their desire for highly seasoned food, and when the Minorcans migrated from New Smyrna to St. Augustine they either took their favorite Datil with them, encountered it already growing in St. Augustine as a result of introduction from British trade in slaves

41. B. Roselli, *The Italians in Colonial Florida* (Jacksonville, 1940).

42. J. Quinn, *The Minorcans*, 17.

43. C. D. Gorse, *Dr. Andrew Turnbull*, 51.

and other goods, or were there to meet it when the Spanish and black exiles returned from Cuba with the pepper in their baggage shortly after the exit of the British.

The use of the Datil has remained very localized. During more than 200 years since the legendary Minorcan introduction, isolation and selection have caused it to become entirely different from that originally introduced to Florida, or any of the species being grown in the West Indies today. Unfortunately, until new data are discovered, the origin of the Datil will continue to be shrouded in as much mystery and speculation as the Tabasco.

Although the Minorcans did not introduce the Datil to East Florida, they did probably provide its name. The wrinkled, golden pods look somewhat like dates; hence it was given the name *dátíl* (dah-teal), which means the fruit of the date palm in both the Catalan and Spanish languages. The native language of the Minorcans was derived from Catalan. Between 1763 and 1783 there were virtually no other Romance speaking people in East Florida because all but a handful of the Spaniards in East Florida withdrew in 1763.

If the pepper had been in Florida during the first Spanish occupation, it would probably already have had a name when the Minorcans arrived, but none has been found. Although there were available date palms in Spain, there had been little or no migration directly from Spain to the West Indies after 1535, much less migrants bearing date palm trees.<sup>44</sup> Most of the Spaniards in Florida during the last hundred years of their first colonial period were of New World origin; therefore, they would not have been acquainted with dates. No record of the use of the word *dátíl* in Florida during that period has yet been found. It then seems to be logical to assume that those Catalan speaking Mediterranean people from the New Smyrna plantation, who were familiar with dates, could have noticed the resemblance to a wrinkled, golden date and called the pepper *dátíl*. The Mandingos certainly did not name it because they knew neither dates, Catalan, nor Spanish. Neither did the Spanish-speaking native-Americans have any knowledge of the fruit. It is safe to assume that the name came from the Minorcans, but when? Information about the date palm might shed some light.

The date palm, *Phoenix dactylifera* originated in the lands around the Persian Gulf and was introduced to the western Medi-

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44. D. Watts, *The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture, and Environmental Change Since 1492* (Cambridge, 1987), 121-125.

terranean area by the Phoenicians of the eastern Mediterranean around 1250 B.C.<sup>45</sup> The Moors brought the date palm to Spain centuries before Columbus discovered America. Mediterranean peoples such as the mixed group in New Smyrna, would certainly have been acquainted with the date as would any native born Spaniards. George Cleghorn, a British doctor stationed in Minorca for 22 years described the date palms that grew on that island.<sup>46</sup> By 1821 some of them had been transplanted to Port-au-Prince in the West Indies and a single date palm was growing on Anastasia Island at St. Augustine.<sup>47</sup> The fruit of this palm are cylindrical, yellowish-brown drupes. The people of St. Augustine could not have learned how dates appear from that lone tree, because both male and female trees are needed to produce fruit. No serious attempt at cultivating dates in the West Indies was attempted until 1899 when 75 plants were sent from Algiers to Jamaica. Even then the humidity caused the fruits to rot and fall. Only occasionally have date palms borne normal fruit in the Bahamas and South Florida.<sup>48</sup> William Bartram, botanist to His Majesty for the Floridas, wrote of the “palms and live oaks” he saw when he visited the area of the New Smyrna plantation before and after the arrival of the “Minorquies.”<sup>49</sup> These were most likely the native pinnate *Roystonea* palms, or the palmate palmettos— *Sabal*, *Thrinax*, *Serenóia*, or *Acoelorrháe* – not date palm, which was introduced to Florida from Africa<sup>50</sup>.

From this meager information, combined with what is known of trade, both in slaves and merchandise, between St. Augustine and the West Indies— especially Cuba— it would seem that the original Datil pepper most probably arrived when the exiled Spaniards and blacks returned from Cuba after 1784; still, it could have come anytime during the height of the slavery period, dating from the 1763 British occupancy to the advent of the Americans in 1821. It had to have been there within the lifetime of the original Minor-

45. B. B. Simpson and M. Conner-Ogorzaly, *Economic Botany* (New York, 1986), 123.

46. G. Cleghorn, *Observation on Epidemical Diseases in Minorca, from the Year 1744-1749. To Which is Prefixed a Short Account of the Climate, Productions, and Inhabitants and Endemical Distempers of the Island* (London, 1809), 12.

