

The Consequences of Laws Regulating Lizard Consumption: The Case of *Fardacho**

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ABSTRACT

Environmental protection laws applied globally in European Community countries have overshadowed country practices of capture and consumption of the fardacho lizard in certain parts of Spain. However, mechanised farming, with its technical and social consequences, has had a stronger effect on the hunting and consumption of the reptile. This article comments on changes in generational tendencies towards consumption.

INTRODUCTION

When Spain joined the European Economic Community in 1986 it incurred the incorporation of European regulations on fauna and flora protection.

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This, together with the social movement in favour of nature conservation, led to the passing of Decree 4/1989 of March 27th relating to the conservation of the wild natural environment, flora and fauna. This law was meant to prevent the exhaustion of natural resources, the extinction of animal and vegetable species, and the degradation of natural environments.

The Heading of the Decree No. IV reads as follows: “To kill, upset and disturb wild animals intentionally is forbidden (...) as is also capturing them alive and collecting their eggs or young (...)”.

The National Catalogue of Endangered Species includes a list of animals protected by this law; the State leaves local governments free to create similar catalogues for their own territories. Although *fardacho*,² this paper’s main topic, is not included as a “wild animal” either in the National or in the Local Catalogue of Endangered Species, it is protected by the above mentioned law.

Within the Aragonese Autonomous Community (Spain), this law affects the inhabitants of areas where this reptile has been a traditional food. Peñalba³ being among such areas, we analyse here the role played by *fardacho* in the local food culture over recent years. Also examined are the reasons for a decreasing number of specimens populating the area and factors causing this lizard to lose its role as human food.

As to this last objective, the initial hypothesis is that, in spite of what is largely believed, the consumption of *fardacho* in Peñalba did not come to an end because of the above-mentioned decree; it was rather the result of changes in the food culture of the inhabitants of the village.

FARDACHO AS FOOD FOR HUMANS

Fardachos can be found practically all over the Iberian Peninsula, in the Southern half of France, the North-East of Italy and North of Africa (Arnold and Burton, 1978; Mateo, 1997; Salvador, 1998). Although they can be found in the pre-Pyrenean valleys, *fardachos* are more numerous in lower lands. They inhabit regions characterised by heavy rainfall as well as dry areas. Within their territory they find shelter in shrubs and bushes, near cultivated patches and paths, in stony and rocky areas, roadsides, rabbit warrens or self-made hide-outs.

Habitual prey of a number of carnivorous animals and a predator itself, the *fardacho* plays an important role within the ecosystem. Its colour is mainly green with blue spots called “ocelos”, along its sides. Although it can reach up to 80 centimetres in length, it is usually smaller and its life span in its natural environment is about eleven years, whereas in captivity this lizard may live up to seventeen years. Its yearly fertility span lasts from April to June and the female, depending on her size, lays a number of eggs varying between 5 and 22. They hatch in the summer.

The animal is diurnal and active during the central hours of the day until sunset. Although its main activities take place on the ground, the *fardacho* is a good climber of rocks and trees. It mainly feeds on insects, other lizards, worms, the young of birds and rabbits, and fruit.⁴

In articles dealing with this animal, one of the seldom described characteristics of the *fardacho* is its function as human food. The people of Peñalba are among those who, over the years, have used *fardacho* as food. The elderly mention that they have always eaten this lizard and that the practice was discontinued in the late 70’s and early 80’s.⁵

The locals hunted the animal, but hunting was not submitted to rules: capture was accidental, disorganised, and unplanned. Farmers and shepherds hunted *fardacho* when they came across it while they were working in the fields. Since, traditionally, these occupations were the prerogative of men, *fardacho* hunting was gender specific. However, if women happened to see one during their daily chores, they did all they could to catch it.

Yet, hunting did not always depend on chance. Men and women admit that they occasionally left their working activities in order to “go and get it”: they intentionally removed stones, bushes, etc., in order to find the reptiles. Furthermore, some shepherds could rely on “*fardacho*-dogs”, particularly skilled in locating the animal.

