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Camellia Culture in Greece

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I AM a camelliaphile and this must be made clear for I am neither a scientist nor a horticulturist. I have grown camellias for about fifteen years and bearing this in mind I consented to write about camellia culture in Greece.

Greece is bordered on three sides by the Mediterranean Sea and has two main climatic zones. The coastal regions, the south and the islands have mild winters (with few exceptions) and no excessive temperatures during the summer but the continental part of the peninsular is cold in winter and very hot during summer.

In the colder regions camellias are not hardy and for this reason there are no old plants growing in the public gardens or in the Royal gardens. Another reason why they are seldom seen is that as far as I know no one has worked in this field. To the majority of the people in my country the camellia is unknown for there are no nurseries where they are produced in large numbers.

According to information I have been able to obtain camellias were cultivated here about 80 years ago as decorative pot plants. They were probably brought to Greece from other European countries. Although the colours, forms and sizes of the flowers differed they were all cultivars of *C. japonica*. In 1958 I was able to trace six different unknown varieties, which I describe below :

- (1) A large white formal double flowering at mid-season. Sometimes one petal has a red spot and the flowers do not open fully. It is of upright growth with large very dark green foliage.
- (2) A formal double white striped red which produces very large flowers and often a number of them are completely red. The plant is very strong and vigorous with large green leaves.
- (3) A formal double rosy-red producing many flowers of medium size. Unfortunately they bleach badly in the strong sunlight and discoloration is characteristic of this variety. It is a very strong and vigorous grower.
- (4) A formal double light pink flowering at mid-season and bearing medium size blooms which rarely open. It makes medium growth.
- (5) A semi-double red with a few yellow stamens. The flowers of medium size last only two or three days on the plant, but it is a prolific bloomer at mid-season. The plant is vigorous and has rather narrow leaves.

- (6) An anemone form which appears to be 'Elegans.' I hope to check this identification from young plants of this cultivar which I have recently obtained.

Since 1959, on my own initiative, I have imported some of the best camellias from France and Portugal. In 1961 I imported from America small plants of seventy-five varieties including some of the newer introductions. Eight varieties I obtained from Australia in 1962. Also I have secured many seeds of the cultivars of *C. japonica* and *C. reticulata* from the U.S.A. Many of the resulting seedlings have made very good growth and I hope that in a few years I shall have the good fortune to flower some outstanding camellias. Otherwise I shall use these seedlings as stocks for grafting.

The usual method of propagating of camellias in Greece is by mound-layering. Leaf-mould and chestnut soils with a proportion of sand and rotted manure is the compost used in this operation. Grafting is seldom undertaken as we do not have an adequate number of stocks and scions imported from long distances often arrive in a poor condition due to the import regulations and postage delays.

The climate of Larissa is not very favourable for the culture of camellias. Last winter for the first time in forty years we had very severe weather and many plants in my collection were destroyed because they were not adequately protected. Therefore in the future my camellias will be kept in a glass-house, during the winter.