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SOCIAL AND IDEOLOGICAL CHANGES IN THE BALEARIC ISLANDS DURING LATER PREHISTORY

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INTRODUCTION

Recent discoveries on the island of Menorca have shed new light on social development in the Balearic islands during the second and first millennia cal BC. In 1995 and 1997 local speleologists discovered two caves, named the Cova des Carritx and the Cova des Mussol, in the western part of the island, which had remained unaffected by human activities since prehistoric times. Moreover, the atmospheric conditions in these caves favoured the exceptional preservation of organic materials, such as wood or human hair, which are unusual finds in the western Mediterranean. The archaeological remains registered in both sites showed that a wide range of ritual and funerary practices had taken place in different places in the cave system. Thanks to an extensive C14-dating programme it was possible to establish various phases of occupation of the caves between approximately 1600 and 800 cal BC. Several excavation campaigns have been carried out so far, and the systematic analyses of the palaeobotanical, faunal, anthropological and artefactual remains, as well as of their geological, geomorphological and chronological contexts has been carried out in recent years in the context of an interdisciplinary research project (Lull et al. 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2001). This has not only implied the re-examination of the absolute and relative chronological sequence of the Balearic prehistory, but also we now begin to understand better the environmental conditions, the socioeconomic organisation and the ideological changes taking place on the islands during the second and first millennia BC. Thus, the discovery and investigation of the

Cova des Carritx and the Cova des Mussol has resulted in a general shift in our view of the later prehistory of the Balearic islands.

The new evidence obtained from these two caves and the review of the archaeological record of Mallorca and Menorca allows us to raise a series of questions about the dynamics of the islands' societies in prehistoric times and their situation in the context of the Western Mediterranean. Frequently, it has been claimed, or implicitly assumed, that island communities are "special", in the sense that they develop specific forms of social or economic organisation, due to their circumscription on an area of land with defined natural limits. Yet, the specificity of this geographical situation can be understood in terms of isolation, or the opposite, i.e. exposed and open to constant interaction with other communities. These different ways of conceiving insularity have both operated in the explanation of islands in Prehistory, as can be seen, for example, comparing modern archaeological thinking in the eastern and the western Mediterranean. While in the east it is generally assumed that the sea facilitates communication and that islands mediate in social, economic and political interactions, archaeological models of the west emphasise local and gradual development and limited contact with other regions. These perceptions are not always implicit in the archaeological record, but seem to be influenced by a certain historical understanding of these areas. Since Medieval and, especially, in Modern times the islands of the eastern part of the Mediterranean basin have played a key role in the trading routes of the Byzantine empire, the Ottoman empire, the republics of Venice or Genoa, or under British rule. On the contrary, in

the west, after the expulsion of the Islamic population, most of the islands remained under the rule of Spanish kings, who were soon looking towards the Atlantic Sea. Apart

points of communication and exchange, which allowed the consumption of products coming from Africa, Iberia and Italy, as the ceramic evidence shows. Later again, from the

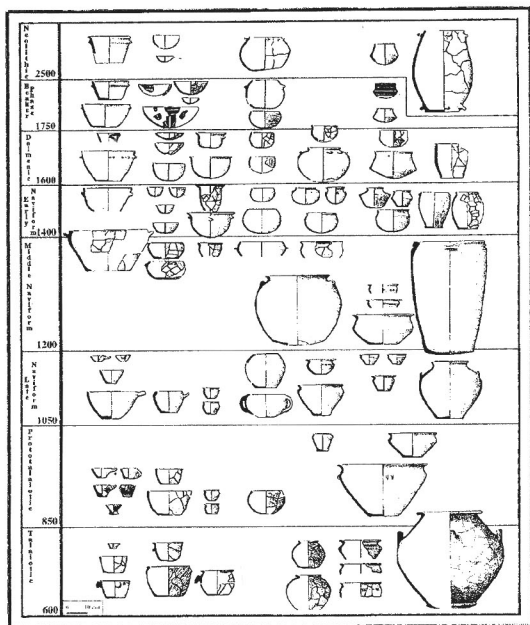


FIGURE 1 .DEVELOPMENT OF THE PREHISTORIC POTTERY IN THE BALEARIC ISLANDS THE NEOLITHIC UNTIL THE TALAIIOTIC PHASE.

