



The *mnw*-plant, the *mnwh*-plant, the *tw*n-plant, and the *ihy*-plant: possible taxonomical identifications?

Abstract

More than 42 native and foreign floral and 11 faunal species were incorporated into the landscape designs of early to mid-late 18th Dynasty Theban formal gardens by ancient Egyptian architects. The flora and fauna beautified the landscapes, had historical, cultural, and religious importance and symbolism, and were raised as surplus produce (*mpwt*) for the institution(s) to which they were connected by intricate networks of individuals (Reichart 2021; Reichart forthcoming, Reichart forthcoming-b).

Four of the floral species have yet to be identified with certainty: the *mnw*-plant, the *mnwh*-plant, and the *tw*n-plant, and the *ihy*-plant. Current evidence from the ancient Egyptian record as well as previous scholarship on the four flora are examined in this case study, and if possible, attempt to identify each with a particular species from our modern plant taxonomy.

Mnw-plant

An examination of the similarly spelled graphemes, palaeographies, and archaeobotanicals, as well as an analysis of the regional flora that grows beside the El-Ashmunein-Beni Suef canals in proximity to ancient Khemenu (Hermopolis) demonstrates that the *mnw*-plant is likely **Ploughman's spikenard (*Pluchea dioscoridis* (L.) Desf. DC.)**: a member of the camphorweed genus *Pluchea* that is an evergreen, canal-loving, many-branched tree or scrub species of the daisy and composite family Asteraceae distributed along the Nile Basin, Red and Mediterranean Seas, Western and Eastern Deserts, Sinai and Fayyum, which grows up to three meters tall, produces whitish yellow flower clusters arranged on peduncles with aromatic, oblong leaves, and clustered roots that have been used since pharaonic times.

Ploughman's spikenard (*mnw*-plant) was associated with the ithyphallic local god Min (*Mnw*). Their leaves and roots were used in medicine/magic as stimulants, relaxants, to treat rheumatoid arthritis, flatulence, and colds, colic, epileptic seizures, and male and female infertility. While their white flowers and aromatic leaves were pressed into nard oil to be used by ancient Egyptian farmers and the upper classes to perfume and rub through their hair and wigs due to its natural mosquito- and fly-repellant properties.



Ihy-plant

An examination of the similarly spelled graphemes, palaeographies, and of its use in medicine indicates that the *ihy*-plant is a fragrant tree or undershrub species that produces flowers and fruit, and which was grown in ancient Egyptian formal gardens, such as that of the nobleman Ineni who had five planted in his β -formal garden beside his home at Thebes.

Ihy-plant fruit and leaves were used fresh and dried in medicine to treat diseases in the stomach, eyes, heartburn, urinary and bladder infections, leg contractions, as well as rashes, blisters, and BSI lumps, and for hair loss.

The author is still in the process of attributing a possible species to the *ihy*-plant.

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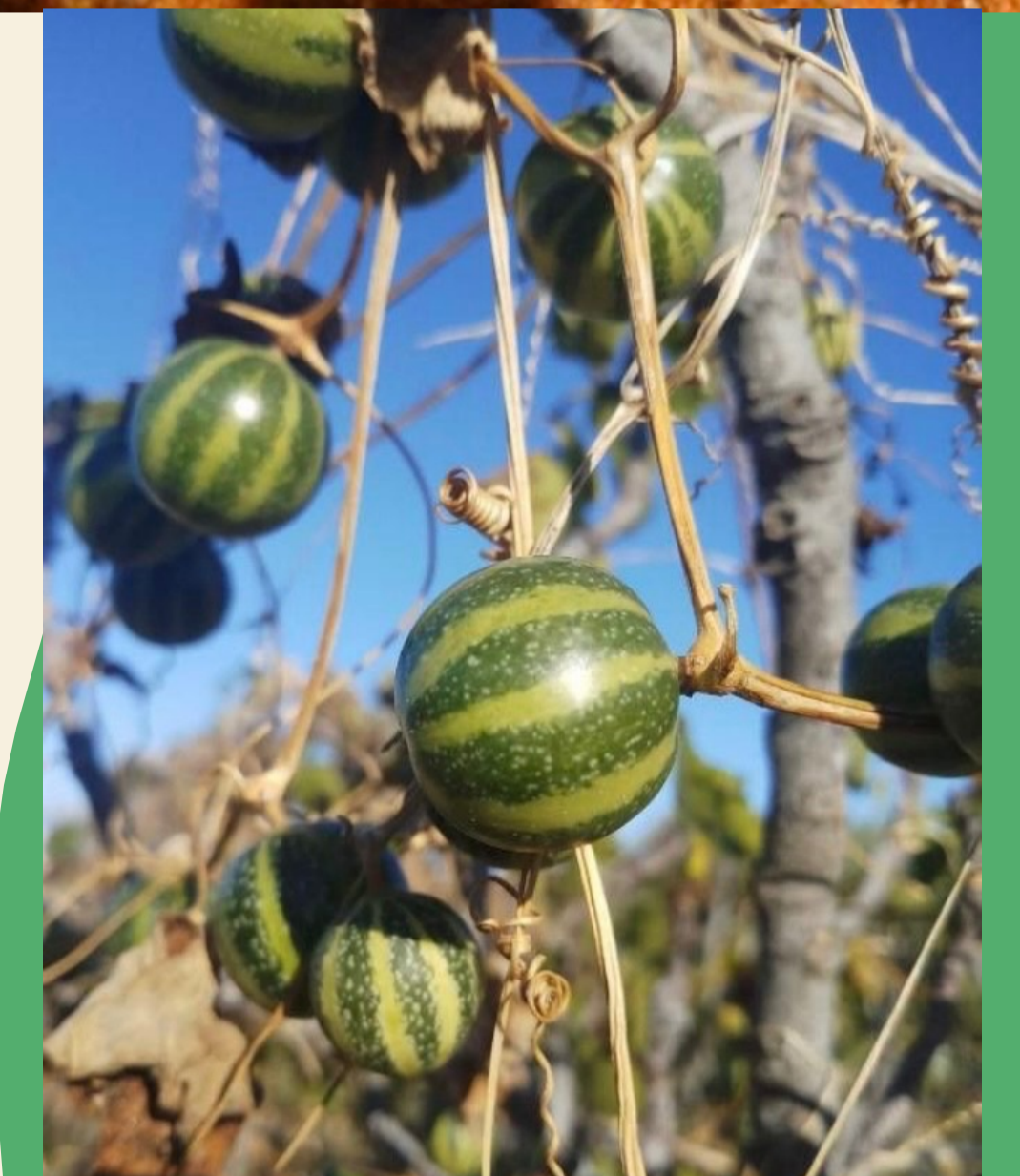
Affiliations: The Theban Mapping Project -
The American Research Center in Egypt;
The Colossi of Memnon and Amenhotep III
Temple Conservation Project

