Iris attica

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Here is probably one of the great-grand-daddies in iris history, if not in evolution. It is undoubtedly the progenitor of *I. pseudopumila* and could easily be the daddy of *I. pumila,* though it also could have been derived from a common source with *pumila.*

The fact of its diploid composition in relation to its tetraploid relative, *I. pumila,* and its low number of chromosomes, would indicate its prior existence. In fact, it is probable that it covered a much greater area in prehistoric days and was covered and destroyed by the glacial period which pushed all vegetation further south in its path.

I. attica Boiss. et Held. is probably the most limited in its native habitat range of any iris species, being found in only a comparatively small area in Greece. Until rather recently, it had never been known in America. Tile first specimen known here was given to me by Mr. A. C. Herrick of England. A year later, I received two more forms from Mr. Darby of England, and then Dr. Randolph sent me four new forms which he had collected in Greece. All of these were counted by Dr. Randolph and found to have the expected number of 16 chromosomes. *I. attica* is a diploid form with a basic number of 8 chromosomes.

As for color and pattern forms, it seems to have an approximately similar range to that of *I. pumila,* except for our expectation that a tetraploid has the advantage of a large number of combination effects and thus augments the variety of effects. There is one exception, however; this is the blue of *pumila.* So far, we have been unable to find a blue *attica.*

Another difference in *attica* is that it has an entire color beard, that is, one color its entire length, which is in contrast to *pumila*, which always has a bicolor beard. Also, *attica* has entire yellow beards. For instance, in *pumila* a yellow flower always has a white beard, whereas in *attica* it can be either white or yellow.

I. attica
photo: Coro Martín

I. attica
photo: Peter Bohnert

I. attica
photo: Tom Waters

Other minor differences between *pumila* and *attica* are the sickle-shaped leaves, which are more pronounced than in *pumila.* Of course, *attica* being a diploid, we expect it to be relatively smaller in all its proportions. Otherwise, *attica* appears to be simply a smaller edition of *I. pumila.*

It is unfortunate that so far we have had difficulty in growing crops of seedlings, as they are not as easy to pollinate as *pumila,* with fewer seeds and less germination. I find this true of all diploid forms in comparison with tetraploids. But with the smaller number of seedlings I have grown, I find about the same kind of inheritance that we know for *pumila.* Therefore, for most breeding purposes, we find *pumila* much more beneficial. Yet for experimental work, the diploid form has all the advantages of requiring fewer seedlings for obtaining ratios of inheritance and for diagnostic purposes.