

Babbar Limonu

Celebrating Citrus in Iran

Natty Mark Samuels

Baba

Linzu

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Dedication

to the artist

Haile Mcael

for the pastel portrait of myself
and the hours spent drumming together

There is no where else Baba Limu would rather sit than here, before returning home, after the day of work on the hillside orchard. Hills – lower and higher - opposite him; the town and village below; everything wrapped in a green cocoon. Every evening, before returning to the hearth, he sits and enjoys the beauty of where he works.

Although during the day he is the exemplary team leader, his co-workers respect his after-work wish, of a quiet communication with Creation. They bid him a good evening and make their way homeward. But many times, going down the hill, they will stop - some for only a few moments - immediately entranced by the sound that comes from his violin: like a prayer for evening rest, for all who live in the valley. He doesn't play every evening, but when he does, the world goes quiet, while it listens to his sunset benediction: giving thanks for what is around him. In the town and the village and all around, Baba Limu is lauded for his violin musicianship, as well as his citrus cultivation. A man and a working horse stop also, as do two young lovers, walking hand in hand: they all stop, in appreciation of human beauty, alongside what the Creator has give us.

Although he mainly grows oranges, in his orchard near the Caspian Sea, he is known as Baba Limu, rather than Baba Naranj, the word for orange. Because since the days of his youth, he's begun everyday of his life, with a lime water drink: like a daily paean to *citrus aurantifolia*. They called him Limu then, the Baba was added with the passing of time.

He likes to go to Sari, the old capital of his homeland, but always looks forward to the return, to his village in Mazandaran.

Now in his late seventies, he has lived the modern history of citriculture. From the harnessing of rain, directed into the furrows, to the use of irrigation know as drip. He has known of *qanat* – the ancient aqueduct system – and farming on the terraces. The snows, the frosts and the loss. He has battled from time to time with the vectors – those who carry fruit disease – and sometimes he has been the victor. He has seen the rise of greenhouses and the coming of chemicals; the advent of machinery: but he knows the human hand is still necessary.

He sits and plays - and only the sun that is setting is sweeter.

Looking at the orange gifts hanging from the tree, he thinks of the citron - known then as the "Median Apple" - said to have been first cultivated in his country. Wild in the Himalayan region, was it first cultivated here? Did Ibn Sina walk where I am sitting? Was it here in Mazandaran, or in Fars or Hormogzan, that he saw and wrote of the citron and other members of the *Rutaceae* family and their benefits?

Two boys play fighting, stop their friendly fisticuffs and lay on the grass, listening to Baba Limu.

He thinks of the warm air from the Caspian, the rainwater and protection that Mount Alborz offers, reminding himself once again, of the need to count your blessings and be grateful.

A woman halts the scolding of her child and the two sit down: the mother embracing her loved one.

On the edge of an orange grove, on a hillside in Iran, an old man with his violin, sends a lullaby over the green cradle, heralding a night of peace and quiet for all.

Sources

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Dept. of Horticultural Science, University of Minnesota

Financial Tribune