Pomegranate (Punica granata L.) Inner Decay Caused by Gluconobacter oxydans Bacterium

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

ABSTRACT

During the autumn of 2018, inner fruit decay symptoms were observed in pomegranate fruits collected from markets in different localities and farms from Giza, Minia and Assuit Governorates, Egypt. Similar symptoms were observed in each location. The symptoms appeared as creamy bright growth of bacteria in the mesocarp layer, decayed both arils and seeds. Bacteria were isolated from these decayed fruits. The pathogenicity test for isolated bacteria was done. Also, the expressed symptom was compared with the original observed symptoms as followed in Koch postulates. Based on morphological characteristics, analysis of 16S rDNA Genes sequences, and pathogenicity test on pomegranate fruits, the causal agent was identified as Gluconobacter oxydans. Possible control attempts were implemented included applying of essential oils. The results revealed that essential oils of Marjoram, followed by Chamomile expressed the most effective against infection with the bacterium when compared with the control.

Keywords: Gluconobacter oxydans; host range; pomegranate; Punica granatum; essential volatile oils.

1. INTRODUCTION

Pomegranate (Punica granatum L., belong to family Punicaceae [1]) is one of the important fruit crops which are cultivated in both arid and semiarid regions around the world; however is gaining lot of attention of total world over due to its high nutrients and economic values [2,3].

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Recently, there is an increase in the cultivation area of pomegranate in Egypt. Pomegranate is used in several medical purposes as diarrhea, ulcers [4], diabetes [5], male infertility [6] and antiparasitic agent [7]. Pomegranate fruit production has become limited due to many fungal pathogens that attack in several areas in the world. Boulos et al. [8] found that Cercospora punicae caused pomegranate leaf and fruit spots in Egypt. In Florida; USA, very aggressive six fungal pathogens on pomegranate fruits and leaves, causing foliar spotting and blighting, and fruit rot, were isolated. Neofusicoccum parvum and Lasiodiplodia sp., two species of Colletotrichum, Pilidiella granati; the fruit rot-causing fungus, and a fungus belonging to Order: Diaporthales [9].

Fruits of pomegranate are subject to infect with several biotic and abiotic diseases. Alternaria alternata, Coniella granati, Aspergillus niger, Rhizopus stolonifer and Botrytis spp. were reported as the major biotic agents whereas fruit cracks, sunburn and hail damage were the most commonly detected abiotic diseases in Turkey and Palestine [10,11]. Penicillium implicatum was found to be the causal of fruit rot of stored pomegranate [12]. Penicillium expansum, P. sclerotiorum, P. glabrum and P. minioluteum and Pilidiella granati were reported as mold pathogens of pomegranate (cv. Mollarde Elche) in Spain [13] and in Mexico [14]. Allam et al. [15] in Egypt isolated Botrytis cinerea from grey molded pomegranate fruits. Alternaria alternata was isolated from fruits (Wonderful cv.) infected with heart rot (black rot), whereas species of Alternaria, Aspergillus, Botrytis, Penicillium and Rhizopus were isolated from soft rotted pomegranate fruits in southern Italy [16]. Sherkhane et al. [17] reported that Xanthomonas axonopodis pv. punicae, the causal organism of bacterial blight of pomegranate in India, infect leaves, stems and reduce crop yield to 60 - 80%, while bacterial knot disease caused by Pseudomonas savastanoi pv. savastanoi on pomegranate trees isolated in Turkey by Bozkurt et al. [18].

Gluconobacter oxydans was the prominent suspected bacterial species. Gluconobacter strains bright in flowers and fruits, e.g. ripe grapes [19,20,21]; apples and dates, [20]. Gluconobacter strains also found in soil of the gardens, baker’s soil, honeybees, fruits, cider, beer and wine, and juice of sugarcane [22-24], also tomato products, juices and nectars [25]. This bacterium species is featuring by regard to its nutritional requirements and optimal growth conditions [26], and is classified in distinct family: Acetobacteriaceae (as a member of the alpha-proteobacteria). No bacterial members of the family Acetobacteriaceae are known to be plant pathogenic, thus G. oxydans has been previously reported as specific plant pathogenic agent. Rohrbach and Pfeiffer [27], Kontaxis and Hayward [28] and Sherkhane [26] reported that G. oxydans is the causal agent of pink disease in pineapple. Gluconobacter oxydans strains are capable to induce apple and pear rots accompanied by various shades of browning [23]. Acetobacter and Gluconobacter were prevalent bacteria with gray mold and soft rot of postharvest diseases of tomato [29]. Essential oils (Eos) are a set of the most important natural products from medicinal and aromatic plants, due to their various biological, their medicinal and nutritional usages. In recent years, researchers of postharvest diseases used some essential oils as alternatives anti-pathogen agents to chemical applications. Most natural essential oils and their single constituents have been reported to inhibit the postharvest pathogens either in vitro or in vivo [29].

