



MUSEO
DO CASTRO
DE VILADONGA



ROOM 0



HISTORY OF THE EXCAVATIONS

The Castro of Viladonga has been well known for a long time for its outstanding position in the countryside and for its monumental defences, as well as for unexpected findings such as the gold bracelet which appeared in 1911 and is on display at the Provincial Museum of Lugo.

First stage (1971-1978)

Excavations were led by Manuel Chamoso Lamas and allowed the discovery of a good number of the structures within the acropolis and allowed for the dating of the most important occupation of the castro as between the 3rd and 5th centuries AD, in other words, in the late Roman period.

Second stage (1982-2006)

After responsibility for archaeological matters was transferred to the Xunta de Galicia (Government of Galicia) and with Felipe Arias Vilas as director, archaeological work was restarted with the cleaning and consolidation of what had already been uncovered and with new excavations in various parts of the Castro both horizontally and vertically. The fieldwork was accompanied by the classification and the first study of the archaeological items which had been found to date.

In 1988 and 1989 a transverse incision was made into the walls and ditch on the eastern side in order to calculate the extent of the site and the structure of the system of defence.

In 1992 the discovery was made in the north-east corner of the acropolis of an occupation level pre-dating the habitat and the main defences, going back to the second and first centuries BC.

In 1996 the excavations carried out in the ante-castro on the west side allowed the locating of an access point to the acropolis with bastions on either side. In the years leading up to 2006 work concentrated on the main access to the acropolis and on the western side of the ante-castro.

THE HISTORY OF THE CASTRO DE VILADONGA MUSEUM

Between 1975 and 1977 the first museum building was built situated between the last two walls of the eastern side of the castro and designed to hold, to research and to display materials which came from the excavations carried out at the castro.

In 1983 the Ministry of Culture set up the Monographic Museum of Castro de Viladonga and after the necessary work and assembly between 1985 and 1986, the Museum opened to the public in November 1986 as a museum belonging to the State.

From 1990 the running of the Museum was taken over by the Xunta de Galicia (Galician Government) and a project was undertaken to enlarge the building because of reasons of space and to allow a better development of museum-type functions. In 1994 the Museum opened its renovated installations.

In February 1989 the Association of Friends of the Museum of Castro de Viladonga was set up. Its aims are to promote and publicize this important archaeological complex, supporting the Museum in all its work and functions.

HOW AN EXCAVATION IS CARRIED OUT

Archaeology studies the material remains of human cultures in order to reconstruct the past, to know how previous societies lived and to explain the changes in all their aspects which came about with the passing of time.

Each site is unique and there is only one way to obtain all the information contained in it: a thorough analysis using archaeological excavation. As this process means to a certain extent the “destruction” of the site it is important to gather the data from the earth and from the remains contained within it in a systematic way. For this reason excavation techniques must be rigorously applied, since once the dig has finished anything that has not been recovered and sufficiently documented will be lost.

Isolated finds are of no value. What is really important is to know their exact position within the site and their relation with other objects and structures (walls, houses, etc).

Archaeological investigation must also take into account all similar sites and their relationship with the surrounding countryside.

CASTRO CULTURE

Castro (Hill-fort) culture can be defined as the material, ideological and behavioural knowledge that characterizes the society that lived in the castros. It developed between the Iron Age based on a strong indigenous substrate of the final stage of the Bronze Age in which Central European, Atlantic and Mediterranean cultural influences are assimilated into the characteristics of the pre-castro North west.

The first settlers in the castros can be traced back to the Bronze Age, in the 7th and 6th centuries BC until the change of Age or the middle of the 1st century AD approximately. The Penarrubia Castro situated in Lugo is an example of this early occupation.

Castro Culture underwent notable progress due to internal dynamics and outside influences, the last of them being Roman.

The extent and influence of castro culture is greater than present day Galicia and goes as far as the rivers Navia and Túa in the east, and the Duero in the south.

Basically there are three types of castros, being the most characteristic element of this culture:

- Inland castros, which are the most frequent and characteristic type situated on hills or more or less prominent high ground, but occasionally on large or high summits (Viladonga and Coaña).