Usually the hunt took place when *fardachos* came out of hibernation (depending on the temperature, they hibernate between October and February), since still “stunned”, it was easier to trap them. It was a day hunt since the lizards ceased to be active at sunset.

Once the *fardacho* had been spotted, there were various ways of catching it. Shepherds confirm that in this area it was never hunted with guns. Traps

were used sometimes; according to an informant, they were placed in spots where ants were abundant, since *fardachos* like these insects. The most common method though, was to run after the lizard until it was cornered (sometimes this was not necessary because people threw stones at it during the chase and could succeed in hurting or even killing the animal). Once it was trapped, the bottom of a knife or a stick was introduced into the animal's mouth (the bravest used their thumbs for this purpose). The *fardacho* bit it instinctively and did not let go, which allowed time to hit the animal on the head and kill it.

Once caught it was never sold. It was common to eat it out in the fields on the very day of its capture. Occasionally it was brought to the village to share with the family, sometimes it was presented as a gift to friends or important persons in order to return or ensure a favour.

In the outdoors *fardacho* was cooked and eaten by men, who were the ones who usually worked in the fields and did the hunting. When a shepherd or farmer caught a *fardacho*, he usually shared it with his fellow workers.⁶ This was a happy event for the diners, since the occasional consumption of the reptile satisfied their need for variety in their routine diet. It functioned as an element of cohesion of the group, because it united shepherds and farmers alike and reinforced their pride in being active country folk. Furthermore, the cooking methods of grilling and roasting, endowed the diners, all men, with meaningful cultural notions. As M. Montanari argues (1993: 35), anthropologists have taught us that the image of food roasting on fire, right on the flame, corresponds to cultural notions which are very different from what is suggested by boiling water in a pan: fire conveys notions of violence, bellicosity, impetuosity and a "wilder" interaction with nature. I. González Turmo (1995: 221) also points out that men's food practices are more closely related to the country, to nature and, of course, to fire.

Anybody could cook *fardacho* since no special skill was required for it. First the lizard's innards had to be removed; special attention was paid to the removal, with a knife, of the animal's kidneys, because their ingestion "was bad for one's health". It was believed that those who ate them suffered from urinary dysfunctions. Once gutted, the *fardacho* was placed on the grill. It was cooked whole, sometimes its tail was missing, as the animal could lose it as a ploy to escape predators. Curiously, this was one of the

most appreciated parts of the animal because “there were hardly any bones in it and it was much tenderer”. The barbs on the neck were also much appreciated, and for this reason the head was never thrown out.

The lizard was not skinned before grilling, otherwise “the meat would burn”; the skin was removed after grilling and occasional remaining bits were spat out as it was eaten, seasoned with salt and oil.

According to those who used to eat it this way, no other seasoning was needed since *fardacho* was very tasty in itself. It was usually a mid-morning meal (*almuerzo*) together with fried eggs and/or for lunch as an appetiser before the main course consisting of a *calderada* (game or lamb stew with potatoes).

Sometimes the *fardacho* was not eaten in the fields but taken home and shared with family or friends. It was not necessarily consumed by the one who had caught it, but eaten in turns, by each member of the community of shepherds and farmers. It was thus shared as a “gift” and the rivalry and envy associated with the hunt were eliminated.

At home it was also eaten as an appetiser on the very day of its capture or, at the latest, on the following day, and it was never preserved. Once the *fardacho* entered the domestic area, the women were the ones who decided how to prepare it. They skinned and gutted it, chopped it and fried it in a pan with oil and garlic.⁷ According to a shepherd of this area, the fact that women complained about the effort required for preparing it (skinning and gutting was considered by them a tiresome activity) was one of the main reasons for the sporadic consumption of *fardacho* at home.

Gender differences were manifest not only in the cooking methods, but also in the general appreciation of the animal. Whereas men regarded it as a very tasty food, women did not consider it very appetising (although some women claim they like it a lot). As J. González Turmo argues (1995: 221), the importance of meat in men’s meals is undeniable; it was an essential food in their non-daily meals. Meat had to be part of the meal at all costs. Cost here does not just refer to economic value, but to scarcity or to overcoming the revulsion to uncommon meat, rejected by most people. This is the case of lizards, snakes, tortoises, donkeys and even cats, which men have eaten to women’s disgust and horror. Women, in general, show a strong aversion to the ingestion of such animals.