from particular situations, such as the development of Menorca under British occupation in the eighteenth century AD, islands in the western Mediterranean developed an economy based more on agriculture and husbandry, than on their role as trading ports. The archaeological record shows that this situation has not always been this way. During the 3rd-1st centuries BC, at a time when the whole of the western Mediterranean was involved in the Punic-Roman conflict, Sardinia and the Balearic islands became key

5th to early 7th centuries, when these islands formed part of the Vandal kingdom and the Byzantine Empire, their societies participated intensely in the influences and products coming from North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean.

This suggests that geographic isolation or long distance communications are not the consequence of an insular position, nor do such situations seem to depend exclusively on the development of seafaring technology or the distance to the nearest mainland. The social space of an island does not

finish where its land ends, but integrates the surrounding sea as well. The perception of this space and the attitude of island societies towards the outside does not seem to be fixed but changes through time, due to different economic,

in Mallorca and Menorca (Waldren 1986) it is now possible to propose three moments of increased interaction between the late third and the early first millennia BC.

The first of these phases occurred during the Early Beaker

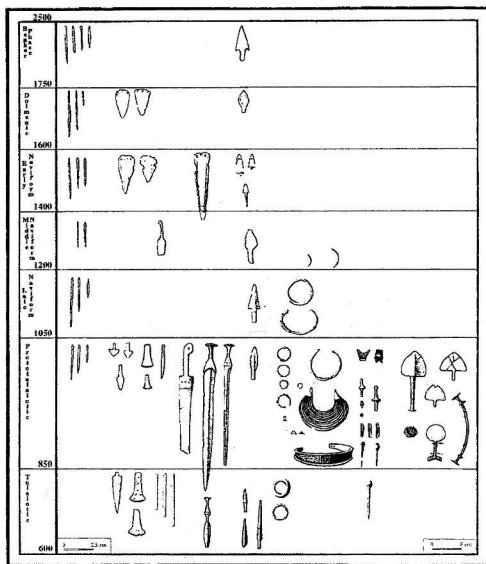


FIGURE 2. DEVELOPMENT OF METAL PRODUCTION IN THE BALEARIC ISLANDS THE BEAKER PHASE UNTIL THE TALAIOTIC PHASE.

social or political factors. Thus, an island situation can be perceived as isolated, networked, or both, depending on different aspects of the social organisation. Rather than insisting on the geographical constraints of islands and using purely Cartesian criteria for their spatial definition (e.g. Cherry 1981), it is the behaviour of "social insularity" which needs further discussion, if we want to understand the diversity of the islands trajectories and at the same time explain their overseas connections.

The recent archaeological discoveries from Cova des Carrix and Cova des Mussol on Menorca show that such changes in "social insularity" also occurred on the Balearic Islands during prehistoric times. Together with the extensive dating programmes carried out so far at different sites

phase, which started around 2500 and lasted until 2000 cal BC. It represented a moment when Mallorca especially was taking part in a much wider phenomenon, which, apart from certain ceramic decorative styles, involved the introduction of new funerary rituals, copper metalworking and the development of a varied stone and bone industry (Waldren 1998). The continued production of many of these new instruments and ornaments during the next one thousand or, some cases, even seventeen hundred years, underlines the importance of this moment of trans-European contacts and movements for the future development of the islands.

During the Beaker phase we also find the first evidence of occupation of the lowlands of Mallorca and of the islands of Menorca, Ibiza and Formentera. Such a sudden demo-

graphic and technological change suggests the arrival of new population groups from one or several points of the arc

The archaeological record of the following centuries is rather sparse, but very little evidence exists for long distance