The aim of this study is to characterize and identify the decay bacterial pathogen of pomegranate fruits in Egypt, and to found a technique for its control. Studies included effect of different essential oils on growth and disease severity as a healthy and cheap alternative chemicals as well as include the host range of the organism.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Samples

Mature apparently healthy sound fruits of pomegranate (Punica granata, cv. wonderful) were collected from commercial local markets in Minia, Giza and from pomegranate private orchards in Assuit and Minia Governorates, Egypt, in autumn 2018-2020. The surface sterilized by soaking in 3% sodium hypochlorite (NaOCl) for 3 minutes and followed by washing in several changes of distilled sterile water, fruits were cut using a sterile scalpel into two halves to show if there are healthy or decayed. Naturally inner decayed fruits (Fig. 1) were used to isolate the associate pathogen(s).
Fig. 1. (A, B, and C) natural infection at autumn 2018, 2019 and 2020, respectively, (D) Artificial infection

2.2 Isolation of the Pathogen(s)

Two methods were applied to isolate the pathogen, i) a loop of the bacterial growth grown on the inner tissues of the fruit was striated on nutrient glucose agar (NGA) medium, ii) Twenty-five gram of each collected sample was weighed in sterile conditions and homogenized in sterile saline water using pestle and mortar for five minutes. The samples were collected in sterile tubes and stored at -20°C for further use [30]. One ml of each sample was serially tenfold diluted in sterile water up to 10^-5 dilution. The amount of 0.1 ml at 10^-5 dilution was spread over Nutrient agar media (NA) using sterile spreaders. The plates were incubated at 30°C for 12-24 hours for the appearance of bacterial colonies. The pure bacterial colonies obtained were primary identified using morphological analysis. Pure cultures of isolated bacteria were maintained on GYC slants (glucose 5%, yeast extract 1%, CaCO₃ 3%, agar 1.5%, pH 6.3) at 4°C for further analysis [31].

Three isolates of rod-shaped creamy-white bacteria were secured from three different pomegranate fruits showing typical symptoms. They were designated PB1, PB2 and PB3 originated from decayed fruit mesophyll.

2.3 Inoculation with the Pathogen

The inoculum was prepared for inoculation from 48 hours old cultures on nutrient glucose agar medium (NGA) suspended in distilled sterilized water, the titer was through up 2x10^6 cell ml^-1. Healthy apparent fruits were inoculated with sterile distilled water and served as control. Three methods of inoculating pomegranate fruits were compared, one by dipping them in an aqueous suspension of the tested bacteria, the other by inserting the end of a sterilized wooden toothpick charged with undiluted bacteria into the healthy fruits [32] and the third method was carried by placing a droplet of the bacterial suspension on the blossom end and then piercing the fruit repeatedly through the inoculum with the sterile needle.

2.3.1 Disease assessment

The disease severity percent (DS %) was determined using the following formula

\[\text{Disease severity (DS %)} = \frac{\text{Weight (g) of the diseased area}}{\text{Weight of integrated fruit}} \times 100\]

Re-isolation was made from inoculated fruits of pomegranate. A second inoculation was performed with the isolated bacteria to confirm pathogenicity.

2.4 Identification of Bacteria

The cultural, morphological and physiological characters (Listed in Table 1) of the three isolates under investigation were determined according to the methods described by [33].
characters were studied using Nutrient Glucose-
sodium Carbonate agar; NGCA [23], nutrient
glucose (1%) agar; NGA, nutrient sucrose (5%).

Pigmentation was studied separately using NGA
and potato slices. Biochemical tests (dextrose,
maltose, lactose, sucrose, manitol, methyl red,
Voges–Proskauer, H₂S and indole productions)
were performed to identify the bacteria. The
Bacterial presumptive identification was
confirmed with 16S rDNA, sequence analysis
[34] by methods of BioTech Research Lab,
Sigma Scientific Service Technical Support Co.
Cooperation with the Hardy Diagnostics
manufacturing facility and quality management
system is certified to ISO 13485 (www.
HardyDiagnostics.com).

2.5 Reaction of Pomegranate Varieties
and Susceptibility of Different Fruits
to Infection with Gluconobacter
oxydans

The most pathogenic isolate (GP1) was tested.
The reaction of 13 plant species, apple, pear,
plum, peach, orange, lemon, mango, guava,
grape, tomato, kaka, strawberry and cherry,
belonging to 8 different families, were tested.
Fruits of tested plants were inoculated using the
methods described by [32]. Sets of 2 inoculated
fruits were kept in plastic containers (25x7x7
cm), each replicated three times, at 30°C and
observed daily to record the symptoms
development up to 7 days. The weight of
decayed areas was recorded. Sets of different
fruits were inoculated with distilled sterilized
water, were used as control.

2.6 Effect of Essential Oils of Some
Ornamental Plants on Bacterial
Growth and Pomegranate Decay
Control

2.6.1 On bacterial growth

The inhibitory effect of the essential oils on the
growth of G. oxydans was evaluated by in vitro
assay. The essential oils of Chamomile
(Matricaria chamomilla), marjoram (Origanum
majorana), Rosemary (Salvia rosmarinus), and
thyme (Thymus vulgaris) were assessed at
concentrations of 0.1, 0.25, 0.5, 1.0, 5 and 10%
in 1.0% powdered milk. Powdered milk was
added as an emulsifier agent for the oil-based
substances [35]. The essential oils were added
separately to a previously autoclaved aqueous
solution (1.0%) of powdered milk. Control
treatments with tetracycline sulfate 500 ppm,
Copper sulfate 2.0 mg mL⁻¹ (a copper fungicide),
1.0% powdered milk, and sterilized water was
also evaluated. The experimental design was a
completely randomized block, with three
replicates (Petri dishes). Previously autoclaved
filter paper disks (5.0 mm in diameter) were
soaked in 20 µL of each treatment, dried at room
temperature, and spread in Petri dishes with
NGA medium containing 100 µL of the G.
oxydans suspension (2x10⁶ CFU mL⁻¹). The
presence and the diameter of inhibition zones
around the disks were measured, 48 hours of
incubation at 30°C [36].

