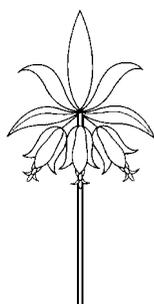


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Contents

Early evidence of “Erica”: A linguistic and pictorial tracking from antiquity to the mid-16th century Holger Funk	79–94
Wild and cultivated plants in Cambridge, 1656–1657: A re-examination of Samuel Corbyn’s lists C. D. Preston	95–124
The deforestation of the French Alps Roger L. Williams	125–142
Some notes towards a reconstruction of Mark Catesby’s library E. Charles Nelson	143–156
Natural history, medical and economic properties of the <i>Solanum</i> and the genera merged with them: A dissertation by Michel-Félix Dunal Translated and abridged by Roger L. Williams	157–164
Idée fixe: A commentary on the opposition in France to the theory of lichen duality, 1870 to 1900 M. E. Mitchell	165–182
<i>Huntia</i> : History and reincarnation Scarlett T. Townsend, <i>Huntia</i> Editor	183–184
Book Reviews and Announcements	185–190

Natural history, medical and economic properties of the *Solanum* and the genera merged with them: A dissertation by Michel-Félix Dunal

Translated and abridged by Roger L. Williams

Editor's note

Sadly, shortly after submitting this manuscript, Roger L. Williams passed away. Given Roger's long association with *Huntia* and the relevance of the subject matter, we decided to include the manuscript without the benefit of peer review and with only light editing. Roger's papers are located in the Hunt Institute Archives collection no. 373.

Abstract

In his dissertation *Histoire Naturelle, Médicale et Économique des Solanum, et des Genres Qui Ont Été Confondus avec Eux* (1813), Dunal surveyed the use and misuse of the name *Solanum* over the centuries, correcting what he perceived to be mistakes; finally adding a list of his own new species of *Solanum*, only a few of which still stand. They are so indicated in the text. The work is based on materials in the Jardin du Roi of Montpellier, much of it belonging to Augustin Pyramus de Candolle, Dunal's mentor, and so acknowledged.

Translator's introduction

In 1774 Antoine-Laurant de Jussieu (1748–1836) proposed that plants conforming in their external characters (natural families) might also possess conforming medicinal virtues. His disciple, Augustin-Pyramus de Candolle (1778–1841), designed his own medical doctoral dissertation in 1804 to test that prediction. As Félix Dunal (1789–1856), the author of this later article, was a medical student of Candolle in Montpellier, it is germane to cite what Candolle had concluded about Solanaceae in his dissertation:

Solanaceae, the Nightshade Family, is in general a family of powerful, even fatal narcotics. The narcotic principle may vary in strength from genus to genus, or be more

pronounced in different parts of the plant, but it is always there in some degree. If the potato, *Solanum tuberosum* L., is safely eaten, the stalk, leaves, and fruits of the species are as noxious as most species in the family. *Nicotiana tabacum* L., formerly taken by mouth or in enemas as a purgative, from leaves cured and dried, ceased after recognition of their poisonous origin (Candolle 1804, pp. 82–83).

Candolle, as director of the medical faculty in Montpellier, assigned the medical doctoral students dissertation topics meant to introduce them to the Jussiean prediction and to provide a test with a particular species or related group, accounting for Dunal's title.

Dunal opened with the assertion that the precise knowledge of the substances that have an effect on the human economy, and about that effect, are as useful to the medical doctor as the knowledge of the organization of the human machine, and of the movements it executes in the state of health as in the state of illness. . . .

Michel-Félix Dunal: To the lack of a precise determination of the substances used as medications, we owe our ignorance of most of them about which the ancients made use. For the same reason, certain errors must have necessarily been introduced into the *materia medica*. After these considerations, and authorized by the example of those who have preceded me, I believe I am able to offer the Ecole de Médecine this monograph of a genus of plants.

The greatest part of the materials necessary for this work were taken from the collections

of books and plants of my master, Professor Augustin-Pyramus de Candolle, and from the garden he directs. What has been no less useful has been the advice he never ceased giving me, reflecting his endless goodness, and based upon his principles. The botanical part of my dissertation must only be regarded as the application of those principles to a particular class of facts.

My goal being to undertake the history of the *Solanum*, and of the genera that have been related to it, I have divided my work into two parts. In the first part, I have examined what one knows about the nature of these plants, about their actions on the human economy, and about the use man has made of them. In the other part, I have sought to make the species known in a precise manner. I have written this last part in the language of botanical science.

I

General history

Celsus Cornelius Aulus (dates unknown) is the first of the ancient authors known to us who used the word *Solanum* to designate a plant that he recommended its use as the remedy for frenzy (Aul. Corn. Cels. AD ca.40, [*The True Word*] lib. 3, cap. 18). The word *solanum*, if we can believe the scholastics, derived from the word *solari*, to console.