47. J. G. Forbes, *Sketches Historical and Topographical of the Floridas: More Particularly East Florida* (New York, 1821), 148.

48. J. Morton, *Fruit of Warm Climates* (Miami, 1987), 6.

49. F. E. Harper, *The Travels of William Bartram: Naturalists Edition* (New Haven, Connecticut, 1958), 46.

50. J. K. Small, *Manual of the Southeastern Flora* (Chapel Hill, 1933), 236-243; and R. W. Long, *A Flora of Tropical Florida* (Coral Gables, 1971), 240-247.

cans who had memories of dates they had known in their homeland and who could compare them with the fruit of the golden *Capsicum chinense*. Their Florida born descendants would not have seen dates; therefore they had no vision of them to recall. James G. Forbes, a native of St. Augustine and an American envoy to Cuba, reports that the fruit of the date he saw in 1821 resembled large acorns covered with a thin yellowish membrane. The wrinkled, cylindrical Datil is golden.

During the 44 years from the time of their arrival in St. Augustine in 1777 until Florida became a part of the United States in 1821, the Minorcans had been the largest stable body of people in that city. Being gardeners and small farmers they would have taken notice of new plants, fruits, and vegetables, and would have associated them with others of their kind already familiar to them. The golden Datils were as different from any of the tiny red wild chilies mentioned by naturalists in those early days—Jonathan Dickinson, William Bartram, or Johan Schöpf— as they were from the cayenne peppers of their homeland.<sup>51</sup>

Although not well-known to the general public, the Datil is familiar to most citizens of St. Augustine. Many have not only grown a few plants but also have a “secret” sauce recipe. About 40 to 50 commercial growers cultivate small plots of the Datil, making it the first *Capsicum chinense* to be grown for profit in the United States. In 1990 a bushel of the stemmed fruits brought the farmer \$50 and he could produce 20 to 30 bushels from 130 plants if picked by himself as is the practice. Unfortunately for the grower of any very pungent pepper, it does not take many peppers to heat up a food product. This commercial production has been going on for at least 70 years, and the Datil is said to have been known in that area since the Minorcans fled to St. Augustine in 1777. Datil fanciers, and there are many, believe that its characteristic flavor and aroma are lost when they have tried to grow it in such places as Georgia and Puerto Rico.

Like the related Habanero, the golden Datil is quite aromatic and very *picante*. A little goes a long way. The commercial food processors and grocers are forced to buy this pepper green because the fully ripe fruit will not keep well more than a few days, therefore, commercial food processors use the Datil in the mature green

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51. E. W. Andrews, *Jonathan Dickinson's Journal* (New Haven, Connecticut, 1961).



state, and as a result almost everyone else uses it that way also. This custom, coupled with the previously mentioned Minorcan food habit that favored green Guinea peppers, combine to form a strong food routine based on the green Datil, and food habits are hard to break. Flavor, aroma, and pungency in capsicums increase with maturity; consequently they are more delicious when fully ripe— in this case golden. Spoilage should not pose a problem to cooks using Datils from their own garden; therefore, it is recommended that the golden ripe ones be used for added gustatory pleasure.

Given the fact that the Datil ancestor originated in the West Indies, probably Cuba and/or Jamaica, along with the tradition of Minorcan-Mandingo introduction, and after looking at the history of the Minorcans in Florida, the Mandingos in Florida, trade between the West Indies and Florida, early naturalists' observations in Florida, a clearer picture of the Datil's history is formed. It would appear that the *C. chinense* that evolved into the unique Datil, arrived in Florida by one or more of the readily available trade routes after the arrival of and during the lifetime of the group of Mediterranean laborers (Minorcans) in St. Augustine (1768-1820) before Florida became a part of the United States. During that time it was adopted, adapted, and named by the Catalan speaking members of that group. Just as some different heirloom *Capsicum chinense* and other exotic seed acquired from the West Indies during the Colonial Period are grown in Pennsylvania today, the Datil has remained isolated and nurtured in Florida all these years. The Datil, however, found Florida to be a more favorable climate, with a population of Mediterraneans and Africans who had built-in appetites for pungent, spicy foods. It consequently flourished there.