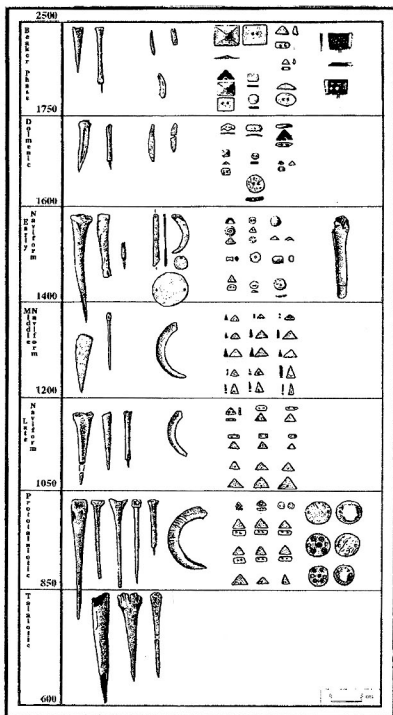


FIGURE 3.

DEVELOPMENT OF BONE PRODUCTION IN THE BALEARIC ISLANDS
THE BEAKER PHASE UNTIL THE TALAIOIC PHASE.

of immediate influence, as proposed by Waldren (1982). Moreover, it is important to note that these changes occur during a phase of intense social mobility and communication throughout large parts of Europe and the Mediterranean during the second half of the third millennium cal BC.

contacts. The use of small rectangular megalithic chambers as funerary structures in Menorca and northeastern Mallorca could be understood as an indicator of the arrival of some new populations, but these megaliths represent an anachronistic type of construction around 1750-1550 cal

BC on the continent, where they only continue appearing in marginal regions such as the Pyrenees. In general the Balearic Islands do not seem to have participated in the social and economic developments of the so-called European Early Bronze Age.

This situation changes around 1600 cal BC when

roduction of tin-bronze and metal casting with moulds), and the presence of exotic materials (e.g. ivory) confirms the reactivation of long distance networks. Nevertheless, previous settlement and funerary forms continue to be used at an initial moment (Early Naviform), indicating that probably local, as well as new population groups arriving from

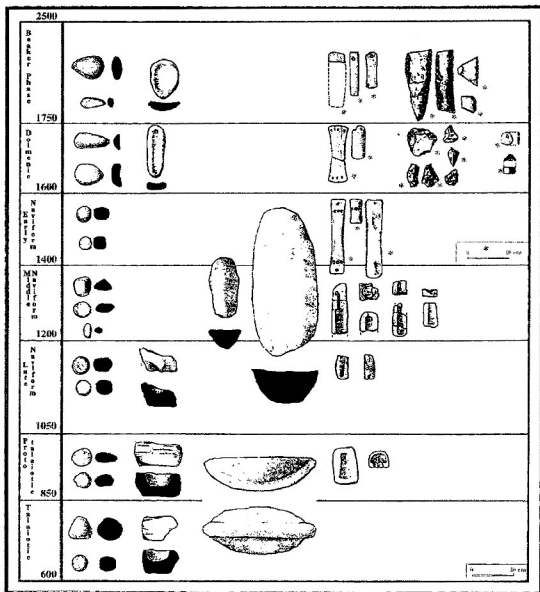


FIGURE 4. DEVELOPMENT OF STONE PRODUCTION IN THE BALEARIC ISLANDS THE BEAKER PHASE UNTIL THE TALAIIOTIC PHASE.

new types of settlement and funerary structures appear in great numbers on the Balearics. A distinctive feature is the use of cyclopean construction techniques, as can be seen in the 14-18m long and 3-4m wide naviform (boat-shaped) buildings. These constructions become the characteristic habitation site of the period between 1600 and 1050 cal BC (TABLE 1). Also certain technological changes take place during this period, especially in the realm of metallurgy (in-

outside were living side by side. The lack of weapons and fortified settlements implies that this coexistence was generally peaceful.

In this context the use of the Cova des Carritx and the Cova des Mussol as ritual spaces starts around 1600 cal BC. In both caves a series of human, faunal and artefactual remains have been found related to the worshipping of an anonymous and underground entity of feminine character

(Lull et al. 1999). Unfortunately the fact that such types of archaeological contexts are unknown in the western Mediterranean, hinders the possibility of establishing if these ritual practices were introduced by the new naviform communities or

this process combined old as well as new elements and produced a particular social organisation, which continued to develop with little interference from the outside over the next few centuries.

