

## California Avocado Society 1997 Yearbook 81: 172-174

### THE MOST IMPORTANT KNOWN REFERENCES TO THE AVOCADO IN LITERATURE, DOWN TO THE END OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

1519. ENCISO. First reference to the avocado in print. Without stating the common name, this chronicler shows that the fruit was commonly grown in the vicinity of Santa Marta, Colombia, at the time of the Conquest.

1526. OVIEDO. States that avocados are found on "Tierra Firme," the coast of what is today Colombia; he describes them, but gives no common name, calling them simply "pear trees." In his later and more extensive work, he calls them "wild pear trees," and adds that he has seen them in Nicaragua as well as on Tierra Firme.

1532-1550. CIEZA DE LEON. Reports having seen them in Panama, northern Columbia; the Cauca valley of Colombia; and in the coastal valleys of Ecuador and Peru. He uses both "aguacate" and "palta" as common names. First appearance of either of these names in print, so far as I can find.

1554. CERVANTES SALAZAR. First mention of the "aguacate" in Mexico. Without details.

1565. BENZONI. Described the fruit as growing in Nicaragua, but gives no common name for it.

1569. SAHAGUN. Uses the Aztec name, which he spells "aoacatl," and describes several forms grown in Mexico.

1589. HAWKES, in HAKLUYT. First mention of the fruit in English, so far as I have been able to ascertain. Hawkes saw it in Mexico, and lists it among other fruits of the country under the name "alvacata."

1590. ACOSTA. Distinguishes between the large, thick-skinned paltas of Peru and the small, thin-skinned ones of Mexico, without using the Mexican name "aguacate."

1601. CLUSIUS. Gives a botanical description of the "aguacate," based upon a tree which was then growing in a garden at Valencia, Spain. It is thus evident that the tree was introduced into Europe before the end of the XVI century.

1605. GARCILASO DE LA VEGA. Recounts the history of its introduction into Peru, from the province of Palta (in territory which is now Ecuador) during the reign of Tupac Yupanqui, circa 1450. This is the only work, so far as known to me, which takes the history of the avocado into pre-Columbian days. It is valuable also as explaining the origin of the name "palta."

1616. XIMENEZ. Explains that the Aztec name of the fruit was corrupted by the Spaniards to "aguacate." This work was based on the manuscript of [Hernandez], which had not yet been published at the time.

1651. HERNANDEZ. This eminent Spanish physician traveled in Mexico 1571-1575, investigating the medicinal virtues of the plants found in that country. His is the first extensive account of the Mexican avocado, with the exception of Ximenez, which (as above mentioned) was in reality an earlier publication of the same account.

1653. COBO. Using the name "palta," this writer was the first to differentiate between the three horticultural forms now known as the West Indian, Guatemalan, and Mexican races. Explains that "palta" is the Peruvian name, and says it is known as "aguacate" in Mexico, also the West Indies.

1657. A BOOK OF THE CONTINUATION OF FOREIGN PASSAGES. Second known reference to the fruit in English. Under the name "avocata," the fruit is said to be grown in Jamaica, and to sell for "eight pence per piece."

1660. COWLEY. A poetical account of the "aguacata," of interest principally as being one of the early English descriptions for this fruit.

1672. HUGHES. First extensive description in English, so far as I have been able to ascertain. Under the name "Spanish Pear" this author calls it "very delicious meat" and says he has seen it only in Jamaica, though he thinks it may also be found in adjacent islands.

1680. SHARPE, in DAMPIER. Saw the "albecato" at Taboga island, near Panama City.

1696. SLOANE. First known appearance of the names "avocado" and "alligator pear." In his later, more extensive work on Jamaica (1725), this same author calls it the "albecate pear tree" and states, erroneously, that the Spanish name is "abacado" or "avocado."

Summarizing the situation, Wilson Popenoe noted in 1935 (California Avocado Association's **Yearbook** pp. 184-194):

***"...in the light of the early chronicles and other evidence, we have reason to believe that avocados were grown at the time of the Conquest, from northern Mexico southward through Central America into northwestern South America, extending southward in the Andean region as far as Peru (where the tree had been introduced, however, shortly before the Conquest) and eastward into the Andean region of Venezuela. It is, therefore, in this area that we must search for the wild ancestor or ancestors of our present cultivated races."***