



LA CAMELIA RETICULATA EN GALICIA

por
**ROBERT
GIMSON**

EXCMA. DIPUTACION PROVINCIAL

PONTEVEDRA

A black and white photograph of a grand, classical interior space, likely a museum or gallery. The architecture features high ceilings with arched windows and doorways, supported by large, fluted columns. In the foreground and middle ground, several large, white, circular planters are filled with numerous white camellia flowers. The lighting is soft, highlighting the textures of the stone and the delicate petals of the flowers. The overall atmosphere is one of elegance and historical grandeur.

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by
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Introduction

One of the most beautiful shrubs in the world, **Camellia reticulata**, which is rare in Europe, may be seen growing and flowering well in gardens in Galicia. It is easily distinguished from the common **Camellia japonica**; the colour of the leaves of **Camellia reticulata** is light green and the leaves are matt and veined, it starts to flower later and the petals are irregular.

History

During the first quarter of the 19th. century many Chinese plants were introduced to England by Mr. John Reeves, who was employed by the East India Company as the Chief Inspector of tea in Canton. The movement of Europeans in China was restricted to the treaty ports, but Reeves collected many fine plants, some for his garden and others to send back to England. The genus **Reevesia** was named after him, as was **Skimmia reevesiana**. He constructed small portable greenhouses to be carried on board the East India Company's ships, and gave the ships' masters instructions regarding the care of the plants during the voyage, which in the days of sailing ships took about 4 months round the Cape of Good Hope. It was probably Reeves who gave a Camellia in 1820 to Captain Richard Rawes, the captain of an East India Company ship, to take to England. (1) Rawes gave it to his friend Mr. Thomas Palmer who planted it in his conservatory at Bromley, Kent, where it flowered for the first time in the spring of 1826. In 1824 Mr. John Parks sent to the Horticultural

(1) UROUHART, B. L. (1956-60). **The Camellia**, 2 Vols.

Society of London, now the Royal Horticultural Society, a similar plant, and it is possible that this is the old tree still growing in the Temperate House of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, London, where it is now about 7 metres high. (2)

The Horticultural Society commissioned a hand-wrought, coloured illustration to be published in July 1827 in the **Botanical Register**, where it was described as a "splendid new species of *Camellia*, Captain Rawes' "*Camellia*". The description of *Camellia reticulata* by Dr. John Lindley continues "We conceive there can be no doubt of this being specifically distinct from *C. japonica*, from which it is distinguished by its rigid, flat, strongly reticulated leaves, and also by its silky ovary. The flowers have also a different aspect; the petals are much undulated, and irregularly and loosely arranged, with none of the compactness and regularity for which the *C. japonica* is so much admired." (3) Later in 1827 another beautiful illustration of the same *Camellia* appeared in the **Botanical Magazine**. (4)

Reeves retired to England in 1831, and in 1843 he persuaded the Horticultural Society to send Robert Fortune to China to collect plants and seeds. Fortune sent another form of *Camellia reticulata* to England in 1850, and this bore formal double flowers and so was known as *Camellia reticulata* "Flore Plena". In the **Botanical Magazine** of 1 April 1857 there is a colour plate and a description of a "Netted-leaved *Camellia*, double-flowered variety", growing in the conservatory of Mr. William Martin near Kingston in Surrey. In 1849 it was stated to have been 4 metres high and the branches had a spread of 4.8 m. and a circumferen-

(2) BEAN, W. J. (1970). **Trees and Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles**, 8th. edition, Vol. I, p. 483.

(3) EDWARDS, S. (1827). **The Botanical Register**. Vol. XIII (1078).

(4) Curtis' **Botanical Magazine**. (1827). Vol. LIV. (2784).

CAMELLIA RETICULATA SEMI-PLENA AT SANTA CRUZ DE RIBADULLA



ce of 15 m. During the following ten years it grew nearly 3 metres. All the other camellias in the conservatory were removed to devote the entire house to it. The description continues "Unlike other really fine specimens of **reticulata** we have seen, the present one does not form a straggling bush, with leaves and flowers so sparse that the branches may everywhere be seen; but it's beautiful and ample foliage, and its still more beautiful, and, for a Camellia, almost gigantic flowers (eighteen to twenty inches in circumference!) constitute a dense mass of rich green and red, mingled in such equal proportions that it is at first sight difficult to say which predominates, the flowers or the leaves. Every bloom seems to be in its right place, and the number of these is not the least remarkable feature of this unrivalled plant. In the beginning of October, 1848, the multitude of flower buds was so great that it was requisite for the health of the plant that 2600 should be removed; and assuredly, though it was difficult to count them, nearly an equal amount (say 2000, and we are sure we speak within bounds) were allowed to remain; and these were in the perfection of blossom in April 1849!" (5) So at least we know that one or more plants of 'Flore Plena', had been sent to England before Fortune's.