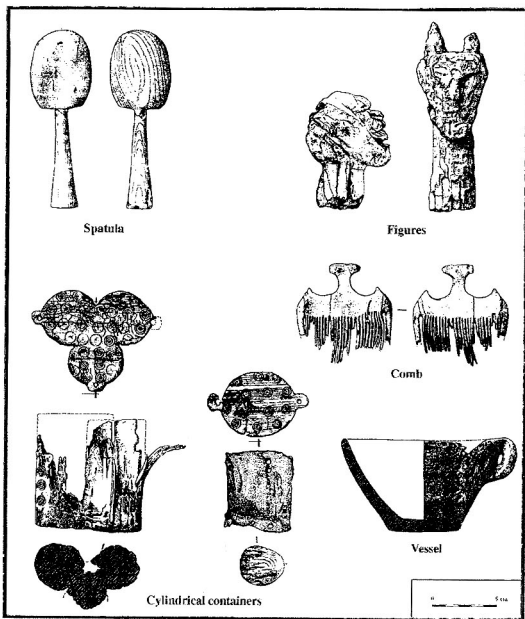


FIGURE 5.

WOODEN, HORN AND BONE ARTEFACTS
THE COVA DES CÀRRITX AND COVA DES MUSSOL (CIUTADELLA, MENORCA).

formed part of earlier belief systems.

In any case, the patterns observed in the archaeological record of the sixteenth/fifteenth centuries cal BC show that, at this moment, the Balearic islands again became involved in wide ranging social and economic transformations which have been recognised in different parts of the Mediterranean and Central Europe. Yet, contrary to the situation during the Beaker phase,

It is not until the end of the second millennium cal BC that we find again signs of enhanced contacts with other parts of the western Mediterranean. After 1200 cal BC changes in the naviform settlements become evident through the appearance of larger population centres and more complex architectural structures. The different spheres of production seem to initiate a gradual process of intensification (metal-

lurgy, bone industry), or a technological shift (pottery). Yet, the most important split occurs at the ideological level and was caused by extra-insular influences, as has been made evident by the recent discoveries of the Cova des Mussol. In one of its most inaccessible rooms a series of wooden carvings were found, two of which represent a zooanthropomorphic and an anthropomorphic figure. The first was placed in a dominant position in the rather small sanctuary

part of the western Mediterranean.

The existence and intensity of these contacts, specially during the Prototalaiotic period (1050-850 cal BC), has been confirmed by a series of grave goods and ritual objects found in the Cova des Carritx and Cova des Mussol. Metal and faience artifacts, as well as a complex technology used in the production of small cylindrical containers made out of wood or horn, have their direct parallels in the Circum-

| | |
|--|-------------------|
| Occasional arrivals and Neolithic occupation | c. 5000-2500 |
| Early Beaker Phase | c. 2500-2000 |
| Late Beaker Phase | c. 2000-1750 |
| Dolmenic | c. 1750-1600 |
| Early Naviform | c. 1600-1450/1400 |
| Middle Naviform | c. 1450/1400-1200 |
| Late Naviform | c. 1200-1050 |
| Prototalaiotic | c. 1050-850 |
| Talaiotic | c. 850-600/500 |
| Posttalaiotic | c. 600/500-123 |

Table 1. Chronological scheme of the Prehistory of the Balearic islands

TABLE 1.

and showed a very schematic carving with an impressive expression. On its head two horns appear, whose anatomical features correspond to antlers of a young deer, an animal that did not exist on the Balearic Islands. The detailed analysis of the complete archaeological context of the cave allows us to propose that here we are in a ritual space, where a small number of individuals participated in some kind of initiation practices, and where a supranatural creature, half human, half animal was worshipped (Lull et al. 1999). Such a ritual suggests a clear symbolic and ideological break on the islands. Surprisingly, the combination of human and deer features has its closest parallels in the Celtic symbolism of central Europe during the Iron Age (e.g. in the rock art of Val Camonica in northern Italy), which suggests the establishment of close contacts with the northern

pine regions. Previous studies of the Late Bronze Age Balearic metallurgy have also pointed in this direction as the possible origin of certain types of weapons and ornaments (Delibes y Fenández-Miranda 1988). Yet, the two caves also provide evidence of contacts with northern Africa (ivory), southwest Spain (possibly copper ores) and, perhaps, Sardinia (bronze "mirrors"). Small iron objects of still unknown origin are also present in contexts before 1000 cal BC.

