

## Cíes

*"This brigantine sank, swallowed up by the sea on a stormy night a long time ago. It was carrying a cargo of onzas and doubloons, part of which ended up on the sandy bed of the cave right below "Punta do Cabalo", which since then has been known as "Cova dos pesos".*

*Castroviejo 1955*



### HISTORY

Although both Palaeolithic and Neolithic man traversed Cíes Islands, the earliest settlements are from the **Bronze Age**. The **"As Hortas" settlement** on the slopes of Mount Faro dates from that period as do other as yet unconfirmed references to similar structures in Alto da Campá.

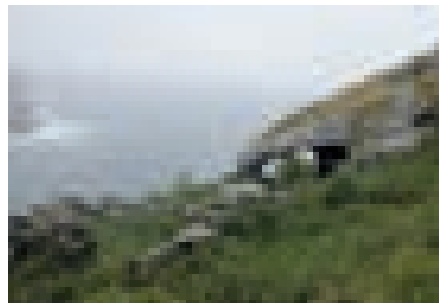
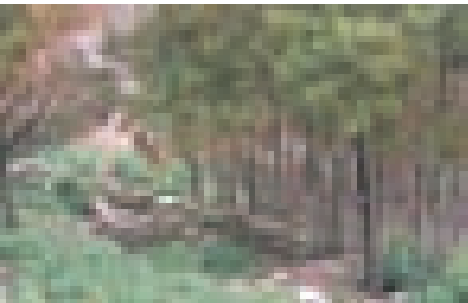
From the remains found there, that settlement has been classed as *castro*-Roman. It is linked with a series of natural shelters such as the one known as the "Druid altar". Resembling a skull, the grooves on the surface led many to take it as proof that sacrifices were made to the gods there. The "concheiros" (deposits consisting of shell and bone remains and pottery shards, etc.) found there indicate that their diet included shellfish and fish from ne-

arby waters. They are thought to have traded with people along the coast given the findings of pottery with motifs similar to those on the Peninsula.

Although there has been speculation that these islands were part of the *Kassiterides* Islands (named by the Greeks), the implicit allusion in the place name to Casiterita - tin- and the absence of this metal in the interior of the islands, leads to the conclusion that the islands may have been a tin trading site.

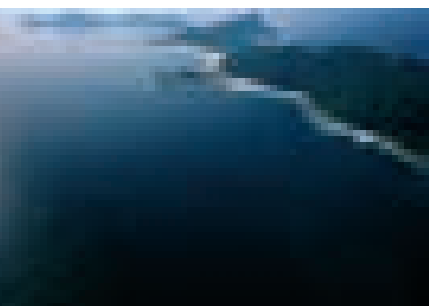
The **Romans** who sailed the *Mare Tenebrosum* called them the *Islands of the Gods*, and made them the scenario for the legend of Julius Caesar and the indomitable Herminians – a Celtic people from northern Portugal who tried to escape Roman harassment by seeking refuge on the islands. Roman remains similar to those of “As Hortas” found on the southern island (Isla Sur) suggest a settlement or outpost for merchant shipping, an idea as yet unconfirmed.

No remains or documents of possible inhabitants from Roman times to the appearance of the first hermits on



the islands have been discovered. This dark period of the island falls within the context of the rise of Norman and Sueve invasions on these shores, which lasted until the eleventh century. The Roman legacy of the Christianisation throughout Galician territory that converted the fierce Sueves was what triggered the proliferation of religious orders during the **Middle Ages**.

*Town of “As Hortas”, old fort, and “Druidic altar”, shelter and vantage point in the Bronze Age.*



*Bird's eye view of the Cíes islands*

The **islands** were **donated** to the **Cathedral of Santiago** by the King Alfonso III in 899. Two **convent-hermitages** were built in the Cíes during this period (eleventh to twelfth century): on the Middle Island (San Esteban) and the South Island (San Martín), and the monks who settled there controlled and managed the small population that congregated.

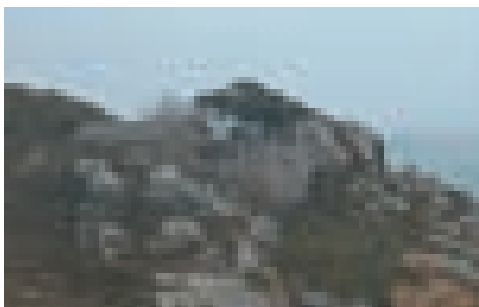
However, the discovery of the tomb of the Apostle St. James (Santiago) stoked Norman greed, and one of them, the Great Olaff, who was nicknamed "The Galician", attacked the islands and destroyed the convents.