The origin of **Camellia reticulata** as garden cultivars, or possibly hybrids, dates back over 1,000 years to the 9th. century A.D., and might well go back to the T'ang dynasty (A.D. 618-906). In the 11th. century P. Chao in **Cha-Hua-Pua** described 72 cultivars of this camellia (6), and there are many references to them in subsequent Chinese literature. One of these cultivars "Lionhead" was imported into Japan between 1673 and 1681 (7), and there is an old tree of 'Flore Plena' in the Temple garden of Western Hill, Kunming, Yunnan Province, fully 10.5 metres high and

(5) Ibidem. (1857). Vol. LXXXIII, (4976).

(6) SEALY, J. R. (1958). **A Revision of the Genus Camellia**. p. 2.

(7) TUKAMA, Takesi. (1968). **Camellias of Japan**.



with a trunk 0.5 m. in diameter estimated to be 250 years old; flowering season January and February. (8) (Note A) In England two plants of semi-plena were planted at Chatsworth, Derbyshire, about 1840 against a south-facing wall, and a large glass case 7 metres high, 10 m. long and 2.8 m. wide was constructed to protect them in winter. (9) They are trained as espaliers to the full height of 7 metres and bear upwards of 1,000 blossoms every spring. Both plants measure over 60 cm. in the circumference of their main stems at 60 cm. from the ground. In Cornwall in the old walled garden at Heligan there is a tree 7.5 m. in height and 11 m. in width, and at Tregothan one 6 m. high; both are semi-plena.

In 1938 H.H. Hū gave the first clue that some cultivars of *C. reticulata*, which were unknown in Europe and very beautiful, were growing in

Note A.

	Yunnan (8)	Pontevedra
Latitude	21°-29° North	42°26' North
Longitude	10°-19° East	8°39' West
Height above sea level	2,100 metres	24 metres
Annual mean temperature	18° C.	14.5° C.
Annual rain precipitation	1,200 mm.	1,475 mm.
Rainy season	May to September	September to March

(In Yunnan the period of frosts lasts for only 40 days and is of no great severity.) (8)

(8) YU, T. T. (1947). The Garden Camellias of Yunnan. *The Camellian*. 1964.

(9) HANGER, F. (1958). Camellias and their Cultivation. *Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society*, London, Vol. LXXXIII, p. 381.

Yunnan Province. (10) Owing to World War II this could not be followed up until 1948-9, when two Americans and an Australian imported some of these cultivars, which became known as the Kunming reticulatas. Subsequent importations from China have since been made into other countries. In 1958 T.T. Yü issued a short description of the various Kunming reticulatas stating that "the shape of the tree is majestic and very beautiful. It can reach more than 10 metres in height and can live for several hundred years." (11) The Botanical Institute at Kunming sent a schedule of these **reticulatas** to New Zealand in 1963. They opined that

- [10] HU, H. H. (1938). Recent Progress in Botanical Exploration in China; **Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society, London**, Vol. LXIII, p. 387.
- [11] YU, T. T. (1958). Yunnan Shen-Cha, Peking, Translated by Professor E. G. Waterhouse and quoted in the **Rhododendron and Camellia Year Book**, London, 1968. p. 77.

COMPARISON OF THE LEAVES, FROM TOP LEFT TO BOTTOM RIGHT:
CAMELLIA RETICULATA SEMI-PLENA, FACE AND REVERSE.
CAMELLIA JAPONICA "ALBA PLENA", FACE AND REVERSE



the plant known in Europe as 'Flore Plena' or 'Robert Fortune' is 'Sung-tzelin', which is now known under the western trade name of 'Pagoda'. Dr. Yü has suggested that 'Tsaotaohung' is the same as semi-plena or 'Captain Rawes', but Colonel T. Durrant in New Zealand does not agree. (12)

In 1924 George Forrest, a Scottish botanist, collected seeds of the single form of **C. reticulata** in the Chinese province of Yunnan on the hillsides of Tengyueh near the Shweli-Salween divide, where he found **Camellia saluenensis**. Of the plants which germinated from these seeds the first one flowered in 1932 in the garden at Caerhays, Cornwall. (2) This single flowered form is considered by some botanists to be the species of **C. reticulata** (2) and semi-plena to be a cultivar or hybrid, but Sealy names the single flowered plant **Camellia reticulata forma simplex**. (13) Other seedlings from Forrest's collection have been named 'Mary Williams' and 'Trewithen Pink'.