This evidence suggests that Minorca and Mallorca played an important role at the end of the second and the beginning of the first millennia cal BC in an extended network of social relations established between central Europe and the western Mediterranean. These contacts included the circulation of goods, technology and ideologies at a time when the

Balearic populations were especially open to external influences. The absence of any eastern Mediterranean products on the islands implies that the protagonists of these communication networks were some of the local populations of the west, and not Cypro-Phoenician traders, as has often been claimed (e.g. Sherratt and Sherratt 1993). Rather, it seems to have been the existence of a developed exchange system during the eleventh and tenth centuries cal BC that first attracted the mercantile interests of the eastern polities and then furthered the establishment of colonies in the west from the ninth century cal BC onwards.

This phase of early control of the trade routes by eastern sailors and merchants coincides with the classic Talaiotic period (c. 850-600/500 cal BC) on Mallorca and Menorca, and the foundation of a Phoenician trading post on Ibiza. Surprisingly, during this period, which is characterised on Mallorca by a significant demographic increase, nucleated settlement structures and large tower-like buildings (talaïots), the intense relations established specially with the north-eastern shores of the western Mediterranean broke down. The construction of talaïots on Mallorca and Menorca, together with the appearance of nuraghi on Sardinia and torres on Corsica, has been understood as an simultaneous socio-economic phenomenon of the western Mediterranean (Lethwait 1985). Yet, a growing number of C14 dates confirms that these cyclopean towers appear comparatively late on the Balearics, when similar constructions go through their final phase of development in the eastern islands. The Talaiotic population seems to have adopted this architecture in order to isolate itself from extra-insular contact. Apart from some sporadic findings in the sixth century, it is not until the fifth century that we again find evidence indicating some interaction with overseas, in this case with the Punic colony of Ibiza. This new phase of increasing circulation and contacts characterises the Post-Talaiotic period until the Roman conquest of the islands in 123 BC.

A discussion of the relations between the Balearic Islands and other Mediterranean regions in Prehistory shows that "insularity" was most of all a social construction. Internal as well as external factors seem to have played an important role in the behaviour or reaction of the local populations towards overseas. It can be noticed that while the major episodes of interaction and/or migration at European and Mediterranean scale, such as the Beaker phase (26th-22nd centuries), the transition from the Early to the Middle Bronze Age (17th/16th century) or the Final Bronze Age (12th-9th centuries), also affected Mallorca and Menorca, the response of the indigenous population and the consequences of this contact with other social organisations was different in each case. In some periods of extensive trading and seafaring, like early Phoenician and Greek colonisation, the Balearic societies even developed an isolationist attitude towards a deal which probably was conceived as disadvantageous to their own interests. This shows that the isolation of an island, at least in the Mediterranean, is not necessarily determined by its geographical particularities. The perception of the islands' landscapes changed over time, and differences must have existed between the perception of the local populations and that of the visitors. Prob-

ably it was more for these that the islands appeared as limited and isolated spaces, while the islanders were aware that their origins lay on the mainland and that the sea had been crossed before.

The archaeological record and the chronometric framework of the prehistory of the Balearic islands allows us to analyse more closely the factors implied in the construction of "social insularity". Three forms of interaction between the islands and the continent or other islands of the western Mediterranean can be distinguished. The first is the arrival or immigration of populations, which occupied the island in the beginning (Neolithic) and produced significant demographic increases in certain moments: early Beaker, early Naviform, early Roman and early Andalusian (Omeyan) periods. These immigration waves would explain the sudden development of very dense settlement patterns and are confirmed in later times by historical records. Their duration and intensity remains unknown, but they always triggered off a long lasting phase of social and economic development. New types of architectural structures, burial rites and technical devices were introduced each time, most of which remained in use for many centuries, suggesting a common origin and a considerable number of new settlers. Probably the islands were also reached more or less constantly by smaller groups, but their impact on the existing communities, as well as their visibility in the archaeological record would be limited.