2.6.2 On disease severity

The essential oils of chamomile (Matricaria
chamomilla), marjoram (Origanum majorana),
rosemary (Salvia rosmarinus), and thyme
(Thymus vulgaris) were assessed at
concentrations of 0.1 , 0.5 and 0.25 % in 1.0%
powdered milk which was added as an emulsifier
agent for the oil-based substances [35]. Mature
and healthy pomegranate fruits cultivar wonderful
were selected and washed by tap water then air
drying at room temperature (20-25°C), fruits
were surface-sterilized in 0.3% sodium
hypochlorite for three minutes then they washed
several times in sterilized distilled water. Holes (5
mm diameter and 4 mm deep) made into the
fruits, using a cork borer, 1 ml of essential oils
were sprayed separately into the holes, then kept
to air drying. One ml, 48 hours old cultures of
Gluconobacter oxydans were suspended in
distilled sterilized water through up 2x106 cell ml⁻¹
and sprayed into the holes which were plugged
with the removed pieces [15]. Each treatment
consisted of three replicates with four fruits per
replicate control fruits were inoculated with
sterilized water, 1.0% powdered milk, and
tetracycline 500 ppm was used as a positive
control. All treated fruits kept into plastic
containers (25x7x7 cm), and incubated at 30°C
up to one and three weeks when the weight of
decayed areas were recorded.

2.7 Statistical Analysis

Data of all treatments were arranged and
presented as mean from three replicates. The
experimental designs of all experiments were
completely randomized. Data were statistically
analyzed for significance in the 8th edition,
Analytical Software, USA [37] using analysis of
variance (ANOVA). Significance between means
was compared by Duncan’s multiple range test at
p<0.05 probability according to the method of
Gomez and Gomez [38].
3. RESULTS

Pomegranate (Punica granata, cv. wonderful) mature apparently healthy fruits were collected from commercial markets in Minia, Giza and from private orchards in Assuit and Minia Governorates, Egypt, in autumn 2018-2020. Heart decay consisted in an internal decay of the arils, which usually confined to part of the fruit compartments, and some seeds (25%-50%) were discolored while the rind remained healthy and unaffected. Three isolates, PB1, PB2 and PB3, of non-capsulated, non-spored, rod-shaped, gram negative, creamy-like bacteria, were isolated from the inner decayed arils on NGA. The same symptoms had showed at autumn of 2019 and 2020.

Pathogenicity test revealed that all isolates of the pathogen under investigation were able to infect pomegranate fruits cv. wonderful. However, isolates differed as regards the severity of symptoms they initiated (Table 1). Data shows that isolate PB1 is the most pathogenic one, followed by PB2 and Pb3, which could be regarded as moderately pathogenic. Data in Table 1 shows also that the incidence and severity of infection differed due to the method of inoculation, whereas the infection using toothpick for wounding fruits caused the greatest infection, then inoculation through blossom end. No infection was appeared in sound fruits immersed in bacterial suspension after 7 days of incubation at 30°C.

The morphological and physiological properties (Table 2) of the bacterium on NGA, about 48 hours old at 30°C pointed to moderate growth develops, colonies are large, highly raised with regularly edges, slimy, milky white to yellowish, produce yellowish to pink change to dark brown pigment. Growth on nutrient sucrose (5%) agar is moderate and bacteria produced a low amount of mucoid substances. On potato slice, growth is moderate and the slice tissues appear brownish, dried and necrotic after 5 days. The three tested bacterial isolates grow well at a wide range of pH, from 4 to 6.5. Optimum temperature for growth was 25 -30°C, minimum was 5-10°C, but no growth at 40°C. Comparing the characters of the isolated bacteria with those reported by Gupta et al. [23], it is suggested that the isolated bacteria belonging to Gluconobacter oxydans and it is pathogenic to pomegranate. The identification of pathogenic isolated bacteria was confirmed applying the 16S rDNA Genes sequence analysis [34] by BioTech Research Lab, Sigma Scientific Service Technical Support cooperation with the Hardy Diagnostics manufacturing facility and quality management system is certified to ISO 13485 in USA. their (PCR) technique, indicating the causal agent of inner decay of pomegranate disease was identified as Gluconobacter oxydans (Annon. 2018. Gluconobacter. HardyDiagnostics,USA. https://catalog.hardydiagnostics.com/cp_prod/Content/hugo/Gluconobacter.htm)

