

Study of the Archipel Fig Synonyms

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Introduction

The Archipel fig is commonly considered synonymous with Osborn Prolific and Neverella varieties. It has also been compared to a lesser degree to other types but not consistently in literature. When comparisons of morphological characteristics are made, similarities exist but differences are also evident, particularly between Osborn and Archipel. A study of readily available literature was made to identify if the two latter varieties were indeed the same. Findings lead the author to believe they are distinct varieties.

Literary Accounts

Hogg describes Archipel by the name De l' Archipel [Hogg 1884] and separately includes a description of Osborn's Prolific to which he credits introduction by Messrs. Osborn of Fulham Nursery in 1879. Hogg's account identifies differences between the varieties. Archipel is identified as large, obovate and neck not prominent. Osborn is described roundish turbinate, tapering to a very long neck. Ribs are prominently described as present on the Archipel fruit but are entirely absent from the description of Osborn. Both fruits are said to have an opaline pulp but he distinguishes the two in identifying the appearance of occasional rose-colored fibers in Archipel and the absence of any in Osborn. Hogg further identifies that the Osborn's taste is rich but the Archipel's is not and described as flat.

Eisen also lists both the Archipel and Osborn as two different varieties [Eisen 1901]. He claims that the original name of the fig introduced as Osborn was not known and it was not identified with any variety at the time. His description of the Osborn follows Hogg but he thoroughly describes Archipel and cites the synonym De l' Archipel. Eisen and Hogg are consistent in their descriptions of Archipel's shape, ribbing and colors. Eisen also makes note of the occasional rosy fiber in the pulp and the mildness of flavor. He points out the absence of any red in the pulp of the Osborn. Eisen identifies the importing of Archipel to Niles, CA by the USDA.

Condit does not identify Archipel in "The Fig" but discusses Osborn in various contexts [Condit 1947]. Osborn is identified as having a white pulp that matures to amber. Condit also identifies that Osborn is synonymous with Ronde Noire in conflict with Eisen who cites that Osborn is distinctly different than Ronde Noir. Hogg makes no mention of Osborn and Ronde Noir as being similar. In fact, he equates Ronde Noir and Black Ischia. Black Ischia has a deep red pulp which is clearly not the case with Osborn. The discrepancy in descriptions and synonyms makes the Ronde Noir – Osborn relationship suspect even though Condit's description of the Ronde Noir is very similar to Osborn. Condit points out that Osborn was often confused with Brown Turkey by some English horticulturists.

In Hilgardia, Condit reports that Osborn (England), Archipel (England) and Figue Gris  (France) all were tested and found to be identical at Riverside [Condit 1955]. Figue Gris  was identified with other French varieties by Eisen with pulp colors ranging from rose to dark red which is inconsistent with the prior statement. He further says that Ronde Noir and Osborn similarity varied across plots introducing uncertainty that they are the same. Condit goes on to describe that Riverside testing showed Archipel and Neveralla to be identical. Neveralla was listed by B. R. Amend in the 1942 catalog of Willamette Fig Gardens in Portland, Oregon. Condit's description of Archipel (grown at Riverside since 1930) is consistent with the earlier accounts by Hogg and Eisen, however, he identifies a long neck and fails to mention any rosy fibers in the pulp which are in conflict.

Contemporary accounts freely cite Archipel, Osborn and Neverella as synonyms of the same variety or very similar but their descriptions are often conflicting with the accounts of Hogg, Eisen and Condit and few point out the discriminating morphological characteristics of neck and pulp.

USDA Accessions

The USDA Germoplasm Repository at the University of California – Davis maintains Archipel and Osborn as two different accessions DFIC 0007 and DFIC 0075 (respectively). The observation data in their descriptor database differs between the two.

Main crop fruit of Archipel are characterized by purple over gray coloring while Osborn is described as green over yellow. At the neck, Archipel is amber/grey and Osborn is green/yellow. Both are shown to have ribs present and an open eye, however the scales of Archipel are flat and Osborn protruding. Both fruit are described as having amber pulp with some pink patterns.

Growth habit differences exist between the USDA Archipel and Osborn accessions. Archipel has a spreading habit with higher small branching while Osborn has an upright form with fewer small branches. Leaf shapes are described as similar. Terminal buds of both varieties are described as yellow/green and orange at the scale edges but Osborn has brown tips to the bud scales.

Based upon the descriptions for Archipel and Osborn in the USDA collection, we can conclude that these varieties are similar but distinct and differences exist in coloring and habit. These differences could normally be explained away by differences in culture and local climate variations if they were from two geographically separated collections: this is not the case for the USDA collection.

Genetic Relationship

Recent genetic testing conducted of the fig accessions at the USDA Germoplasm Repository at the University of California – Davis included both Archipel and Osborn [Stover]. The study showed a high genetic variability in the USDA collection and

grouped the accessions into several clusters based upon the closeness of genetic relationship. Osborn and Archipel were characterized within two entirely different clusters indicating significant variation between the two accessions justifying the characterization as separate cultivars.

Conclusions

After review of the descriptions provided by literary subject matter authorities it can be concluded that the Archipel and Osborn varieties have sufficient distinction to be considered individual cultivars. Lesser comparisons to varieties Ronde Noir and Figue Gris  do not bear out to scrutiny of the descriptions. It is questionable if Condit's claim that Neverella and Archipel are identical will hold in the absence of additional comparisons. The distinctions between Archipel and Osborn are supported by the morphological descriptions made of the accessions in the USDA collection and further confirmed by the differentiation found in the genetic study performed.

References

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