Nothing else seems to have been known about the *Solanum* until the Renaissance when scholars began to seek a knowledge of the plants scattered among them, their descriptions beginning early in the 16th century. Travelers from abroad expanded botanical knowledge to a point, in the last half of that century, that the science began to have firm bases. The species of *Solanum* were then known under a variety of names as described by diverse authors.

At the beginning of the 17th century, the illustrious Casper (Gaspard) Bauhin (1560–

1624), in his *Pinax Theatri Botanici* (1623), assembled a list of the plants then known. In his tentative natural classification, beyond the species then known by the name *Solanum*, he combined several other plants of that family or in neighboring families. His nomenclature was adopted by most botanists, notably John Ray (1628–1705), L. Plukenet 1642–1706), and R. Morison (1620–1683), until the epoch of Tournefort.

Joseph Pitton de Tournefort (1656–1708), with his *Elémens de Botanique* (1694), translated into Latin as *Institutions Rei Herberiae* in 1700, established greater precision in classification by establishing groups of species called genera in a manner never done before. He distributed Bauhin's species of *Solanum* into several genera. Three of them, *Solanum*, *Melongena* and *Lycopersicon*, included species known in his time by our present genus *Solanum*.

The celebrated Carl Linnaeus (1707–1777), in his great reform of nomenclature, combined those three genera, giving it its oldest name, *Solanum* (Linnaeus 1737, no. 251). For its principal character, he cited the anthers opening by two terminal pores. Most botanists subsequently conserved that genus as Linnaeus established it, except for Michel Adanson (1727–1806). He combined *Solanum* and *Melongena* into one genus but retained the genus *Lycopersicon* as without joined anthers (Adanson 1763, 2:218).

My own attentive examination of the flowers of *Solanum lycopersicon* L. has taught me that their anthers are joined on the inside according to their length; that they are joined by means of a membrane that is raised above their top and terminates in the hollow cone they form by their adherence. The pollen escapes principally through the upper part of the longitudinal cleft of the anthers, spreading from the upper part of the cone to put itself on the stigma. Since that observation, I have seen that a German author, Conrad

Moench (1744–1795), has accepted the genus *Lycopersicon*, out of consideration of their joined anthers opening depending upon their length (Moench 1794, p. 515).

Linnaeus united to *Solanum dulcamara* a species he must never have seen as a variety. That species, described by J. J. Dillenius (1687–1747) as *Solanum dulcamarum africanum, foliis crassis hirsutis* (Dillenius 1732, 2:365), has since been designated as *Solanum crassifolium* by Lamarck and has anthers opening depending upon their length. That is what I learned from a specimen found in Monsieur de Candolle's herbarium and from a manuscript note from Louis L'Héritier (1746–1800) placed in that herbarium. After that, I removed that plant from the genus *Solanum* in order to unite it to the genus *Witheringia* based upon a single species by L'Héritier. He named it in memory of William Withering (1741–1799), English botanist (L'Héritier 1788, p. 3). [The genus did not stand.]

Nicholaus-Josef von Jacquin (1727–1817) established a genus with the name *Aquartia*, which only differed from the genus *Solanum* in its calyx and corolla of four divisions instead of five, four stamens instead of five. I have felt obligated to reunite the species in *Aquartia* to *Solanum* for the following reasons:

1. Some species in *Solanum*, described and accepted by all botanists, have their flowers in four parts, for example, *Solanum tetrandum* and *Solanum crotonoides*.
2. These species must not be separated from *Solanum* because several of them, such as *Solanum bonariense* L., *S. lanceolatum* Cav. and *S. poligamum* Vahl., produce some flowers in four parts (usually their first), and others in five parts.

After such considerations, the genus *Aquartia* cannot be accepted.

Solanum cornutum Lam. in Kew Garden was considered by Etienne-Pierre Ventenat (1757–1808) to require a new genus that he

named *Nycterium*. That genus was founded upon the observation that the anthers of its plants are a bit curved and that one among them is twice as long as the others (Ventenat 1803–1804, 1:85).

Nycterium does not merit being accepted, first, because the species that Ventenat inserted there only resembled each other by the form of their anthers. Moreover, Professor Antoine Gouan (1733–1821) has made known to me that he has seen anthers in one of those species perfectly equal and straight. That circumstance, which I have never seen, will prove the minor importance of the character on which that genus was established. Even granting that the unique form of the anthers does not vary, if, on this single difference, you accept this genus, it would be necessary to make it in other species that have unequal filaments or in those that have a calyx of ten teeth, et cetera.

The genera *Dulcamara* Medik. and *Peudocapsicum* Medik., the genus *Psolanum* Neck. and others were founded on minor differences in some species. Thus, I accept none of these genera and consider as *Solanum* all the Solanaceae with pulpy fruit, which have anthers opening through two terminal pores.