Table 1. Disease incidence and disease severity on pomegranate cv. Wonderful fruits according to method of inoculation with 3 bacterial isolates, PB1, PB2 and PB3, 7 days after inoculation

| Method of inoculation                  | DI%  |      |      |      | DS%  |      |      |
|---------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|                                       | PB1  | PB2  | PB3  | PB1  | PB2  | PB3  |
| Prickle (stick) with toothpick        | 100  | 100  | 100  | 92   | 61   | 77   |
| Inoculation through the blossom end   |      | 88   | 52   | 50   | 55   | 36   | 38   |
| Immersing the sound fruit in          |      | 00   | 00   | 00   | 00   | 00   | 00   |
| bacterial suspension                  |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Character or test                        | G. oxydans strain reported by [23]                                                                 | Isolated bacteria |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Gram reaction                           | Gram-variable, more than likely negative                                                       | Mostly negative   |
|                                        |                                                                                               | negative          |
|                                        |                                                                                               | Negative          |
| Shape of cell                           | Ellipsoidal to rod-shaped.                                                                      | Short rod, singly, in pairs or in short chains |
|                                        | Occurring singly, in pairs, and sometimes in short chains.                                    | Short rod, singly, in pairs or in short chains |
|                                        |                                                                                               | Short rod, singly, or in pairs |
| Size                                    | 0.5-1.0 μm X 2.6-4.2 μm                                                                       | 0.7-1.1 x2.4-4.1 μm|
|                                        |                                                                                               | 0.5-0.8 X 0.9-4.2 μm                                           |
|                                        |                                                                                               | 0.5-0.8 X 0.9-4.2 μm                                           |
| Capsules                                | None                                                                                          | None              |
|                                        |                                                                                               | None              |
|                                        |                                                                                               | None              |
| Sporulation                             | None                                                                                          | None              |
|                                        |                                                                                               | None              |
|                                        |                                                                                               | None              |
| Aerobiosis                              | +                                                                                             | +                 |
|                                        |                                                                                               | +                 |
|                                        |                                                                                               | +                 |
| Motility:                               | Motile and non-motile. When motility occurs, cells have 3-8 polar flagella.                   | Motile            |
|                                        |                                                                                               | Motile            |
|                                        |                                                                                               | Motile            |
| Color and Shape of colony               | Large, slimy, pale colonies                                                                   | Large, slimy, milky white to yellowish colonies |
|                                        |                                                                                               | Large, slimy, milky white colonies                          |
|                                        |                                                                                               | Large, slimy, pale white colonies                           |
| Edge of colonies                        | regularly                                                                                     | regularly         |
|                                        |                                                                                               | regularly         |
|                                        |                                                                                               | Regularly         |
| Pigmentation                           | may produce pink or dark brown pigments                                                        | Produce yellowish to pink change to dark brown pigment |
|                                        |                                                                                               | Produce yellowish to pink pigment                           |
|                                        |                                                                                               | Produce pink change to dark brown pigment                   |
| Glucose oxidase                         | -                                                                                             | -                 |
|                                        |                                                                                               | -                 |
|                                        |                                                                                               | -                 |
| Voges-Proskaur (VP)                     | ?                                                                                             | -                 |
|                                        |                                                                                               | -                 |
|                                        |                                                                                               | -                 |
| Methyl red                              | ?                                                                                             | -                 |
|                                        |                                                                                               | -                 |
|                                        |                                                                                               | -                 |
| Indol formation                         | -                                                                                             | -                 |
|                                        |                                                                                               | -                 |
|                                        |                                                                                               | -                 |
| H₂S production                          | -                                                                                             | -                 |
|                                        |                                                                                               | -                 |
|                                        |                                                                                               | -                 |
| Levan test on NSA (1) medium            | ?                                                                                             | ±                 |
|                                        |                                                                                               | -                 |
|                                        |                                                                                               | ±                 |
| Catalase                                | Strongly-catalase-positive                                                                     | positive          |
|                                        |                                                                                               | +                 |
|                                        |                                                                                               | +                 |
| Oxidase                                 | negative                                                                                      | negative          |
|                                        |                                                                                               | negative          |
|                                        |                                                                                               | Negative          |
| Indole production                       | negative                                                                                      | negative          |
|                                        |                                                                                               | Negative          |
|                                        |                                                                                               | Negative          |
| Nitrate reduction to nitrite            | Does not reduce                                                                               | Does not reduce   |
|                                        |                                                                                               | Does not reduce   |
|                                        |                                                                                               | Does not reduce   |
| Aerobic                                 | Obligate aerobic                                                                              | Obligate aerobic  |
|                                        |                                                                                               | Obligate aerobic  |
|                                        |                                                                                               | Obligate aerobic  |

Table 2. The reported morphological, biochemical and physiological characters of *Gluconobacter oxydans* in comparison with those of the isolated organism.
| Character or test                  | G. oxydans strain reported by [23] | PB1 | PB2 | PB3 |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Oxides ethanol into acetic acid   | positive                          | positive | Positive | Positive |
| Utilization of carbon sources     |                                   |     |     |     |
| Starch hydrolysis                 | No growth or acid                 | -   | -   | -   |
| Esculin hydrolysis                | ?                                 | -   | -   | -   |
| D-Mannitol                        | Grow but requires p-aminobenzoic acid as growth factor | delicate growth | delicate growth | delicate growth |
| sorbitol, glycerol                | grow                              | +   | +   | +   |
| D-Glucose, galactose, D-fructose, mannose, sucrose, | | | | |
| pantothenic acid, niacin, thiamine | grow                              | +   | +   | +   |
| Hypersensitive reaction in tobacco| ?                                 | positive | Positive | Positive |
| Temperature                       | Grow Opt. at range 25-30°C         | Opt. 30°C | Opt. 25-30°C | Opt. 25-30°C |
| pH                               | pH 5.5 - 6.0.                      | 4-6.5 | 4-6.0 | 4-6.0 |

(1) NSA = nutrient sucrose (30g/L) agar medium, (2) + = poor growth, ± = moderate growth with low amount of mucoid substances
Furthermore, the pathogen was re-isolated from all inoculated fruits and was identified to be *G. oxydans* as described above, fulfilling Koch's postulates.

