



CRHEC
Centre de Recherche en
Histoire Européenne Comparée



Timber and architecture during prehistory and Antiquity (2) Wood supply, agro-sylvo-pastoral activities and forest

Workshop, Paris-Creteil, April 7-8, 2022
Call for papers



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A first *Timber and architecture/Bois et architecture* workshop, hosted in Toulouse in 2018, aimed to bring together various methods and approaches to study the structural role of timber in Ancient Architecture during a long period (Prehistory and Antiquity) and through a vast area stretching from the Aegean world to the Italian peninsula and western Europe. This workshop is published in the journal *Pallas* 110 (2019) (<https://journals.openedition.org/pallas/17097>).

A second workshop will focus more specifically on wood resource. Ancient societies and their activities are closely dependent on wood availability, as material and fuel.

Wood is a renewable resource, however both forest regeneration, with or without human intervention and related changes, are difficult to accurately evaluate. Furthermore, the issue of how forests were used and managed by prehistoric and ancient societies is raised. Despite its central role in our knowledge of the past societies, this complex interaction between human and nature to produce resources remains poorly investigated and requires a further integration of humanities and environmental sciences.

William V. Harris published in 2011 a major synthesis paper on deforestation in the Mediterranean area and the role played by prehistoric and ancient societies in this phenomenon. He points out several methodological issues to study the evolution of the woodland cover, in particular the difficulty of analyzing various sources and the risks of over generalizing specific conclusions. Indeed, the analysis of results from both environmental sciences and humanities raises interpretation issues, so that conclusions reached by the main actors in this field of research differ significantly. Moreover, tools and methods of archaeobotany and palaeoecology (interpretation of palynological data, new approaches in anthracology and dendrochronology) are constantly renewed.

For all these reasons, historians and archaeologists which try to understand the possibilities of wood supply in the societies under study, face numerous knowledge gaps in reconstructing landscapes, available wood resources and their evolution over time. To go beyond the disputed concept of “deforestation” - it would indeed be more appropriate to refer to “evolution or variation of forest cover” in a region – it seems important to consider this issue in the wider perspective of interaction between societies and their environment, here between humans and forest.

The objective of this workshop is to engage an open discussion among palaeobotanists (palynologists, dendrochronologists and anthracologists in particular) and historians (studying iconography, written and archaeological sources) to lead to methodological reflection. Our aim is also to question the sources available to study the forest cover and its management, but also to discuss the interpretation of these sources. It is also a matter of highlighting the limits and biases of each method as well as the potential of comparing sources. To this end, three themes have already been selected:

- **(1) Better understanding relationships between wood supply and forest ecosystem:** which selected species and trees, in which proportions? How trees were cut or pruned? What were transport conditions and modalities?

- **(2) Determining relationships between agro-pastoral activities and forest ecosystem:** forest harvesting is a cultivation practice and its modalities need to be characterized. The relationships with animal husbandry need also to be questioned.

- **(3) Reconstructing the evolution of the forest cover in the Mediterranean area through a critical approach.** A state of the data currently available, at a site or a regional scale, can provide a better basis for analysis.

Reference to historical comparisons (for example from the European Middle Ages) is welcome, as well as case studies highlighting methodological issues. This is the reason why, although the workshop intends to focus on the Aegean world and in particular on Greece and Crete during Prehistory and Antiquity, the reflection will be open to other regions (Italian peninsula, Western Europe, the Balkans and Near East).

The workshop will take place at the University of Paris Est-Creteil on **April 7 and 8, 2022**. If you wish to participate, please send an abstract (one page maximum) to the following email before **December 1st, 2021**: journeesbois.tlse@gmail.com

A publication is planned (papers in English and French)