

DNA reveals origins of ancient wood

Researchers at the Thünen Institute of Forest Genetics and the universities of Copenhagen and Wageningen have managed to extract DNA from the wood of old buildings and shipwrecks. They could use this aDNA (ancient DNA) to determine the origin of the wood.

The origin of wood from centuries past is usually determined by studying the annual rings but that is not always possible. It is difficult to extract enough genetic material.

Structures usually use the dark wood from the middle of the tree trunk, which contains a lot of chemical compounds that hamper DNA extraction.

Despite this, the researchers were able to develop two protocols for extracting DNA from oak. They used sources such as wood from the 700-year-old shipwreck Mönchgut Ostsee VII, found off the coast of North Germany.

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