### 3.1 Effect of Some Essential Oils on Bacterial Growth in vitro

None of the four tested essential oils inhibited the growth of *G. oxydans* in vitro, at the concentration of 0.1% (Table 3). At the concentrations of 0.25 and 0.5%, the tested essential oils partially inhibited the growth of the bacterium. The pathogenic bacterium growth was highly inhibited at 5.0 and 10.0% of chamomile, marjoram, rosemary and thyme. However, at the concentrations of 5 and 10% of the essential oils, the inhibition growth of bacterium was almost like the effect of the tested antibiotic. Bacterial growth was observed on sterilized water, powdered milk and copper sulfate, whereas total bacterial inhibition occurred on tetracycline sulfate.

### 3.2 Effect of Temperature Degrees on Artificial Infection by *G. oxydans* of Pomegranate Fruit

This experiment was conducted to standardize the range and optimum temperatures for the pomegranate fruit decay which revealed that the disease could occur at all the temperatures from 5 to 35°C (Table 4). Data pointed to the highest significantly amount of decay was caused in fruits incubated at 30°C, followed by that incubation at 25°C, either 7 or 14 days of incubation period. Significant decrease in decay amount was observed when temperature of storage was decreased to 15°C. The lowest amount of decay occurred at 5°C. At 40°C no decay was observed. The maximum amount of pomegranate fruits decay (92.33%) was occurred after two weeks of incubation at 30°C.

### 3.3 Susceptibility of Different Fruit Hosts to Infection by *Gluconobacter oxydans* (PB1 isolate) under Laboratory Conditions

Data in Table 5 represented that kaka fruits were the most susceptible to infection by the pathogen (79.2 and 100% decay after 3 and 7 days of infection, respectively), followed by peach fruits (51.8 and 88.5%). Hosts can be classified into 4 groups depending on their susceptibility to infection.

- **Group one**: Fruits include highly susceptible hosts; kaka, peach, pear and apple, more than 50% infection,
- **Group two**: Susceptible hosts, include tomato, grape and cherry, infection ranged between 25 and 50%,
- **Group three**: include lowly susceptible hosts; strawberry, guava, plum and mango, infection was ranged between than 1-25%,
- **Group one**: Fruits include Group four include the most resistant hosts, i.e., lemon and orange, which no infected with the bacterium.

#### Table 3. Inhibition growth of *G. oxydans* (mm) in vitro due to essential oils treatment

| Source of essential oil                  | Concentration of essential oils (%) |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|                                        | 0.0       | 0.1     | 0.25    | 0.50    | 1.0      | 5.0      | 10.0%    |
| Chamomile, *(Matricaria chamomilla)*    | 0.0k      | 0.0k    | 12.00hi | 13.33ghi | 23.33d   | 27.33b   | 31.33a   |
| Marjoram, *(Origanum majorana)*        | 0.0k      | 0.0k    | 13.67gh | 14.33g   | 16.33f   | 23.67cd  | 27.67b   |
| Rosemary *(Rosmarinus officinalis)*    | 0.0k      | 0.0k    | 11.67i  | 12.33hi  | 13.67gh  | 21.33e   | 25.33c   |
| Thyme *(Thymus vulgaris)* powdered milk 1.0%(1) | 0.0k      | 0.0k    | 13.00g-i| 16.33f   | 27.67b   | 30.33a   | 31.33a   |
| Water(1)                               | 0.0k      | 0.0k    | 0.0k    | 0.0k     | 0.0k     | 0.0k     | 0.0k     |
| Copper sulfate 2 mg L(1)                | 5.0j      | 5.0j    | 5.0j    | 5.0j     | 5.0j     | 5.0j     | 5.0j     |
| Tetracycline sulfate 25 mg mL(1)        | 32a       | 32a     | 32a     | 32a      | 32a      | 32a      | 32a      |

(1) The same concentration was applied in all trials without adding the essential oils; (2) Values in each column followed by the same letter are not statistically different P = 0.05
Fig. 2. Represent the hierarchical clustering of *Gluconobacter oxydans* strains and other species based on 16S rDNA Genes sequences identifies relevant pathogen subsets.
### Table 4. Effect of temperature degrees on artificial infection by *G. oxydans* of pomegranate fruit

| Temperature (°C) of incubation | % of rot weight, period of storage | a week | two weeks |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------|----------|
| 5                             | 17.67(1) e(2)                    |        | 22.33f   |
| 10                            | 24.50d                           |        | 33.67e   |
| 15                            | 24.67d                           |        | 31.67e   |
| 20                            | 27.67d                           |        | 42.17d   |
| 25                            | 71.67b                           |        | 82.00b   |
| 30                            | 81.00a                           |        | 92.33a   |
| 35                            | 41.00c                           |        | 52.50c   |
| 40                            | 0.00f                            |        | 0.00g    |

(1) Data are presented as mean of three replicates each contains two pomegranate fruits. (2) Values in each column followed by the same letter are not statistically different *P* = 0.05