Equally important are population movements in the opposite direction, i.e. emigration away from the islands. Yet, no significant decrease in the number of archaeological sites can be identified during prehistoric times. An open question in Balearic archaeology is the development of Ibiza and Formentera from the end of the II millennium until the Phoenician control of these islands in the 7th century, which apparently prevented the formation of a Talaiotic society on these islands. Emigration coupled with depopulation, at least of certain parts of the islands, rather seems to be an historical phenomena and can be detected for the first time during the Roman Empire when most settlements of the central plain of Mallorca are abandoned. After rapid post-Roman recovery, the 'Muluk' period, when the islands practically gained back their independence from continental powers, sees again a strong demographic decrease, although, to a certain extent, this pattern can be the result of a lack of diagnostic archaeological materials for the 8th/9th centuries. In any case, the fertility and plentiful resources of the islands suggests that such depopulation phases were only possible through a forced military expulsion of the local agropastoral communities.

Communication of information and values represents a second form of interaction between societies and its material expression is the introduction and reproduction of technologies, styles and symbols. While all immigration phases supposed the introduction of a new technological and symbolic universe, the opposite does not hold true (table 2). At certain times, as at the transition from Naviform to Talaiotic, in Posttalaiotic times and Late Roman times, the communities of Mallorca and Menorca were open to technological innovations and new belief systems coming from

outside. These must have been periods when a well developed communication network in the western Mediterranean coincided with important internal changes in the local socio-economic structures. Archaeological and historical information supports such a view for the last centuries of the first millennium BC and the Vandal/Byzantine period, but we only start to grasp a very different form of organisation of the western Mediterranean 1000 years earlier.

Another way in which societies can interact is through the exchange of material goods. Unquestionable evidence for the introduction of foreign materials is always coupled to phases of enhanced communication, but not necessarily with significant immigration processes. Thus, communication with the islands' prehistoric societies seemed to depend more on their necessity or desire to acquire non local products, than on the arrival of new communities. We know very little about the organisation of the material exchange systems, if it resembled a gift giving network or if already a notion of commodities with established exchange values existed. Yet, an interesting observation is that only raw materials (ivory, copper, tin, iron and lead) were imported, but practically no finished products and specially no objects with a high exchange value and a low use value (so called 'prestige items'). Balearic metal and bone objects, as well as pottery and stone artefacts, might resemble certain continental prototypes, but follow their own stylistic and/or technical pattern (FIGURE 1-4). Until the 4th/3rd century BC, prehistoric communities show little interest in acquiring exotic objects, but rather attempted to obtain the necessary raw materials to maintain their local workshops. The absence of precious metals, such as silver or gold, and of imported symbols of power, agrees well with the idea of classless societies, with little political centralisation and economic asymmetry, which is based on the archaeological record previous to the Postalaitic period.

The lack of control over production and consumption by a state like organisation and the absence of a violent occupation of the Balearic islands during prehistoric times also seems to explain why many of products and technologies, once they had been introduced, continued being used for centuries and even much longer than on the continent where they originated. V-perforated buttons, flat axes, sharpening plaques (so called 'archers wristguards') or calcite tempered and hand made pottery are some of these long lasting productions which continued independently of the different moments of social interaction.

Another difficult question is what sort of products the islanders were giving in exchange for the received raw materials. As has been suggested for Sardinia, agricultural products, such as cattle and grain, could easily be produced beyond the local needs, but at least during the Protolaitic period a well developed craft production could also provide important exchange values.

So far we have proposed a tentative model of the forms of interaction developed by the Balearic communities and how 'geographical insularity' was socially modified and understood in very different ways over several millennia. In the future, new discoveries and the systematic analysis of the extremely large collections of prehistoric artefacts recov-

ered during more than hundred years of 'archaeological' activities should help to improve this general scheme and to explain the social and economic situations that made Balearic societies more or less inclined to overcome or to enhance certain geographical limits. Moreover, it will be interesting to see if these phases of communication/isolation can also be observed on neighbouring islands.

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