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FURTHER VENTILATION ON THE HISTORY OF THE OPORTO CAMELLIAS

- *Autres informations au sujet de l'histoire des camélias à Oporto*
- *Ulteriori Schiarimenti Sulla Storia Delle Camelie Di OPORTO*
- *Mas Detalhes Sobre La Historia De Las Camellias De Oporto*

ROBERT M. GIMSON

San Vicente de Meis, Spain

The article by Mrs Julian W. Hill in *The International Camellia* of October 1978 calls for some comment. If Mrs Hill does not speak Portuguese there may have been the same misunderstanding between herself and the Conde and Condessa de Campo Bello, as there was between the Conde and Dr F. G. Meyer.

In 1959 Dr F. G. Meyer stated "... Old family archives of the Conde de Campo Bello, present owner of the villa, indicate that 3 living plants of *C. japonica* from Japan were planted in the garden about the middle of the 16th century. This is not impossible, since early Portuguese traders in the Orient first made contact with Japan in 1542. The discovery of these aged specimens extends the date of introduction of the *Camellia* back nearly 200 years, to about 1550". (Meyer 1959)

After speaking to the Conde in his own language, a denial was published first in Spanish (Odriozola 1971) and later in English (Odriozola 1975) which stated "... The Conde himself told me that Dr Meyer had misunderstood; he did not tell Dr Meyer the *Camellias* were 400 years old, but that documents substantiate that the manor and its garden were in the possession of his ancestors 400 years ago . . ."

Subsequently the Conde wrote a history of his family and property for me, which I have translated, and he stated "... In the archives of Campo Bello there are records of four sons of the family going to the Indies in the sixteenth century, but there is no reference to their bringing back *Camellias* or other plants . . ." (Gimson 1978). From which it will be seen that the family archives of the Conde do NOT indicate that 3 living plants of *C. japonica* from Japan were planted in the garden about the middle of the 16th century.

Of the large trees in the garden of the late Miss M. R. Tait, in 1964 she said that the six cultivars of *C. sasanqua* must have then been at least fifty-five years old (Tait 1964); *C. sasanqua* first came to Europe in 1869 (Sealy 1969). Of some of the other large *Camellias* in her garden, *C. japonica* 'Princeza Real' was first introduced

in 1884 (Loureiro 1884), and 'Incarnata' ('Camurca' in Portuguese) came to Europe in 1806 (Andrews 1812). There is an account of the planting in 1897-99 of some of the *Camellias* in the garden at 1191, Campo Allegre, Oporto, now the Jardim Botanico (da Silva 1962). J. M. Loureiro who was the best known horticulturist in Portugal in the last century wrote that the first *Camellias* were introduced to Oporto between 1808 and 1810 (Loureiro 1882); this was on the authority of Mr Van-Zeller, one of the importers. A. Moreira da Silva agreed with Loureiro (da Silva 1962). It has been suggested that Tournefort may have seen a *Camellia* in Lisbon in 1689 (Gorer 1977).

To turn from plants to history. Prince Henry the Navigator died in 1460 (Atkinson 1960); but the Portuguese did not round the Cape of Good Hope until 1488, Vasco da Gama reaching India 10 years later. The landing in Japan by the Portuguese in 1542 was when one of their vessels was shipwrecked. Their first trading stations were established in China, at Macao, in 1557 and in Japan, at Nagasaki, in 1570 (Boxer 1973).

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Mrs Hill in acknowledging Mr Gimson's profound and intimate knowledge of the *Camellias* of Portugal and Spain, and of their history, went on to say: "Since the real origin of the trees at Campo Bello is not documented I suggest as a possibility that they were brought to Portugal during the period of active trading between Japan and Portugal between the years 1549 and 1639. But who knows?"

One of our members, Mrs Mary Caroni, of Minusio, Switzerland, is another who has been fortunate enough to see the *Camellias* at Oporto. She also wrote to us querying the exactness of parts of the historical data.

The interest and discussion which has sprung from Mrs Hill's original article bodes well for the International Congress proposed to be held in Spain in 1981.