The donation of the islands to the Church was confirmed by successive kings of Galicia when the convents, or what remained of them, were assigned to the order of the Benedictines in 1152 and the Franciscans in 1377. These new religious communities maintained a **feudal regime** over the population that remained until the mid-sixteenth century. They grew rye, millet and wheat, and kept relatively free ranging animals – goats, sheep, chickens, rabbits and pigs – on the abundant pasture land. Their staple diet was rounded off with fish. The land was fertilised with algae and there was plenty of water.

In the late Middle Ages a series of conflicts involving the Spanish monarchy arose in response to the change in the international panorama overseas. It led to the islands being used as a haven for foreign vessels. These **new invasions** (Turks, Tunisians, English) did not, in the main, affect the islanders, except in the case of the pirate Francis Drake, who laid waste to the Ría de Vigo and the Cíes Islands. The Battle of Rande against the Anglo-Dutch squadron in 1702 is famous. The victory left in its wake legends about treasures hidden in sunken Spanish ships.

The ecclesiastical presence waned partly due to internal conflicts within the Church, but mostly because of further pirate attacks until well into the eighteenth century, i.e. the **Modern Era**.

At that time – the mid-16th to 18th centuries – the harassed island population lived much as they had done under the former monastic regime, in which the forum of what was then the Sías Islands was administered by nobles from the town of Baiona and came to be known as the **Bayonne Islands** or Islands of Bayonne in the 18th century. Lack of security to the islands being abandoned.



*Former jail*

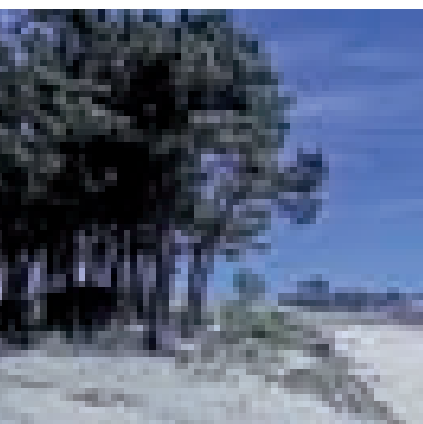
As a result of all the maritime chaos, pirates and trading routes, the Sías Cíes were the subject of several fortification plans, resulting in an artillery store in 1810 in the former Monastery of San Esteban, and, later, a **barracks for carabineers and a jail** near Nuestra Señora Beach.



*Carabineer barracks*

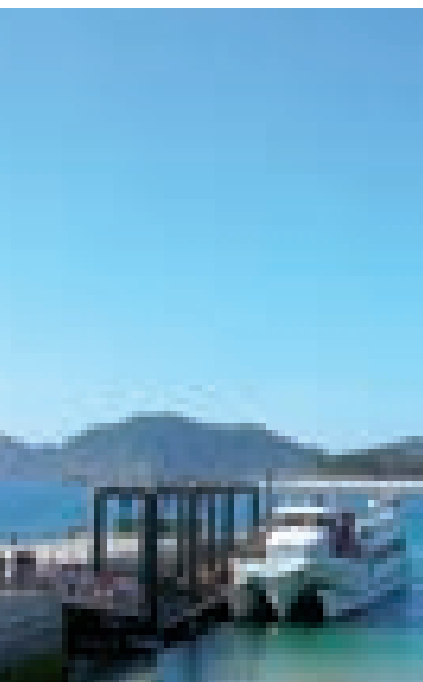
At the beginning of the 19th century, those defensive constructions contributed to a greater feeling of confidence, which encouraged resettlement and fresh activity. The islands came to depend on the town of Vigo in 1840 and around that time two **salting factories** were set up, one on the northern island, where the Restaurante de Rodas is currently located, and the other on the southern island, with a warehouse and a wharf. A tavern known as “La Isleña”, near El Lago, also thrived, serving many sailors. Cíes lighthouse was built in 1852.