In fact, the consumption of *fardacho* in the area of Peñalba was part of the culture defined by the inhabitants as “eating all”. Shepherds assured us that, in the country, any animal is “good to eat”. A list of “peculiar” animals consumed by them, includes hedgehogs, rats and especially a wide variety of birds: esparbel (*Cernícalo primilla*), little owls, hoopoes, stone curlews and many more. As a shepherd says quoting a proverb, “All birds that fly, one can fry”.⁸ All these “peculiar” animals were hunted and eaten with beans, lard and wine by the men during their long stays in the fields.

ABOUT THE DECREASING NUMBER OF *FARDACHOS*

The decrease in the number of *fardacho* specimens in Peñalba is not due to food practices of the inhabitants, but to the modernisation of agriculture technology in the 60’s, and to agricultural policies on the 80’s.

In the 1960’s the mechanisation of agriculture was completed. Threshers, harvesters, baling machines, etc., were already part of the landscape. One of the main changes brought in by mechanisation was the replacement of mules by tractors.⁹ As a consequence, the rural landscape was modified: fields became wider; smallholdings were unified; stones were removed from the ground (a practice not included in former ploughing techniques). All this had repercussions on the loss of hide-outs for *fardachos*. Furthermore, in the early 70’s the use of pesticides was extended, which led to the disappearance of insects, the *fardachos*’ main food source. As a consequence, it became much harder for these reptiles to survive.

In the 1980’s, the unification of land plots, the transformation of dry lands into irrigated fields and the repopulation of hillsides altered the countryside and brought a decrease in the areas of stubble and thus in the number of *fardachos*. During this and the following decade, the local government decided to concentrate the number of smallholdings, making the plots fewer and bigger. Apart from obvious economic consequences, this concentration resulted in the destruction of ditches, hedgerows etc. Besides, as J. Bada (1999: 205) points out, public intervention on the territory was accompanied in the allotted plots by the owners’ own performance. The logic of economy ended up prevailing over everything else. Private owners strived hard to level their fields and remove large stones which were left on

the edges in big piles. They broke up irrigation ditches and furrows; ponds were filled, banks and old huts were destroyed.

Such material facts were, of course, accompanied by others of the order of representations and beliefs. In the oral tradition, the relationship between reptiles and humans in the area of Peñalba has always been one of love/hate.¹⁰ As to the *fardacho*, it was loved as food and hated for other reasons. It was for example, accused of eating partridge eggs and, in this area, whatever is responsible for the decrease in the number of partridges has to be eliminated. Gamekeepers were in charge of “cleansing” and elimination.

As a result of material and non-material factors, the number of *fardachos* diminished in the area of Peñalba. However, nowadays, both inhabitants and local administrations agree that this reptile is not in danger of extinction. They say that although *fardachos* have decreased and disappeared locally, they are still common in large parts of the Iberian Peninsula. Furthermore, in the area of Peñalba, it is believed that *fardachos* will be seen running around again, due to their high degree of adaptability and to the fact that the countryside has stabilised. In fact, some people assure us that they can already be seen in the neighbourhood.

EATING *FARDACHO*, AND THE LAW

As far as the legal protection of *fardachos* goes, it is worth considering how the people concerned interpret it, and to what extent the law has influenced consumption. As to the first, Peñalba’s inhabitants are ignorant of any regulations concerning the protection of *fardachos*; they don’t know which law protects these reptiles, or when it became operative. Only through the media did they become aware that this animal could no longer be hunted and eaten. When someone heard the news it travelled by word of mouth to the other locals.¹¹ What’s more, people from this area are not interested in knowing the origin of such prohibition. The simple fact of knowing that there is a law against it is enough for them to protest against the regulation.

