

XIX. *Some Observations on Iris susiana of Linnæus, and on the natural Order of Aquilaria. In a Letter to Alexander Mac-Leay, Esq. F.R.S. Sec. Linn. Soc. By Sir James Edward Smith, M.D. F.R.S. P.L.S.*

Read June 16, 1812.

DEAR SIR,

DISAPPOINTED in my last hope, of the pleasure of attending the concluding meeting, for this season, of the Linnean Society, which the state of my health has rendered impracticable, I am still unwilling that the meeting should pass by without some testimony of remembrance on my part, however trifling may be what I have to communicate. My botanical observations have been of late confined to my own very small garden, but no theatre is too confined for a person who wishes to use his eyes with attention. The *Iris susiana* of Linnæus, or Chalcedonian Iris, which has flowered very finely last week, has suggested some observations, with which I will now venture to trouble you. I know not how this species came to be mentioned in the *Hortus Kewensis* as blossoming in March and April. I have never seen its flowers but in the early part of June, and during a very short period, perhaps ten days, only.

There appear to be two distinct varieties, if not species, comprehended under the above name. One of these is *Iris susiana major variegata*, of Swertius' *Florilegium*, tab. 38. f. 2. This is figured in Curtis's Magazine, t. 91, tolerably well, though the

colouring gives but an inadequate idea of the solemn magnificence of the original. It is moreover the plant of the Linnæan herbarium, and the only kind I have ever seen in our gardens.

The other is *Iris susiana latifolia minor*, Swert. *Floril. t. 39, f. 1*. This may be the *Iris susiana* of Redouté's *Liliacées, t. 18*, which is there drawn much smaller, as well as of a darker colour, than Curtis's plant. There is however an essential difference, if it be faithfully represented, in the plant figured by Swertius; its dependent petals being deeply lobed, which Redouté does not express, and which, if it be true, affords a specific distinction no less certain than extraordinary. It is much to be wished that this point could be ascertained by living specimens from France or from Turkey, or perhaps from some recluse old country garden in England.

But the matter which chiefly leads me to bring this *Iris* under your notice at present is its name, and reputed native country. Clusius, who first mentions the plant and justly celebrates it as the finest of its genus, relates, that being at Vienna in 1573, he received a root of this *Iris* from the Imperial Ambassador, then just returned from Constantinople, who sent others of the same species to his friends in Holland. These were brought from Constantinople under the name of *Alaja Susani*, and *Alaga Susam*, with an Italian inscription signifying that "the flower was elegantly pencilled with black and white, and had a good smell." "Hence," says Clusius, "as the name seems to indicate that it was brought from Susa, the capital of Susiana, to the gardens near Constantinople, on the other side the Bosphorus, I have called it *Iris Susiana*." This Curtis repeats, and Redouté thinks it necessary to inform his countrymen that "it does not derive its name from Susa in Italy."

Now I cannot help presuming that this conjecture of Clusius
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is ill-founded. The name *Susam* or *Susani* appears to be the general Turkish appellation of an Iris, derived no doubt from the Hebrew *Susan* or *Schuschan*, a lily. Dr. Sibthorp mentions *Susen* as the Turkish name of *Iris germanica*, one of the most common and conspicuous species. The ancient town of *Susa* itself is indeed said to have owed its name to the quantity of lilies or flowers about it; but there is no authentic indication of the plant under our consideration, in particular, being one of them. On the contrary, its bearing our climate so well, never suffering, as far as I can observe, from any degree of cold experienced here, except accompanied by too much wet, leads us to presume it a native of a more northern latitude, and probably our English name, Chalcedonian Iris, is more near the truth. At least we may safely conclude that its Turkish denomination is no proof of its coming from *Susa*. With respect to the scent of this flower, I agree with Clusius, that no agreeable one is to be perceived about it. On the contrary, I have found a slight, but very perceptible fetor, in the fresh-gathered flower, chiefly at the orifices between the lower petals and the stigma, which recalls some idea of the *Stapelia* genus, and affords another instance, in addition to those already observed, of a coincidence between the colours, or at least the style of colouring, of some flowers and their smell.—I might add a few remarks on the true stigma of the Iris, concerning which some unfounded ideas, as I conceive them, of my late friend Cavanilles, are given in Sims and König's Annals of Botany, v. i. 412. But those ideas are abundantly refuted in the very same place, by the observations of Kölreuter and Sprengel, who surely have sufficiently shown the actual stigma to be in the cleft at the end of that petal-like expansion, which Linnæus called by this name, and which constitutes the peculiar generic character of *Iris*. This a very slight examination of the various

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species cannot fail to ascertain ; and the *I. susiana*, being large and distinctly formed, is one of the best for the purpose.

On another subject, quite unconnected with the above, I shall but slightly touch, and that rather in the form of an inquiry than a communication. Has any one ever adverted to the natural order of the *Aquilaria*, since Cavanilles and Jussieu published their very imperfect accounts of this genus ? I cannot but suspect it to belong to the *Euphorbiæ*. Dr. Roxburgh has lately sent me some seeds of this plant in their capsules, evidently the same as Cavanilles has figured, and I presume Sir Joseph Banks and others are supplied with them. The insertion of the parts, the nature of the little hairy tufts which are in the place of petals, and the configuration of the capsule, favour my opinion, which is strengthened by the acrid burning flavour of the seeds. As to its affinity to *Samyda*, I presume no one will support that opinion, nor does it appear on what grounds it has been advanced. I inclose two of the capsules, and shall be thankful for any information concerning them.

I remain, &c.

Norwich, June 15, 1812.

J. E. SMITH.

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