### Table 5. Susceptibility of different fruit hosts to infection by *Gluconobacter oxydans* (PB1 isolate), at 30°C

| Host   | Scientific name   | Family       | % of rot weight after, 3 days of incubation at 30°C | % of rot weight after, 7 days of incubation at 30°C |
|--------|-------------------|--------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Apple  | *Malus domestia*  | Rosaceae     | 30.33(1) c(2)                                     | 57.17c                                             |
| Pear   | *Pyrus communis*  | Rosaceae     | 31.50c                                            | 62.17c                                             |
| Plum   | *Phoenix dactylifera* | Plamaceae  | 15.17e                                            | 22.17f                                             |
| Peach  | *Prunus sp.*      | Rosaceae     | 51.83b                                            | 88.50b                                             |
| Orange | *(Citrus × sinensis)* | Rutaceae  | 0.00f                                             | 0.00g                                              |
| Lemon  | *(Citrus × limon)* | Rutaceae     | 0.00f                                             | 0.00g                                              |
| Mango  | *Mangifera sp.*   | Anacardiaceae| 12.50e                                            | 18.00f                                             |
| Guava  | *Psidium guajava* | Myrtaceae    | 12.67e                                            | 23.50f                                             |
| Grape  | *Vitis vinifera*  | Vitaceae     | 27.83c                                            | 34.17e                                             |
| Tomato | *Solanum lycopersicum* | Solanaceae | 20.83d                                            | 44.00d                                             |
| Kaka   | *Diosyros kaki*   | Ebenaceae    | 79.17a                                            | 100.00a                                            |
| Strawberry | *Fragaria ananassa* | Rosaceae  | 16.33de                                           | 23.00f                                             |
| Cherry | *Prunus avium*    | Rosaceae     | 20.33d                                            | 31.33e                                             |

(1) Data are presented a mean of three replicates each contains two pomegranate fruits. (2) Values in each column followed by the same letter are not statistically different *P* = 0.05

### 3.4 Effect of Essential Oils of Some Ornamental Plants on Decay Occurrence

Data in Table (6) indicate that marjoram (oregano) essential oil, followed by chamomile essential oil is the most affected against infection with the bacterium when compared with the control, 7 and 21 days after inoculation. The decay was significantly decreased with increasing the oil concentration. The least percent of decay was detected when marjoram (oregano) essential oil was applied by 0.5 and 1 ml L⁻¹ (12.5% and 8.53%, respectively). Rosemary essential oil showed the lowest effective one against decay (22.8 and 26.7%) was occurred 7 and 21 days after inoculation, respectively. Tetracycline at 500 ppm prevent pomegranate fruits against the bacterium infection, significantly decreasing the decay percent to 14.3 and 18.0%, comparing with control (80 and 87%), after 7 and 21 days from inoculation.
Table 6. Effect of essential oils on infection of rot % pomegranate caused by \textit{Gluconobacter oxydans} on 30°C after one and two weeks

| Essential oil source | Concentration (ml L\(^{-1}\)) | One week after inoculation | After 3 weeks of inoculation |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
|                      |                                |                           |                             |
| Thyme                | 1ml L\(^{-1}\)                | 13.2\(^{(1)}\)            | 16.67e                      |
|                      | 0.5ml L                       | 21.33d                    | 22.33d                      |
|                      | 0.25 mlL                      | 25.00bc                   | 25.00c                      |
|                      | mean                          | 19.94                     | 21.33                       |
| Oregano L Marjoram   | 1ml L                         | 8.53f                     | 11.50f                      |
|                      | 0.5ml L                       | 12.50e                    | 16.83e                      |
|                      | 0.25 mlL                      | 14.33e                    | 17.67de                     |
|                      | mean                          | 11.79                     | 15.33                       |
| Chamomile            | 1ml L                         | 12.00ef                   | 13.50ef                     |
|                      | 0.5ml L                       | 15.5e                     | 16.67e                      |
|                      | 0.25 mlL                      | 20.5d                     | 24.67c                      |
|                      | mean                          | 16                        | 18.28                       |
| Rosemary             | 1ml L                         | 20.17d                    | 23.33c                      |
|                      | 0.5ml L                       | 22.50cd                   | 25.50c                      |
|                      | 0.25 mlL                      | 26.17b                    | 31.33b                      |
|                      | mean                          | 26.78                     | 26.72                       |
| Tetracycline         | 500 ppm                       | 14.27e                    | 18.00de                     |
| Control (water)      | 0.0                            | 80.17a                    | 87.33a                      |

\(^{(1)}\) Data are presented as a mean of three replicates each contains two pomegranate fruits. \(^{(2)}\) Values in each column followed by the same letter are not statistically different \(P = 0.05\)

4. DISCUSSION

The losses from postharvest diseases are significant important for overall agribusiness activities and it can result into rise the consumer prices and low incomes to farmers, processors and traders [39]. FAO organization reported that about half of the yield losses of crop production over the world [40], about 10-30% of crop yields, especially in developing countries, destroy due to postharvest diseases [41,42]. Different postharvest diseases reduce the quantity, quality and postharvest life of pomegranate. In autumn of 2018-2020 seasons, inner decay symptoms were observed in pomegranate fruits collected from different markets of Giza, Minia and Asuit Governorates, Egypt. A creamy bright bacterial growth was observed in the mesocarp layer, decayed both arils and seeds while the rind remained healthy and unaffected. These symptoms could make confusion with physiological disease caused due to the high temperature during storage which disappear (discoloration) for all seeds in the pomegranate fruits.