Competition from the canning industry on the nearby coast caused the decline of the salting facilities and led to their being demoted to warehouses in 1900. El Lago is said to have been used at that time as a nursery for rearing lobsters. Las Cíes’ small population, mostly from Cangas, gradually declined until the mid-20th century. The residents made a living chiefly from agriculture (potatoes, maize and market gardening produce), fishing for home consumption and oc-



*Remains of the old tavern on the dune, and, in the background, the former salting factory, now converted into a restaurant*

*Tourists arriving on Cíes*



cupations such as keepers or seasonal workers in the salting factories. Their chief forms of amusement were getting together in the taverns (La Isleña, Bar de Serafín, Bar Begoña and Casa del Chuco) and hunting. When the factories closed, some left and others made a living by selling fish on the coast, while along the coast people grazed cattle.

As the depopulation worsened, interest in tourism grew among the wealthier sectors, which initiated small-group visits to the islands at the beginning of the **20th century**. From the sixties this tourism became large scale and studies indicated a need to protect the islands' natural values. In 1980, the archipelago was declared a natural park and most of the territory is the property of the regional government.

During that stage and until the end of the 70s, every summer the Armed Forces sent a contingent to do survival manoeuvres on the south Island. All that remains of them are popular tales and the pilots' accommodation.

Cíes archipelago was declared Natural Park in 1980 and greater part is owned by Galician government.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE

Remains inaccurately assigned to the **Paleolithic** and **Neolithic** periods: *Campo Sanquiense* biface and a scraper among the Saint-Acheul bifaces used for shellfishing, and some poutadas used as weights with some kinds of fishing tackle.

From the **Neolithic Period** three hand mills, a bifacial carver and a triangular item for decoration have been found. There is also a deposit thought to be from that period containing ceramic and stone items that have yet to be classified.

The “As Hortas” site is the most noteworthy **Bronze Age** site. Greatly altered by later arable farming, it has about 4 or 5 quadrangular dwellings –due to the Roman occupation of the fort– that include double-leaved doors. The *concheiros* associated with that stage reveal primitive, simply decorated grey, ochre and orange pottery; and other more evolved techniques involving polishing and burnishing. An altar stone, spindle whorls (possibly a weight on a loom), decorative rope jambs and a fishing hook and clasp have been found there.

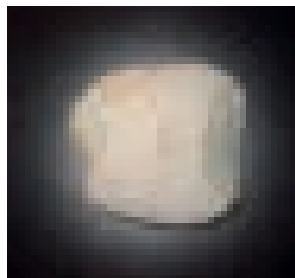
The **Roman** remains consist of urns, plates, pottery and necklaces on the Faro and Sur islands; and a peculiar ring in the Muxieiro area whose inscription is thought to be military.

The early religious constructions, which appeared at the beginning of the **Middle Ages**, were later altered:

- **Monastery of San Esteban, on Faro Island**

Rectangular ground plan, two storeys, made of granite, with a twosided sloping roof.

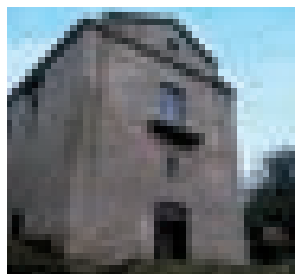
It conserves the original foundations on rock and, during its rehabilitation as a Nature Classroom several graves were found (one of them is on display), as well as the bones of men and women.



*Poutada*



*Pottery remains from the Castro*



*Former Santo Estevo Monastery, now an information point*



### • Chapel site and shrine on South Island

The chapel site looks out over the ocean and consists of a cell between walls of ashlar stone and the remains of the former roof. The shrine, located on the beach, is flanked by two columns and a central niche. At the back of the roof is a central finial like an arc with three ribs. The frontal features a cross and two pinnacles.

### SHIPWRECKS

The wrecks found in Cíes waters are the stuff of adventure.

*Bone remains found in the Convent of Santo Estevo*

- Stone anchors from the prehistoric period.
- The “Santo Cristo de Maracaibo”, a Spanish galleon full of valuable items sank near South island after the battle of Rande.
- German submarines from the Second World War sunk by allied frigates.
- Amongst several shipwrecks is the one involving the “Ave del Mar”, which lost its 26 crew members in bad weather. A cross was erected in their memory at the northern point of Isla Sur (South Island).

