

BITTER ORANGE / תפוז מר (Tapuz Mar) / Naranja amarga

"See the fruits of the orange tree, displayed above, That look like crimson tears from the trials of love...."

Scent Profile: Fresh, citrusy, slightly bitter

Medieval Insight:

Bitter oranges (*Citrus aurantium*) were introduced from Asia via the Islamic world. While Maimonides doesn't mention oranges directly, later Jewish physicians in Iberia valued citrus peels—especially from citron and bitter orange—for cleansing the stomach and lifting the spirit. The rind was often candied or infused in drinks or for medicinal purposes.

Medieval Context: Bitter oranges (*Citrus aurantium*) were introduced from Asia to Iberia via Islamic agricultural innovations and were cultivated in palace gardens and Jewish courtyards. While not eaten raw, their peel was candied or steeped in syrups for confections. The orange tree became a central image in Andalusí poetry, symbolizing sensuality, longing, and cultural refinement.

Symbolic Association: Poetic exchange, cultural hybridity, and memory.

In medieval al-Andalus (Muslim-ruled Spain), poetry was one of the highest forms of art, practiced and admired by Muslims, Jews, and Christians alike. Among the most beloved poetic themes were gardens, trees, blossoms, and fragrant spices; metaphors for love, desire, memory, the divine, and paradise.

This was a world where the orange tree was not just a fruit-bearing plant but a symbol of sensual delight and refined culture. In *"The Orange Tree"*, the Muslim poet Ibn Sāra as-Santaríní celebrates the

tree's beauty and scent, blending nature and emotion, body and soul, themes that echoed throughout the poetry of the time.

Jewish poets, such as Yehuda HaLevi, Ibn Gabirol, and Moses Ibn Ezra, also wrote in Arabic and Hebrew, often drawing on the same garden imagery and fragrance metaphors. They used spices and plants to express longing for the divine, the pain of exile, or the sweetness of reunion , mirroring the poetic currents of their Muslim neighbors.

Andalusi Arabic poetry, such as that of Ibn Sāra, used citrus groves to represent longing and sensory intimacy. While Ibn Sāra was a Muslim poet, his imagery reflects the shared aesthetic of Jews, Muslims, and Christians in al-Andalus. The scent of oranges, the taste of saffron, and the rhythm of Arabic verse were part of a common cultural garden.

The Orange Tree Ibn Sāra as-Santaríní (c 1040-1123)

*See the fruits of the orange tree,
displayed above,
That look like crimson tears from the trials of love.
Topaz branches filled with carnelian balls
And the hand of the wind beats at them all.
Sometimes we smell them, some of them we kiss,
They are bottles of perfume or fair maidens' lips.*