Three isolates, PB\(_1\), PB\(_2\) and PB\(_3\), of non-capsulated, non-spored, short rod-shaped, gram negative, creamy-like bacteria were isolated from the inner decayed arils on NGA. The morphological and physiological tests of the isolated bacterium on NGA, about 48 hours old at 30°C, and verifying the results by molecular (PCR) and biochemical methods (VITEK 2) pointed to a \textit{Gluconobacter oxydans} is the pathogen.

\textit{Gluconobacter}, earlier known as \textit{Acetobacter oxydans} [43], has been featured as having the pronounced capability by glucose oxidation to gluconate and weak ability for oxidation ethanol to acetate [44]. Also, \textit{Gluconobacter} strains grows well in sugary media, e.g. ripe grapes, apples, dates, garden soil, baker’s soil, honeybees, fruit, cider, beer and wine [23]. They found also that the bacterium strains are capable to cause rot of apples and pears fruits accompanied by various shades of browning.

There are no external symptoms were observed but when the fruit cuts into two halves, the inner arils appear decayed. This suggests that the infection occurs through the flowers. Sometimes, the diseased fruits were heavy in weight. These results are in agreement with Hine [45] who reported that pink disease of pineapple fruit, caused by strains of acetic acid bacteria, has no external symptoms but, during the canning process, infected fruit develop a brownish-pink discoloration after heating. He mentioned also that when flowering occurs during dry, high temperature stress conditions, followed by wet-
blooming cycles in November and December, led to increase the percentage of disease incidence in March.

Kado [46] reported that no organism belonging to family Acetobacteriaceae are known to be plant pathogens, thus neither Gluconobacter oxydans nor A. aceti have been previously reported as plant pathogens. Gluconobacter oxydans brings about the incomplete oxidation processors of sugars, alcohols, aldehydes and acids. Incomplete oxidations lead to nearly quantitative results of the oxidation products making this organism important for industrial use. Strains of Gluconobacter can be used industrially to produce L-sorbose from D-sorbitol; D-gluconic acid, 5-keto- and 2-ketogluconic acids from D-glucose; and dihydroxy acetone from glycerol. It is primarily known as a ketogenic bacterium due forming 2,5- di-ketogluconic acid from D-glucose [23]. Gluconobacter oxydans was reported by Rohrbach and Pfeiffer [27], Kontaxis and Hayward [28] and Kado [46] as the causal agent of pineapple pink disease, also, it was reported as the causal agent of apple and pear rots accompanied by various shades of browning [23]. Also, the obtained results are in agreement with that obtained by Buddenhagen and Dull [47] who mentioned that the strains of G. oxydans differences occur, but all strains produce the disease when injected into fruit.

The temperature is one of the most important factors for destructive nature of soft rots during growing, storage and transportation of fruits and vegetables. This study revealed that the lowest amount of decay was recorded when artificially pomegranate fruits was incubated at 5°C for 7 or 14 days (17.67 and 22.3%, respectively), whereas the highest significantly amount of decay was recorded in fruits incubated at 30°C (81 and 92.3%), followed by that incubated at 25°C (71.6 and 82%), either for 7 or 14 days of incubation period. At 40°C no decay was observed, thus may be due to this temperature not favored bacterial growth. In 1973, Kankwar et al. [48] found that soft rot of pomegranate fruits occurred by Rhizopus arrhizus occurred between 10 and 40°C with maximum infection (100%) at 20, 25 and 30°C. Bhat et al. [49] during their study on effect of temperature on cabbage soft rot caused by Erwinia carotovora sub sp. carotovora, found that 30-35°C mostly favor the soft rot in cabbage and thus emphasis is to be given to prevent the disease during the prevailing temperatures in the region, in order to prevent losses due to the disease different hosts of the same pathogen. A high humidity coupled with a temperature of 80°F the pathogen is capable to cause the greatest injury. The optimum temperature for its growth was 85°F the maximum slightly over 100°F [50]. The highest severity of radish rot caused by E. carotovora subsp. carotovora was recorded when radish discs were incubated at 35°C and 100% relative humidity [51]. Farrar et al. [52], also, revealed that a range of 30-37°C was optimum for soft rot development in different vegetable plants. For this reason much of the loss due to decay of pomegranate occurs during middle of the summer. Under temperate conditions of Egypt, maximum damage was there only during the summer months viz., June- August as the temperature remains quite high. This also aggravated damage due to decay considerably during this time.

The present study revealed that kaka, peach, pear, apple, tomato, grape, cherry, strawberry, guava, plum and mango are susceptible to infection by G. oxydans. These hosts can be classified into 4 categories depending on their susceptibility to infection: Group one: Fruits include highly susceptible hosts; kaka, peach, pear and apple, more than 50% infection, Group two: Susceptible hosts, include tomato, grape and cherry, infection ranged between 25 and 50%, Group three: include lowly susceptible hosts; strawberry, guava, plum and mango, infection was ranged between than 1-25%, Group four include the most resistant hosts, i.e., lemon and orange, which no infected with the bacterium. These results are agreement with that obtained by Blackwood et al. [19], Passmore and Carr [20], and Ameyama [21], on grapes, Passmore and Carr [20] on apples and dates and De Ley [22] and Gupta et al., [23] on honeybees, fruits, cider, beer and wine as well as capable to cause rot of apple and pear and cause pink disease in pineapple. Lambert et al. [53] reported that Gluconobacters are capable for causing rot of apples and pears which were accompanied by various shades of browning. The bacteria penetrate the apples through wounds in the cuticle and then to the tissue. Strains of G. oxydans are also the causative agent of "pink disease" of pineapple fruit; the disease fruit turns pink or pink-brown to deep brown after heating [46].

