

THE CHEST GAZETTE

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Tulip

In a Busbecq Castle, a baby was born. Some gossipers even said it was the illegitimate baby of the Seigneur de Busbecq. That Flemish boy left home to study in Leuven and in Venice. (Now Busbecq is a small city in France). Ogier Ghiselin de Busbesq was successful and had the chance of working in the court of Ferdinand I who later became the Holy Roman Emperor (Austria). He was appointed as the ambassador to Ottoman Empire during the reign of Sultan Suleiman in 1554. While he was travelling and living in Constantinople, he wrote four letters which were later merged in a book called "the Turkish Letters".

In the first letter, he says: "... we set out to finish the last stage of our journey to Constantinople, which is not far distant. As we passed through these districts we were presented with large nosegays of flowers, the narcissus, the hyacinth, and the tulipan (as the Turks call this last). ... The tulip has little or no smell; its recommendation is the variety and beauty of the colouring." [1]

He had seen the beautiful tulip flowers growing in the palace gardens of Suleiman. Although he was an ambassador, his journeys also resulted in the discovery of new plants as if he was a botanist. One of the flowers was "lale" as the Turks named.

When you trek in the nature even today, you can still see different wild types of lale. It is called as "mountain lale". Where is the origin of this flower? If it were from Anatolia, it would have been possible to see a figure of that flower in the ancient artifacts, like frescoes in the Byzantine structures. But there are lale figures on the tiles of Seljuks. They are believed to have originated in the Tien Shan mountain ranges in Central Asia [2].

So lale accompanied the Turks who migrated from this region. When the Ottomans became an empire, the lale was no longer a wild flower but a garden flower. The breeds are selected and domesticated. During Suleiman's period, the love of lale increased. Why became so popular? Religious meaning was that its spelling is similar to the spelling of the word Allah. Sufi meaning was that its blooming as a single flower on a single stem was associated with the unity of God. Romantic meaning was that its elegance was metaphorically linked to the beloved girl. Then it turned to be a flower that took root not only in the land, but also in the culture.

One day in Constantinople, Busbecq noticed that the boys wore lale attached to their hats on which a "tulbent" was wrapped. (It is still used as a scarf out of thin fabric with handcraft.) The boys were giving a message to the girls who they fascinated. He had never seen such a hat. So he asked them its name by pointing the flower. The boys thought he was asking the fabric, and they said tulbent. This misunderstanding and this wrong answer caused the name of the flower be tulbent, then it was evolved to tulipan, at last "tulip".

Busbecq packed tulip bulbs in his chests on the way back to Vienna in 1562. Busbecq introduced the bulbs to his Flemish friend, Carolus Clusius who served as the director of imperial medical garden in Vienna. In 1593, Clusius brought tulips to the botanical garden in Leiden [3]. Bulbs somehow spread to other towns in the Netherlands.

Since then the owner of tulips are the Dutch.

[1] <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/53681/53681-h/53681-h.htm>

[2] <https://dutchreview.com/culture/society/tulips-in-the-netherlands-dutch-thing/>

[3] <https://amsterdamtulipmuseumonline.com/blogs/tulip-facts/happy-488th-birthday-to-clusius-progenitor-of-tulips>



Tulip figures on Wase (glazed tile)



Tulip, Tulbent, Hat and Young Boy



Tulbent and Old Boy



Tulip Farm in the Netherlands