

Unit 1. Forest and humans

Galicia: Forest management from the Iron Age to Roman Empire



Source: Galicia Turismo rural

Description

This research, carried out at the University of Santiago de Compostela for María Martín, allows us not only to know which species were present in the Galician mountains at that time, but also to know what they used the wood for at that time. All the data were obtained from the study of coal and wood collected during the archaeological excavations of more than 20 sites. Each one of them was observed under a microscope, and their taxa were identified from the diagnostic characters of the wood. This identification allowed to find out which trees and shrubs were being used as fuel, as wood for construction or for making tools, containers, weapons, etc.

From the Iron Age to Roman times, the men who inhabited the Galician territory used firewood and wood as basic resources and their provisioning was made in the forest. This information is known from the coals recovered in archaeological contexts. The main shrub species used were gorse, broom, heather and sticky rockrose. The importance of shrubby *fabaceae* is such that Iron Age communities probably used these species preferentially because they are plants that regenerate quickly, producing quality fuel, fix nitrogen in the soil, and have multiple uses (shearing, material for roofing and for making interwoven branches, etc.).

From the s. V before our era, heather appears as one of the most used species. This use could derive both from obtaining fuel for domestic activities and for the development of productive activities such as iron metallurgy. Heather also provides one of the best quality fuels for the production of charcoal and fuel for metallurgical processes.

From the first century of our era, there is an increase in the consumption of wood from trees, compared to that provided by shrubs and bushes. This change probably had different determining factors, among which could be the increase in the demand for fuels derived from the new organization of the territory, the development of activities that require a significant consumption of fuels and wood, and also probably with technological

innovations associated with new tools that made it easier to fell trees. Wood was probably the most widely used material during the Iron Age. All kinds of instruments were made of wood, cups, spoons, tool handles, weapons and household utensils, beams and posts, the interwoven closures, boats, etc. Oak wood is one of the most widely used due to its physical properties, as well as its resistance to attack by fungi and xylophagous insects. The containers were made of alder wood, an easy wood to work with, odourless and tasteless. The handles were made of oak or hazelnut wood, depending on whether toughness or flexibility was sought. The baskets and the interweaving of sticks in hazel, willow or *fabaceae* wood, among others, which produce fine and flexible branches suitable for making wefts. All these data demonstrate:

- A specific selection of certain woods for certain uses, and a deep knowledge of the properties of plants and, specifically, of wood.
- Different patterns of fuel supply
- forestry practices were carried out especially with wild species.
- The pine was a very abundant species in Galicia both on the coast and in the interior. There were two species, the brave pine and the meek pine. It was used as fuel or as construction wood in the iron age. In Roman times, it was used as fuel in cremation rites.
- The chestnut tree has been present in Galicia since the Iron Age, but its cultivation was introduced for Romans.

Goals

The objective is to know how man used forest resources over time.

Activities

- Forest production management.
- Elaboration of manufactures in wood: techniques and tools.

Impact

Knowing the use of the forest in the past allows us to know how it was at each moment and its evolution over time. In addition, it could allow the recovery of certain practices used by communities that inhabited this territory in the past.

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