

The Historical framework of the ForSEAdiscovery project

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http://www.eh-resources.org/environmental_history.html

by K.J.W. Oosthoek

What is Environmental History?

“Environmental history is always about human interaction with the natural world or, to put it in another way, it studies the interaction between culture and nature. The principal goal of environmental history is to deepen our understanding of how humans has been affected by the natural environment in the past and also how they have affected that environment and with what results. This is called the bilateral approach of environmental history (Smout 1993: xiii.; Verstegen & van Zanden 1993: 11)”.

Environmental History

Perlin, John, A Forest Journey. The Role of Wood in the Development of Civilisation (Cambridge, MA; London, 1989).

Historical Paradigm: Relation between human societies and Nature throughout the centuries implies that social, economic and political cooperation and competition have been employed for the exploitation of natural resources.

Primary assumption: History of Deforestation in Europe is linked to economic development and military expansion.

Role of wood in world History: an historical Narrative.

Armadas 1580 (La Invencible) and the Armada “del Socorro” of Ireland (1596)



Bolaños de artillería, Galeón de Ribadeo



“a prevailing sense of scarcity and doubt about sustaining local resources that leads organized groups to push commercial and political activities into new frontiers”

John Richards, *The Unending Frontier. An Environmental History of the Early Modern World* (2006)

History, Arcaheology, Dendrochronology = Interdisciplinary vision!!!!!!

- General Objectives:

1. to collect bibliographic and documental information as well as other literature on naval construction and the use of timber within the political, administrative and economic framework in which the trade, distribution and utilization of forest resources was conducted in the Iberian empires;

2. to complement this research with the study resulting from analysing the archaeological evidence collected from Iberian shipwrecks, timber and other artefacts. Wood samples are chemically analysed so they can be dated and their source identified.

- Individual projects: small questions.

Historiography (I)

- Analyses from economic, social and political viewpoints
- Technology ?
- Raw material and resources?
- Relation between shipbuilding (Industry and technology) and Forestry (resources)
- Maritime Empires tried to control forest resources throughout policies and trade.
- Literature:
M. Williams, J. Richards, Pomeranz, Chew, Burke, and others

Historiography (II): theoretical framework for social Network studies

- What does Historical sources says?
- Relation between the global deforestation process and the accumulation of capital in the timber trade and exploitation.

Literature: McNeill, Braudel, Chase-Dun and Hall.

Wallerstein:

- Context of competition among empires
- Resources were usually channelled centripetally from the periphery to the centers of power.
- Competition for access to those resources that give power, control over trade and accumulation of capital.
- World System theory

- Wood has been a constant feature in economic life:
 - - It has made possible, directly or indirectly, the processes of accumulation throughout world history.
 - - It has provided the means for the social and economic transformations seen, specially, in maritime societies.
 - - It has been a resource utilized in wars, industrial development, population control, etc, -just as oil is today.
 - - Those areas hierarchically located where these resources were handled and traded had a great advantage over the rest. In Spain a comparison can be drawn between Andalusia and the Basque/Cantabrian region.
 - - Timber is essential in order to replicate lifestyles: building, ships, containers (boxes, barrels), exchange products, energy production...
 - It is important to see what the social theoreticians say about the clash among History, Culture and Nature.

Wood provenance in Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal): routes of timber supply and trade



Nuestra Señora de la Concepción
Y de las Animas, Antonio de Gaztañeta

Galeón San Felipe, sunk in Cádiz, 1596

What do have in bibliography and sources about these enigmas? An Iberian Vessel?

- a) **Constructive criteria**. The evolution of the Spanish shipbuilding techniques-can we talk about a “Spanish way” of building ships? Was it truly Spanish? What was the influence of Mediterranean and Portuguese shipbuilding traditions, and Dutch and English as they were especially present in the 18th century?
- b) **Timber criteria**. The provenance of the wood, if we happen upon a large amount of Iberian timber in a single wreck. Certain ships, like the Ribadeo Galleon, were built in Cantabrian oak.
- c) **Historical criteria**. Whether the ship built by a decree of the king of Spain, or through “asientos” -where private funding was made available to the State on loan- to serve in war missions under the Spanish crown, even if the ship was built on a foreign shipyard and using timber from distant regions.

The study of shipbuilding process
and the provenance of timber lead
us to reflect on the paradigm of the
utilization of natural resources in
History.

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