Linnaeus, and nearly all the botanists who have followed him, have divided the *Solanum* into two large sections, depending upon whether or not they have prickles (*inermia* or *spinosa*). The division is convenient, notwithstanding it can lead to errors. Certain species are born without prickles; others, born with them, lose them by age or by local circumstances. J. J. Dillenius (1687–1747) reported that having sowed some seeds of a *Solanum*, which he was the first to know and which since has been designated with the specific name *bahamense* L., that the first year it was a plant covered with prickles. At the end of two or three years, his plant was nearly devoid. What had happened? Several of these

plants had been placed furnished with prickles among some that were deprived of them (*Solanum bonariense* L., *S. leprostum* Orteg., *S. soubinerme* Jacq.) or where a single or the same species had been considered as describing whether it was furnished or devoid of these organs (Dillenius 1732, 2:363). This division, however, is the most convenient among those one could make at present.

I have brought together species by their natural resemblance. When, by this arrangement, natural groups are found to be formed, that is to say, groups that consist of species that resemble each other more than all the other species in the genus, I have designated them by name, indicating the character of each group. It is known that Joseph Pitton de Tournefort (1656–1708) regarded as species all plants that presented certain distinctions without examining enough whether those distinctions were constant, thus accepting frequently, as species, some simple varieties of one that he met quite frequently. The varieties with white, blue or reddish flowers and the dotted leaves of bittersweet were species for him. To avoid this disadvantage, Linnaeus fell into the contrary excess, often combining neighboring species as varieties but never changed in the reproduction of seeds. The Linnaean species of *Valerianan locusta* and *Astragalus tragacantha*, in each of which one has recognized a great number of merged species, are striking examples.

Along with modern botanists I have consistently taken as a species every plant that distinguishes itself from all others, always preserving itself the same in the reproduction by seeds, namely, whose sown seeds reproduce consistently individuals like the mother plant. Thus, for example, as Carl Ludwig Willdenow (1765–1812) has lately done it (Willdenow 1809, p. 236), I have regarded as species several of the plants that Linnaeus grouped as varieties of *Solanum nigrum* (Linnaeus 1753,

1:186) [#54 *Solanum patulum* Dunal; and #31 *Solanum guineense* Dunal]. He combined them into a single species because of their great resemblance, appearing to him as hybrids and believing that many varieties were actually hybrids. He does not say on what he had founded this last opinion (Linnaeus 1753, 1:266).

Whatever respect I have for the opinions of Linnaeus, I believe foremost that, even if those species have considerable analogy among them, it does not follow that they are the same. It only proves that they form the core of a distinct group within the *Solanum*. In the second place I do not believe at all that they are hybrids for the reason that for the most part they are from different countries. Since we have cultivated them in our gardens, they have not changed and have not produced hybrids. Most of the botanists in the Linnaean school have, in the example of their master, distinguished those plants by regarding them as varieties of *Solanum nigrum* but saying that all of these varieties conserve themselves in reproduction by seeds. Thus, these are species. Experience of more than a year proves that they do not change. All botanists have distinguished them, whether as species or as varieties.

As for nomenclature I have followed the rules that guide the most exact botanists. When a particular species has been described under different names, I have retained that species under its oldest name unless that name implies a contradiction with the plant. Having recognized, for example, that *Solanum torvum* Swartz, *Solanum ferrugineum* Jacquin and *Solanum ficifolium* Ortega were one and the same species, I conserved the name *S. torvum* [#145 Dunal] as the oldest, reporting the others as synonyms. When four *Solanum* had been described with the name *scabrum*, I conserved the name for the oldest known species, the one described by Vahl, and changed the name of the others (Dunal 1813, pp. 193–194): #25

Solanum racemiflorum Dunal; #53 *Solanum muriatum* Dunal; #33 *Solanum pterocaulum* Dunal; and #27 *Solanum zuccagnianum* Dunal.

I have only changed a name in the cases cited above or when the name implied inconsistency with the species named and have had few such changes to make. For example, I substituted the name #158 *Solanum hermanni* Dunal for *Solanum sodomeum* L. because the plant that bears the latter specific name is indigenous to the Cape of Good Hope, and we have no proof that it grows in Judaea. [Linnaeus did cite Africa as its location, and *Solanum sodomeum* L. still stands.]

Seeking to know all that has been done up to the present day on the *Solanum*, I have taken care to record the synonymy precisely. Certain species, however, have been described in such an imperfect manner or have been merely designated in a phrase, so that what we know of them is insufficient either to link in a sure manner to well-known species or to consider them as distinct species. I have not felt obliged to overlook such doubtful species in silence and have grouped them under the title "Species not meriting inclusion."