They maintain that the law should not affect the country folk, who have traditionally lived with *fardachos*. They are against the penalisation of *fardacho* consumption (which is, as we have seen, sporadic) since they stress the fact that this practice is not responsible for the extinction of the animal

or of flora and fauna in general. In this sense, these people feel abused since they have been blamed for something they think they have not done. Besides (although we shall see later that *fardachos* are not eaten any longer), they complain about the law because it prevents them from re-establishing this practice in case they wished to. This law, they add, might just punish the hunt and not the consumption. Metaphorically, this is summarised by a shepherd who says: "If a child buys a gun, it is the shop one must punish, not the child". In other words, once the animal is dead, throwing it away would be nonsense. Most Peñalbans aged 60-65, and those others curious about food, insist that they would not hesitate to eat a *fardacho* again.

What is unanimously disapproved of, on the other hand, is the possible commercialisation of *fardacho*, were it the case that this reptile was not protected. People agree on the consumption being illegal, since, if "it were not forbidden, there would surely be some restaurant in the Diagonal,¹² selling it and making big profits". In short, and paradoxically, they are grateful for this law because it is an efficient means of prevention against the commercialisation of *fardachos*, which, in their opinion, cannot be sold.

As to the second of the above raised questions, it is evident that the fear of incurring economic sanctions¹³ represses *fardacho* hunting. There are, however, other and more important reasons which motivated the disappearance of this animal from the Peñalbans' food world.

Establishing when this practice was discontinued is as difficult as spotting its origin. The locals say that towards the end of the 70's, and at the beginning of the 80's, *fardachos* ceased to be seen in the country due to the above-mentioned factors, which resulted in the elimination of *fardacho* from their food habits. At any rate, it was in 1989 that the law was published in the Government Official Gazette, and by this date *fardacho* was a symbol of bygone times. It can thus be said that the effect of this law on *fardacho* consumption in the rural environment had no consequences on Peñalban food culture.

As mentioned before, habitat modifications, as a consequence of mechanisation, began to threaten the *fardacho*'s survival. Yet, this does not explain, during this period, the waning interest in hunting and consuming *fardacho*. It could actually be related to the changes undergone by the lifestyle of Peñalba's inhabitants, as a consequence of culture's inherent

evolution through time, and of mechanisation. For example, one of the reasons motivating the drop in hunting activities was that walking in the country was associated with *fardacho* capture, and this ceased to make sense with the appearance of tractors.

Furthermore, a generalised use of machines allowed a wider scope of action, gaining larger areas of productive soil, which brought about more work and a loss of motivation as far as *fardacho* hunting was concerned. As an informant stresses: “You are busy doing all sorts of chores and have no time to waste in order to catch it (...) It is a matter of productivity”. During this period the concept of benefit changed. The pace of country life started to be marked by haste, and collective meals disappeared. The satisfactory economic outcomes of the 60’s, resulting from mechanisation, were also the consequence of abundant rainfall in the area of Peñalba. More time was consequently devoted to ploughing at the expense of *fardacho* hunting.

Another point worth mentioning is that machines mediated the relationship with nature. In other words, the relationship between human beings and nature was not closely intimate any longer, neither physically nor symbolically; consequently, the role played by *fardachos*, roasted on fire, as a synonym of cultural notions of violence, impetuosity etc., (see Montanari above), lost importance.

All the material innovations which affected farming and ploughing were accompanied by changes in the organisation of rural society, lifestyle and socio-cultural values. From the middle 60’s on, in the area of Peñalba, family organisation, inheritance, estate administration, socialisation between relatives and between neighbours, underwent important changes (Bada, 1999: 61). These were not the only transformations: women gained access to education and joined the labour force in the cities; rural life lost its prestige in favour of city attractions; the agricultural sector suffered from heavy economic losses; upward social mobility became a reality; modern ideals of autonomy, freedom, etc., made their appearance (Bada, 1999: 69).

No doubt, all this affected food culture in general and the representations concerning meat in particular. In other words, as A. Millán (1998: 139) points out, society and culture vary in time and space: thus, the image of animals and their interaction with humans also becomes modified.

