

Figures From the Past

A Spiritan brother is credited for creating a fruit that is loved around the globe.

According to Spiritan history, Brother Marie-Clement—also known as Vital Rodier—used donated land to develop a species of mandarin that became known as the Clementine fruit.

Marie-Clement was born in 1839 in Malville, France. He first wanted to become a Carthusian monk at Valbonne, but found the lifestyle too austere. Instead, he joined the Brothers of the Annunciation at Misserghin in Algeria, where his uncle was a brother.

The Brothers of the Annunciation ran an orphanage in Misserghin, a village near Oran, on donated land. The Brothers turned the land into an agricultural estate, with famous nurseries. Orphans from France and Algeria trained on the land and it was here that Marie-Clement worked among the vines and citrus trees.

According to Rene Charrier's *Memoire Spiritaine, Etudes et Documents 1*, "You could say that nothing was really planted without him throughout the 20 hectares (a hectare is roughly 107,600 square feet) of the nursery and the 35 hectares of the vineyard. It was he who introduced several hundreds of varieties of trees into the country, including fruit trees and ornamental ones, not to speak of the marvelous collection of rose bushes with almost 600 of the rarest varieties...he even developed many types of plants and fruits, notably a species of mandarin, which won the admiration of connoisseurs and which the orphans baptized the Clementine."

The timing of this "invention," according to lore, is some time between 1892 and 1900. According to Marie-Clement's tombstone, it took place in 1894.

According to Charrier, Spiritan tradition speaks to the manner of Marie-Clement's discovery in two ways:

"On the property, on the bank of the Misserghin wadi, an uncultivated tree had grown among the thorn bushes. It was neither a mandarin tree nor an orange tree. Its fruit was redder than a mandarin and had a delicious taste and, moreover, it had no pith. This is what a young Arab told Brother Clement after having tasted it. As he was interested in these fruits, our arboriculturist took it upon himself to make grafts with slips from this miraculous tree. The operation was successful; the grafts were increased and the new tree was called a Clementine tree."

and

"Another version was given to us by the son of a worker who lived at the nursery at the time of Brother Clement. The latter was following a bee that was collecting pollen for honey making. The bee went from a Seville orange tree onto a mandarin tree. What could come from such cross fertilization? The Brother attached a red ribbon to the flower of mandarin tree and kept an eye on the fruit it produced. He made a seedling from the fruit when it matured and obtained a Clementine."

So, how does Brother Clement figure into Spiritan history when he was a member of the Brothers of the Annunciation? The Brothers found themselves in serious economic trouble and, on the advice of the Holy See, approached the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. In 1901, Rome authorized the Brothers to join the Spiritans, and one year later, Brother Clement became a Spiritan. He died in 1904. ■