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Mnwh-plant

An examination of the similarly spelled graphemes, palaeographies, and archaeobotanicals, as well as an analysis of previous scholarship demonstrates that *mnwh*-plant is likely **Abu Jahl's melon/colocynth (*Citrullus colocynthis* (L.) Schrad.)**: a perennial, undershrub species of the gourd vine family Cucurbitaceae within the desert vine and watermelon genus *Citrullus* native to North Africa, the Levant, the Arabian Peninsula, the Middle East, and Central Asia with a central taproot that spreads into two- to four-meter-long clusters of climbing tendrils with palmate leaves and star-shaped yellow flowers that form into globular, bittersweet marrow melons with nut-like, nutritious seeds.

Abu Jahl's melon/colocynth has been cultivated by human populations in Egypt from the Neolithic era (10,000-4500 BC) onwards evidenced by the discovery of its fruits, tendrils, and seeds at Adaima, El-Omari, Naqada, Hermonthis (Armant), Abu (Elephantine), Nekhen (Hierakonpolis), Thebes (Luxor), Myos Hormos (Qusayr el-Qadim), and Mons Claudianus (De Vartavan et al. 2010: 78-79; Zohary 2000: 194). Abu Jahl's melon was associated with the moon, and particularly to Artemis/Diana by the Graeco-Roman period. The roots, leaves, fruits, and seeds of Abu Jahl's melon have been used as a stomach laxative, emetic, diuretic, as well as to treat lung, stomach, and liver diseases, diabetes, cough, body aches and pains, and external cuts since pharaonic times.



*Tw*n-plant

An examination of the similarly spelled graphemes, palaeographies, and archaeobotanicals, as well as an analysis of the 'low bank meadow' flora thrive in the 'seasonal submerged land habitats' demonstrates that *tw*n-plant is likely **Alfalfa/lucerne (*Medicago sativa* L.)**: a perennial, protein-rich herb species, cultivated for human and animal consumption, with erect, panicles of trifoliate leaflets that produce racemose of purple, butterfly-like florets that form into crescent-shaped pea pods in the spring of the pea and legume family Fabaceae native to Iran, Iraq, Asia Minor, Central Asia, Algeria, Tunisia, France, Italy, and introduced into Egypt as early as the Late Upper Palaeolithic period.

Alfalfa/lucerne is a low bank meadow flora that grows in seasonal submerged land habitats along the Nile banks; was introduced and cultivated for human and animal consumption in Egypt from the Late Upper Palaeolithic period onwards based on its type species discovered at various archaeological sites; has proven antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties for medicinal use; and based on similar graphemes and sociocultural contexts, seems to be closely associated with domesticated cattle breeds, fighting bulls and bullfighting, a bovine *tw*n-disease that is likely **bighead disease**, bull-like virility, courage, strength, battles, the moon, the gods Min of Koptos and of the Wadi Hammamat and Montju, and certain types of canals.