Camellia reticulata in Galicia

There are some fine specimens in Galicia, and the largest which I have seen is in the garden of the Palace of Oca. (Note B) It is 10 metres high by 9.40 m. wide and the trunk at 1 m. from the ground has a circum-

Note B.

Oca is 20 km. south-east of Santiago de Compostela and near Balboa on the N. 525. The garden is open to the public on some public holidays; ask at a Tourist Office about the hours of opening.

The other gardens are not open to the public.

(12) DURRANT, T. (1967). Some Comment on *Camellia reticulata*. **Rhododendron and Camellia Year Book**. 1968, p. 92.

(13) SEALY, J. R. *ibidem*. p. 183.

IN THE BACKGROUND, *CAMELLIA RETICULADA* SEMI-PLENA AT OCA



ference of 1.16 m.; in 1974 it was in flower on 27 March. A few kilometres north of Oca at Santa Cruz de Rivadulla is a tree 6 m. high by 6 m. wide with a circumference of the trunk of 60 cm. The latter was planted between 1880 and 1890, so I surmise that the tree at Oca was planted about 1850. Unfortunately both these trees have been overgrown by other plants, chiefly *C. japonica*. Is it too late to hope that the owners might cut back some of the surrounding bushes to reveal these two historic trees in all their glory? At Puente Ulla there are several younger trees in excellent condition. In Vigo I know two gardens with healthy shrubs; in one of these two were planted 30 years ago and they are of identical size, 3.20 m. high by 4.20 m. wide with a circumference of the trunks of 65 cm. and were in flower in the last week of February 1974. These two were bought from the nursery of Alfredo Moreira da Silva in Oporto. There is a younger shrub in a garden at Bueu, and very young plants at Rubianes, Torre de Lama, Vilanoviña and Meis. All the plants which I saw in flower are semi-plena.

The nursery of Alfredo Moreira da Silva was founded in 1895, and in the catalogue (1873) of the School of Agriculture, La Caeyra, Pontevedra, which is in the Pontevedra Museum there is no mention of *C. reticulata*, so the plants at Oca and Santa Cruz de Rivadulla must have come from another source. For many years the Companhia Horticolo-Agrícola Portuense, which was the successor to the nursery founded by D. José, Marqués Loureiro, in 1849, (14) offered in their catalogues "*Camélia reticulata* - Rosa vivo" (presumably semi-plena) and "*Camélia reticulata* - Dobrada, rosa brilhante" (probably 'Flore Plena'). Perhaps the Oca and Santa Cruz de Rivadulla plants came from there.

(14) ODRIOZOLA, A. (1971) *Sobre la camelia*. p. 17. Pontevedra.

The Cultivation of *Camellia reticulata*

Camellias need an acid soil which there is in Galicia. They must also be planted in soil which is well drained, so that the heavy winter rains do not remain around the roots of the plants, but young plants should be given a mulch of leaves or pine needles in summer to protect their roots near the surface of the soil. The japonicas grow better in part shade, but the reticulatas should be planted where it is not shaded, and it must be remembered that they will grow into small trees so they should be planted about 10 metres apart.

Until recently the reticulatas were propagated by grafting on japonica stocks or by air-layering. Reticulatas grafted on japonica stocks may grow poorly, because the stock does not develop at the same rate as the scion and after some years a "bottle neck" develops at the graft. (15) At the present time some reticulatas are propagated by grafting on other reticulatas grown from seeds, and others may be grown from cuttings in a mist-propagator.

The reticulatas are less resistant to cold than the japonicas, although it has been recorded that they have withstood frosts of -7° C. (15) There are only two regions in Europe where *C. reticulata* can be grown outdoors, on the north-western seaboard of the Iberian peninsular (i.e. the provinces of Pontevedra and Coruña and in Portugal north of the Tagus)

(15) DURRANT, T. *ibidem*. pp. 92 and 90.

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