In the case of *fardachos*, due to socio-cultural changes in the area of Peñalba, a displacement occurred in their food status as well as a change in their symbolic meaning. The representations around the object-*fardacho* were modified. If in the past it was highly appreciated as food for humans, today the reasons which motivated the appreciation are missing and interest in its capture has faded away. As a Peñalba shepherd argues, “Now I wouldn’t move an inch to catch it”. Other inhabitants of this area affirm that, “If there were more *fardachos* nowadays, they wouldn’t be eaten anyway”. The point is that people could not be bothered to catch a *fardacho* given the fact that the tractor, among other things, has caused farmers to prefer to eat a sandwich while comfortably listening to the radio and enjoying air conditioning. Furthermore, both farmers and shepherds usually eat at home and consequently collective meals in the fields, during which *fardachos* played an important role, have lost importance. This, together with the scarcity of *fardachos* and the good economic boom of the 60’s, were the main reasons why Peñalba inhabitants discontinued the consumption of such reptiles.

However, as anticipated above, people aged 60-65, who participated in the culture of “eating all”, and even younger people who are closely related to country life, in spite of not being interested in *fardacho* hunting, assure us that they would consume this “picturesque” food if there was a chance to do so.¹⁴ Of course, it would be consumed in secret, between friends, not in public, and the name of the person responsible for the capture would certainly not be revealed.

The new generation however would never eat *fardacho*. The “culture of eating all”, confined to the countryside, has been transformed into “what is good for your health”. Shepherds say derogatively that people nowadays take yoghurts, smoked salmon and Coca Cola to the countryside. For such modern consumers, the consumption of *fardacho* has fallen into disrepute and even causes revulsion. As one of them says, “eating *fardacho* today would be disgusting”. Young people in fact, abhor the very idea of eating such an animal. Time has indeed changed what was culturally appetising. This moral and social feeling, (Miller, 1998: 22) among other reasons, comes from the process of humanisation of the animal,¹⁵ a factor which has largely contributed to modify the subjective position of humans

in relation to animals. According to A. Millán (1998: 148), today we witness a process of upward socio-animal mobility (humanisation). This can be observed in post-industrial countries: the qualities of animals are emphasised, their rights are stated and defended by associations, the number of protected species increases, the processes previous to their consumption are uncovered, etc.

For this reason, young people cannot be bothered to catch a *fardacho*, since “people eat better”; although it is good, it is second-rate “meat”, and there is no need to consume “strange” animals, belonging to the past. If in former times “anything went” as far as food was concerned, nowadays there is a lot to choose from, and, given the possibility of choosing, people prefer game (rabbit, venison, hare) or meat on sale at the butcher’s (pork, veal, etc.). *Fardacho* represents a generational boundary, between the culture of the old, the “eating all”, and that of the young and modern times.

CONCLUSIONS

The *fardacho* and its food status in the past is a recurrent topic in Peñalba. It often arises during tea or coffee time chats, and people always talk about it positively. Its taste is praised and it brings to memory a number of pleasant situations experienced by the diners, usually men, who participated in its consumption.

Its prohibition is in part responsible for such appreciation. From being a food practice abandoned long before the coming into force of the law, after the social and cultural changes in the area, something recalled only sporadically, it has turned into a modern topic. People discuss law regulations and express their opinions in favour of or against the law itself. On the one hand, they complain about not being able to re-install a food habit in case they wished to do so, and on the other, they are happy that other people, who do not belong to their countryside and might have commercial interests in *fardachos*, are also forbidden to hunt it.

This demonstrates that legal protection of flora and fauna also alters food culture. In our times the process of humanisation of animals (see Millán, 1998) allows the law to give priority to the protection of vegetal and animal species over human food practices. The question arises as to how it might

be possible to reconcile the protection of wild species and human cultural practices, especially when, at present, as in the case of *fardachos*, the reasons which justified the legislation, namely the danger of extinction, are no longer relevant. However, even though the law left the door open for the revival of *fardacho* consumption, modern food tendencies will aid its extinction. But who knows whether in the future, the interest in the revival of such practice might arise among the young inhabitants of Peñalba, especially if we consider that values such as tradition and nature are again fashionable and there is a tendency to re-establish dishes which have long been abandoned.