*Stone anchors*



## ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE



### Settlers' houses:

Built of ashlar stone and blocks of granite, they have sloping roofs.

They were arranged as small independent farms: the family home included an oven, hearth and compartments for animals.

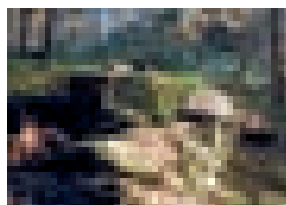
To supply the settlers, the islands were equipped with:

- **Forje:** with a stone oven and water supply – found on Isla Norte and one on Isla Sur.
- **Mills:** a horizontal one on Isla Sur, with upper channels and a windmill in the south of the lake, which was used until the 20th century.

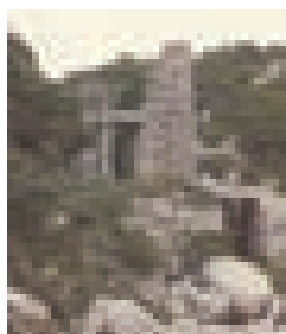
It is possible that raised barns to store the harvest existed, but only one foundation has been found in the area of Campana.

### Barracks of carabineers and jail:

Both are near the beach of Nosa Señora. The barracks are two storeys high, rectangular and have several rooms. The jail consists of a series of buildings around a central inner courtyard. Associated with the jail was an artillery store, which was housed in the monastery.

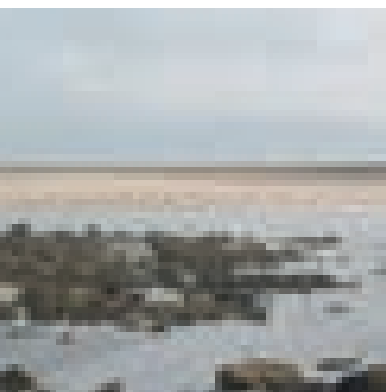


*Ferreiros settlement, island of Monteagudo*



*Former mill on Isla Sur*





*Remains of the nursery  
in the lake*

### Salting factories, nursery and taverns.

All of them are associated with the islands' heyday. Salting factories: one at the Rodas wharf site and the other on Isla Sur. The latter still has the yard where the salting tanks used to be.

The nursery consisted of a house near the lake and an underwater structure at the bottom of the lake, whose walls can still be seen at low tide. The water was regulated by means of sluice gates in the dike that joined the two islands.

Near the nursery house was "La Isleña", a tavern run by El "Coxo". Its domed oven produced tasty pasties for sailors.

### Cemetery:

Founded in 1927. Small and special for its sloping layout following the lie of the land south of the lagoon, the cemetery contains some iron crosses. Below the stone supporting the base of the inner cross there is an ossuary.

*View of the hillside  
graveyard on Cíes*



### Monuments and tributes:

The barracks known as the "Monolith", demolished in 2008, was located at Muxieiro point and was built in honor of Franco in 1962. Other small tributes remember Jesús Molanes Gamallo, ranger involved in repopulating the forest; Fernando de Castro with a plaque near Nosa Señora beach, as one of the first lovers of the island; and the cross in honor of the "Ave del Mar" on the South island.



### Chapels:

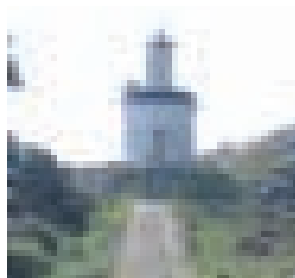
A small chapel dedicated to the Virgin of El Carmen, patron saint of sailors, was built in 1963. All that remains of the mosaic of the seated Virgin with child in her arms is her face.

On the South Island, a simple altar was erected in 1930 by a group of hunters who used the island in the 1890s.

### Lighthouses:

There are four lighthouses on the Cíes Islands. The first one was built in 1852. Its 171 metre-high tower houses the light; ancillary quarters for the lighthousemen were built into the tower. Following several overhauls, the two structures were made separate and the light now functions automatically by means of solar panels. The other three lighthouses – Faro do Peito, Faro do Principe and Faro de Bicos – already in existence by the 20th century, stand at the entrances to the ria.

*Mosaic of the Virgin of El Carmen at the old chapel on the North Island*



*The lighthouse Faro da Porta also known as Faro do Príncipe Cíes lighthouse*

