Historic Camellias and Conservation

19th century camellias at Quinta de Santo Inácio de Fiães, Portugal

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As far as we know, all 19th century camellias at Quinta de Santo Inácio de Fiães are japonicas, except for one plant of *C. rusticana* and a recently planted *C. reticulata* ‘Captain Rawes’. In this garden japonicas were first planted in 1808-1810 (see International Camellia Journal, 2012, pp.38-40). This Quinta is mentioned in 19th century publications as a model for horticulture, and as a place where camellias and other plants self-seed.

In November 2011, during a research tour at the furthest area of the woodland garden, we came across sixteen camellias that we cannot classify.

They are quite spectacular flowers, 6 to 9 petals, mainly saucer-shaped, size medium to large, with many stamens - sometimes also petaloids - in a circular or spreading form.

The fruits are quite characteristic (photo 4) and in some cases leaves are rather large (photos 5 and 6). They are all early bloomers (from November to February).
We thought they were Higo camellias, but we were told that they cannot be Higo.

There is no proof of camellias imported directly from Japan, and we do not know if there were any plant exchanges. Maybe they are the product of a spontaneous blend between *japonicas* and the *C. rusticana*. We never saw them before and would be very grateful if someone could tell us what they are.

One of the visits on the 2014 Pre-Congress tour of Portugal will be to the Quinta de Santo Inácio de Fiães in Avintes, near Porto. Its gardens are a true camellia forest, with more than 1,700 plants, all of them from the 19th century (and maybe some from the 18th century). More than 30 Portuguese varieties were obtained here, and there are also many ancient camellias imported from England, France, Belgium and Italy – including the remains of what has now been found to be the oldest ‘Alba Plena’ in Europe.

This Quinta was used mostly as a summer residence by the Van Zeller family and in the 19th century it was considered a reference for horticulture in Portugal and known simply as “Fiães”. However, in the first decades of the 20th century the house was gradually abandoned by the family, although the property was never totally neglected. By the end of the 90s, its owners launched a new project including a zoo and opened it to the public, in order to restore and maintain the house and the gardens, which are officially declared an area of Public Interest.

If you have any ideas or information about these unidentified camellias, please contact Joana Guedes, she would love to hear from you.

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