Majority of postharvest diseases could be controlled successfully by using fungicide compounds, their use is becoming increasingly restricted due to regulations regarding chemical
Syringae megaterium strains of Gram positive (cinerea) antifungal activity against most sensitive one. (0.1 and 0.5%), with bacteria reported also that both Gram (+) and Gram (-) species of plant pathogenic bacteria i.e., A. tumefaciens, E. carotovora and other pathogenic bacteria isolated from the fruits inoculation with the bacterium when compared with control, 7 and 21 days after inoculation. In general, the decay severity was significantly decreased with increasing the oil concentration. Rosemary essential oil showed the lowest effective one against decay, either 7 or 21 days after inoculation. Tetracycline at 500 ppm prevents pomegranate fruits against the bacterium infection when compared with control.

In 1977, Kanwar and Thakur [55] tested 16 preservatives before and after pomegranate fruits inoculation with Rhizopus arrhizus, they found that Potassium metabisulphite (3%) was the best for inhibition the fungal spore germination, and causing the minimum soft rot incidence at room temperature for ten days.

Martins et al. [56] reported the inhibitory effects of 1.0, 2.0, 4.0,8.0, and 100% citronella and lemongrass oilson the development of the bacteriumRalstonia solanacearum, antibacterial activity of clove oil against seven different species of plant pathogenic bacteria i.e., Agrobacterium tumefaciens, Erwinia carotovora pv. carotovora, Pseudomonas syringae pv. syringae, R. solanacearum, Xanthomonas campestris pv. pelargonii, Rhodococcus fascians, and Streptomyces spp. [57]. They reported also that both Gram (+) and Gram (-) bacteria were sensitive to clove essential oil (0.1 and 0.5%), with R. solanacearum being the most sensitive one. Marjorana hortensis showed antifungal activity against C. acutatum and B. cinerea, and antibacterial activity against two strains of Gram positive (Bacillus megaterium and C. michiganensis) and five strains of Gram negative (Escherichia coli, X. campestris, B. mojavensis, P. savastanoi and P. syringae pv. phaseolicola) [58]. The antifungal and antibacterial activity of oregano essential oil against a number of plant pathogens, including fungi; Aspergillus niger, A. flavus, A. ochraceus, Fusarium oxysporum, F. solani var. coeruleum, Penicillium sp., Phytophthora infestans and Sclerotinia sclerotiorum, and bacteria; Pseudomonas aeruginosa, Staphylococcus aureus., Clavibacter michiganensis, Xanthomonas vesicatoria, has been reported by Adébayo et al. [59]. Lucas et al. [35] found all tested essential oils (EOs) from citronella, clove, cinnamon, lemongrass, eucalyptus, thyme, and tea tree showed direct toxic effect on the X. vesicatoria at a 10% concentration in laboratory test. They mentioned also that tested of clove and tea tree, and streptomycin sulfate promoted loss of electron-dense material and alterations in the cytoplasm, whereas essential oil of tea tree effect on cell vacuoles, and essential oils of tea tree, clove, citronella, and lemongrass caused damage to the bacterial cell wall. Several studies have showed that there seems to be a synergic effect between the individual Eos chemical constituents. This synergism in the aromatic plants components functions to make them more effective and reduces the developing resistance of any pathogenic pathogen. In particular, some single constituents such as carvacrol, γ-terpinène and p-cymene become more effective when they are combined together and act synergistically [59]. Also, p-cymene component is efficient facilitator of the transport of carvacrol across cell wall components and the cytoplasmic membrane of the pathogen [60]. Another hypothesis suggested by Soylu et al. [61,62], is that the observed diameter reduction and lysis of the hypha wall, may be attributed to the enzymatic reactions within the essential oil which make to regulate synthesis of the wall components. Furthermore, the lipophilic characters of the above mentioned components might have the ability to damage the plasma membrane, and thus to increase the permeability of the cytoplasm.

5. CONCLUSION

This study submitted approve that internal decay of pomegranate fruits due to a bacterial pathogen (Gluconobacter oxydans), while it was thought that internal decay of pomegranate due to high temperature only. Also the use of resistant varieties and cultivars is by far the most economical and sustainable applications for managing the pomegranate fruit decay. Even as research progresses, eventually is leading to residue levels. Essential oils coating, for the keeping fresh produce quality, is an environmentally friendly treatment that may be an alternative to chemical fungicide applications. However, there is little information about the chemical control of P. granati fruit diseases [54].
pomegranate varieties with improved levels of resistance by using essential oils of Marjoram (oregano) and Chamomile at 0.5 or 1 ml L⁻¹, lowering disease levels. Essential oils are cheap, healthy and environmentally friendly treatment that may be an alternative to chemical fungicide applications.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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