- Castros situated in mountainous areas of higher altitude, mainly located on mountain sides and connected specially with the mines of the eastern regions of Galicia (Vilar in the Courel and Chao San Martín in Grandas de Salime).

- Castros situated on the coast, very common on the Galician shoreline, of simple and well defined design, although very varied according to the geological and geographical configuration in each area (Tegra and Baroña)

The castro economy had at its base farming and livestock as well as hunting, fishing, seafood collecting and fruit gathering. At the same time mining and metalwork played an important role which would bring about the development of outstanding craftsmanship in precious metals. They also worked with stone, not only for construction but also as handicraft and symbolic work, ornamental and sculptural as in the case of the sites in the south of Galicia and the north of Portugal.

Another noteworthy economic activity is the production of pottery as well as textiles on a family and domestic scale.

Castro society probably had unequal wealth distribution and therefore there existed a certain social division with features of internal hierarchical structuring.

GALAICO-ROMAN CULTURE

Traditional castro culture underwent a gradual and decisive change with the Romanization of the North-west.

Military camps and representatives of the Roman administration spread, directly or indirectly, the new culture and new social order and the people from the castros recruited into the Roman army became true “Romanization agents”.

Social structure and economic activity were decisively changed under Roman administration. This administration was concerned about the political and economic control of the conquered areas, promoting change and diversification in the settlements and in the forms of ownership and land exploitation.

The Romanization of *Gallaecia* had an eminently practical and pragmatic character and for this reason public works such as road infrastructures (highways, bridges like those in Bibei or Ourense and Lugo) are well represented as well as everything that had a direct or indirect relation with the economic exploitation of the territory (mining and commerce).

As well as the Roman road network there exist walls and networks of piping and sewers in cities like Lucus and other important centres of population, lighthouses (Torre de Hércules), ports (Bares) as well as military camps (Cidadela and Baños de Bande) and other installations and works that promoted the control of the territory and its economic exploitation by the Romans.

Romanization brought with it a stabilization of animal and farming practices, creating a new rural habitat and restructuring land ownership with the intensifying of agricultural practices and with the introduction of new crops such as wheat, oil and wine.

These transformations can be seen in the *villae*, mansion houses linked not only to farms but also to coastal fishing concerns.

Another type of Galaico-Roman settlement are the *vici* or small open villages, the *castella* or *turres*, small late castros, very often connected with mines, and above all completely new cities and centres of population such as Lucus Augusti.

The abandonment of the castros was in no way complete nor sometimes permanent since the reoccupation of some castros has been found in the middle of the late Roman period (3rd to 5th century AD) as can be seen in the case of Castro de Viladonga.

THE AREA AROUND CASTRO DE VILADONGA. HERITAGE

The area in which Viladonga is situated, the Terrachá, is extraordinarily rich in archaeological, monumental and natural heritage.

There are necropolises of megalithic mounds (mamoas or medorras, with or without an interior dolmen, dating back 4 or 5,000 years). From the later Bronze Age, however, we know of hardly any finds of axes or similar elements.

However, in the Iron Age which is when this type of settlement like the castro expanded, there exist in this area many varied examples. In most cases the settlements which are always well defended, belong to the pre-Roman era while others, perhaps related to the one at Viladonga, were without doubt of Galaico-Roman occupation.

As well as castros other settlements from Roman times of the *villae*, are undoubtedly related to the castro at Viladonga. This was probably the place of defence, habitation and exploiting of the surrounding land by the Gallaico-Roman castro dwellers.

The gold mining settlements of this time also must have played an important role in the archaeological and historical context of Viladonga, which explains, at least partially, the organization of the land and the occupation of many sites.

As for monumental heritage it is important to mention the existence of various bridges, palaces and abundant religious heritage, including notably crosses, altar pieces and the unique church in the convent at Meira, the only example of Cistercian architecture in the area.

The rich natural heritage is made up of a large quantity of rivers, pools and lagoons as well as the mountain ranges that separate the area and which are places of enormous ecological interest due to the abundance of animal and plant species. There are also examples of historic trees of outstanding age and bearing.