Translated from the Spanish version by Monica Stacconi.

NOTES

1. Its scientific name is *lacerta lepida*. Its common name *lagarto ocelado*. It is also called *gardacho* and/or *fardacho*, depending on the geographical area. In this paper the last of these terms has been adopted, as it is the name used by people from Peñalba. According to J. Corominas and J. A. Pascual (1980), the term *fardacho* stems from a combination of the Arabic *hardun* "lizard" with the pre-Islamic Valencian of Byzantine origin *sarvacho*. The first document recording *fardacho* as a provincial word dates from 1817 although one of its derivations, *fardachina* ('little lizard'), already appeared twice in an Aragonese Inventory of 1374.
2. Peñalba is in the province of Huesca in the Monegros area. According to the 1996 Municipal Census it has 817 inhabitants of which 409 are women and 408 men. Agriculture, cattle and haulage companies are the main sources of income.
3. Further information on the characteristics of the *Lacerta lepida* can be found in A. Salvador (1998) and J.A. Mateo (1997).
4. On the history of lizard consumption some references can be found in J. M. Corbier (1999) and B. Rosenberger (1999). According to the former, there were lizards among the Roman remains found in the Egyptian desert, not far from the Red Sea. According to the latter, there is also evidence that this animal was consumed by nomadic shepherds during the pre-Islamic era. C. A. Gálvez, R. Morales and J. Castañeda (1999) point out that lizard consumption was characteristic of American natives.
5. Collective meals in the country were rather common. Farmers and shepherds sometimes spent a long time away from home and took large provisions of lard, beans etc. with them. Their diet was complemented by any animal which could be hunted. As already said, they gathered together daily, in order to share the food.
6. About the ways of hunting and consuming *fardacho* there are, obviously, cultural differences. In a recipe book published by the Caja de Ahorros de Navarra (V. M. Sarobe, 1995), which has been, by the way, condemned for its list of "unusual"

recipes including protected species, it can be seen that the *gardacho* (so called in Navarra), is much appreciated by people of any social status. It is killed with a gun if it climbs a tree, otherwise it is caught with bare hands, thrown up in the air and stabbed to death in the back of its head once it falls on the ground. It is skinned and gutted, then grilled and dressed with salt and oil. Some like to rub its meat with garlic before roasting it. It is also fried in oil with chopped garlic. In some parts of Navarra, *gardacho*, once chopped, is added to white beans or stewed with tomatoes and potatoes, or with peppers in tomato sauce.

7. The literal translation of the Spanish proverb “*ave que vuela a la cazuela*” would be “all birds that fly end up into the pan”.
8. The literal translation of the Spanish proverb “*ave que vuela a la cazuela*” would be “all birds that fly end up into the pan”.
9. The first metal/iron-wheeled tractors made their appearance in the area of Peñalba in the 1940’s. Later in the 50’s, the first tyres appeared. However, it was in the 1960’s that mechanisation became a general phenomenon.
10. The most hated reptiles are snakes. This is reflected in the stories orally transmitted from one generation to another. There is, for example, a story about a baby who, despite breastfeeding, did not grow bigger. Later on it was found out that a snake hypnotised the mother, replaced the baby and fed on the maternal milk. In order to prevent the baby from crying, the snake put its tail into his mouth. Once the trick was discovered, the snake was killed.
11. As usually happens with rumours, that on the prohibition on fardacho consumption has been probably distorted. In Peñalba, for example, it is said that somebody in Madrid was fined 500,000 pesetas for hunting a fardacho. Somebody else claimed that the fine amounted to 1 million pesetas. Be that as it may, everybody is now aware that fardacho hunting may cost a lot of money.
12. A famous street in the city of Barcelona.
13. The heading of the VI decree 4/1989 of 27th March on the preservation of natural environment and wild flora and fauna, includes a description of offences and sanctions. These range from 10,000 to 50,000,000 pesetas.
14. See Note 12.
15. On this process of animal humanisation see A. Millán (1998).

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