

Natural Curiosities

Author: Alfred Russel Wallace
Layout:

Baseline Co. Ltd
61A-63A Vo Van Tan Street
4th Floor
District 3, Ho Chi Minh City
Vietnam

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“Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished.”

— Lao Tzu

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The View

Jan Brueghel (Velvet Brueghel) and
Peter Paul Rubens, 1617.
Oil on canvas, 64.7 cm x 109.5 cm.
Museo del Prado, Madrid.



*The curiosity cabinet of the Dimpfel family
of wholesale
ironmongers and miners from Regensburg*

Joseph Arnold, 1668.

Opaque pigment with heightening in gold on
parchment. Ulmer Museum, Ulm.



Alfred Russel Wallace On the Law Which Has Regulated the Introduction of New Species (S20: 1855)

Every naturalist who has directed his attention to the subject of the geographical distribution of animals and plants, must have been interested in the singular facts which it presents. Many of these facts are quite different from what would have been anticipated, and have hitherto been considered as highly curious, but quite inexplicable.



Emperor Rudolf II as Vertumnus
(detail)

Giuseppe Arcimboldo, 1590.
Oil on wood, 70.5 x 57.5 cm.
Skokloster Castle, Balsta, Sweden.





None of the explanations attempted from the time of Linnæus are now considered at all satisfactory; none of them have given a cause sufficient to account for the facts known at the time, or comprehensive enough to include all the new facts which have since been, and are daily being added.



Solanum melongena
Aubergine (Solanées)

Plate from Basilius Besler's
Herbarium (Hortus Eystettensis),
1613



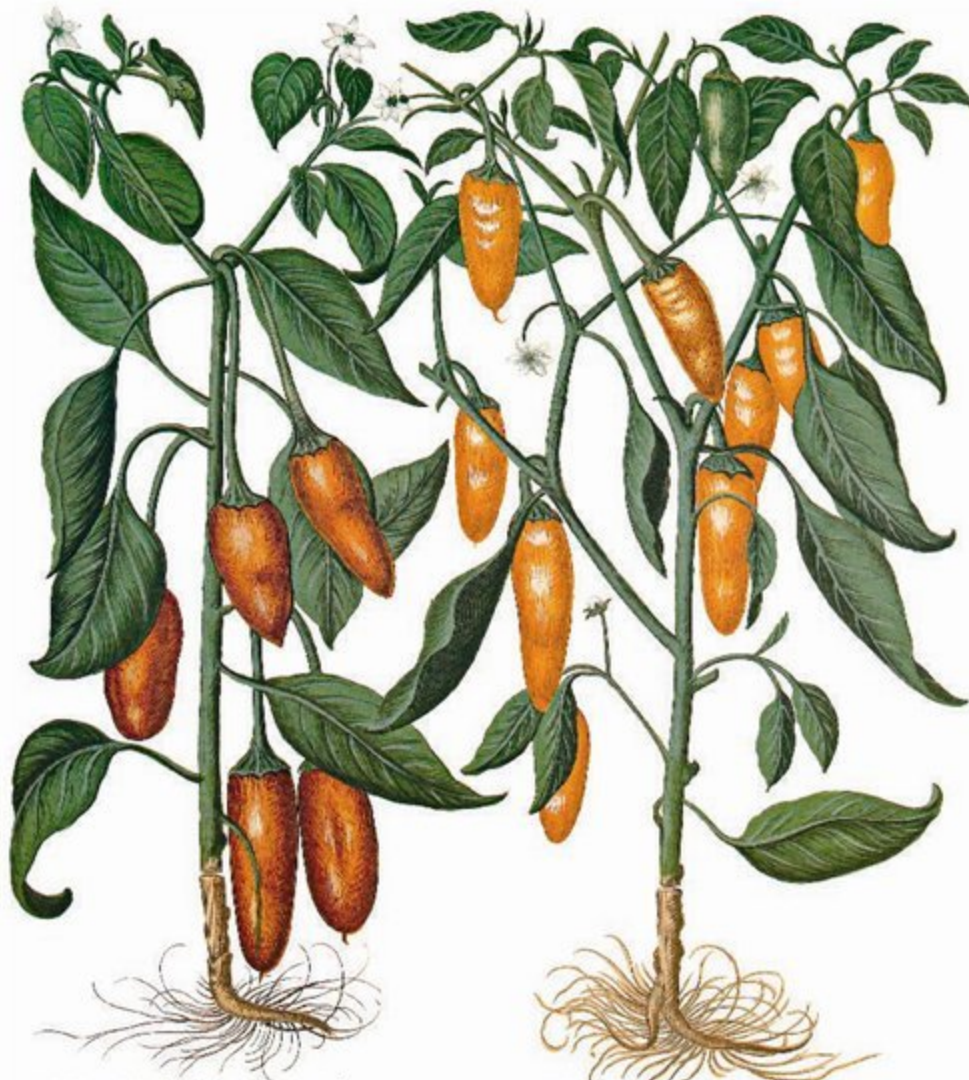
Melanzana fructu pallido.



Of late years, however, a great light has been thrown upon the subject by geological investigations, which have shown that the present state of the earth, and the organisms now inhabiting it, are but the last stage of a long and uninterrupted series of changes which it has undergone, and consequently, that to endeavour to explain and account for its present condition without any reference to those changes (as has frequently been done) must lead to very imperfect and erroneous conclusions.

I., II. *Capsicum specie*
Pepper with long, yellow fruits
(Solanaceae)

Plate from Besler's *Herbarium*



Piper Indicum fructuum latum

Piper Indicum filiquis flavis.



The facts proved by geology are briefly these: That during an immense, but unknown period, the surface of the earth has undergone successive changes; land has sunk beneath the ocean, while fresh land has risen up from it; mountain chains have been elevated; islands have been formed into continents, and continents submerged till they have become islands; and these changes have taken place, not once merely, but perhaps hundreds, perhaps thousands of times: That all these operations have been more or less continuous, but unequal in their progress, and during the whole series the organic life of the earth has undergone a corresponding alteration.

I. *Capsicum specie*
Sweet Pepper called "Tomato"
(Solanaceae)

II. *Capsicum specie*
Pepper called "Cherry"
(Solanaceae)

Plate from Besler's *Herbarium*



Piper minimum Siliquis
rotundis.

Piper Indictum rotun-
dum maximum.



This alteration also has been gradual, but complete; after a certain interval not a single species existing which had lived at the commencement of the period. This complete renewal of the forms of life also appears to have occurred several times: That from the last of the Geological epochs to the present or Historical epoch, the change of organic life has been gradual: the first appearance of animals now existing can in many cases be traced, their numbers gradually increasing in the more recent formations, while other species continually die out and disappear, so that the present condition of the organic world is clearly derived by a natural process of gradual extinction and creation of species from that of the latest geological periods.

I., II. *Capsicum specie*
Red-fruited upward-facing Pepper
(Solanaceae)

Plate from Besler's *Herbarium*