Before nomenclature was fixed in a rational manner, the name *Solanum* was given to some species no longer assigned to that genus today. I have grouped, under the title "Excluded Solanums," the names those species were given, followed by their names in the present nomenclature. Consequently, one can find in my dissertation all those that have at some time been designated with the name *Solanum*.

[Maladies for which the action of the stems and leaves of bittersweet, *Solanum dulcamera* L., were reported:

Page numbers in Dunal:

51: Rheumatism

55: Gout

57: Pleurisy

57: Consumption

58: Leucorrhoea

59: Scurvy

60: Syphilis

62: Scurf

64: Scabies

65: Asthma

65: Cancer

65: Ulcers

65: Observations on internal organs

66: Method of administering bittersweet

72: Accidents that bittersweet appeared to produce

73: The action of bittersweet

76: The stems and leaves of the morels (nightshades)]

Conclusion

What I say below on the natural characters of the genera that occupy us is the résumé of what I have said, in the course of this dissertation, on the physical nature of the species that constitute them.

If one excepts the underground tubers of *Solanum tuberosum* L., the chemical nature of the diverse organs of these plants is still unknown to us.

The roots of the various species of *Solanum* that have been used appear to have an analogous action. They produce a stimulation directed principally on this or that organ, according to the diverse circumstances and the manner of administration. What we know of the properties of these roots is insufficiently established.

The underground tubers that two species of *Solanum* offer are used for food. One of those species (*Solanum tuberosum* L.) is in very general use on account of the facility with which it reproduces in abundance at all latitudes and elevations. [The other would be *Solanum commersonii* Dunal.]

The stems and leaves of various species used here appear to have related properties. No precise observation, however, proves that they enjoy that property. The stems and leaves

of some morels (nightshades), far from being noxious as has been claimed up to now, are used as food in a great number of countries. The sap of these plants applied to the eyelids causes the distention of the iris in the same manner as the sap of *belledonne* (*Atropa belladonna* L.), but its action is much less intense.

The stems of *Solanum dulcamara* L. have been used in a manner to provide us some data on their action. They produce a stimulation, which, following various concomitant circumstances, appeared to be aimed principally at such or such an organ.

The flowers of our plants have no use meriting remembrance. Among the fruits examined, some have a sweet and sugary flavor, thus eaten raw in some countries. In others, cooked in various ways are used as food by diverse peoples. Those of certain species provide a sarcocarp, sweet and salubrious, and a bitter, harmful pulp that surrounds the seeds. Up to now that pulp is the only part of the *Solanum* whose noxious action is recognized.

The facts we have reported are in opposition to general opinion, which holds that all the *Solanum* are poisonous. The causes of that opinion are (1) that one has sometimes merged some very different plants, (2) that one has not considered that the properties of plants must be examined from organ to organ and (3) that without examination one has accepted the overly general nature of Linnaeus's precepts.

[Dunal could not mention the poisonous alkaloid solanine in his dissertation as it was not defined until 1838 and present in varying strengths in the *Solanum* (Littré 1883–1884, 1:485). As Dunal was regarded as the most distinguished of Augustin-Pyramus de Candolle's medical students at Montpellier, he was appointed to the faculty of medicine. When Candolle resigned as their director in 1816 to go to Geneva, Dunal was appointed interim director until the government named Alire Raffeneau-Delile (1778–1850) as the permanent successor (Martins 1854, pp. 53–55).]

II

Monographia

Solanum

[Dunal added a list of the 235 known species of *Solanum*, all numbered, to conclude his dissertation. The following is a list of only those he designated as new species.]

- #25 *Solanum racemiflorum* Dunal
- #27 *Solanum zuccagnianum* Dunal
- #33 *Solanum pterocaulum* Dunal
- #51 *Solanum pubigerum* Dunal
- #111 *Solanum persicifolium* Dunal [Good species]
- #114 *Solanum microphyllum* (Lam.) Dunal
[Transferred from *Aquartia microphylla* Lam.]
- #123 *Solanum brevipilum* Dunal
- #125 *Solanum heterodoxum* Dunal [Good species]
- #127 *Solanum cuneifolium* Dunal
- #138 *Solanum macrophyllum* Dunal
- #142 *Solanum brownii* Dunal
- #147 *Solanum lanatum* Dunal
- #150 *Solanum albidum* Dunal
- #151 *Solanum saponaceum* Dunal
- #157 *Solanum fuscatum* Dunal ex Poir.
- #158 *Solanum hermannii* Dunal → *Solanum americanum* P. Mill.
- #165 *Solanum pressum* Dunal
- #167 *Solanum myriacanthum* Dunal
- #173 *Solanum lasiocarpum* Dunal
- #195 *Solanum balbisii* Dunal
- #198 *Solanum rostratum* Dunal [Good species]
- #199 *Solanum heterodoxum* Dunal [Good species]

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