

Review: From Myotragus to Metellus. A journey through the pre- and early-history of Mallorca and Minorca.

The Balearic Islands, Mallorca and Minorca, are for a lot of people synonymous with holidays, the beach and the sea. Behind the beaches, unknown to the classical tourists, is a rich archaeological prehistoric heritage to discover. Both islands contain well preserved archaeological monuments, build in stone, which are visited by the readers in this book. The symbol par excellence is the talayot, a tower like stone structure, which is still very present in the landscape today.

Although this is a kind of publication that you expect to be written by an archaeologist, the author is the director of the radiocarbon laboratory in Brussels. Since 1986 he has worked together with the different archaeological groups which are excavating on both islands. He presents the ongoing archaeological ideas and hypotheses. Without going too deep in some discussions about certain scientific theories he realizes a synthesis about the present-day knowledge of the archaeology of Mallorca and Minorca. Although the prehistoric archaeological cultures seem quite identical on both islands the author points through his journey on the small, but sometimes significant, differences in the cultural evolution between Mallorca and Minorca

This book focuses on the arrival of the first humans until the beginning of the Roman period on the Balearic Islands, when the prehistoric cultural tradition will be absorbed in the Romanized lifestyle after the 1st century AD. We are first introduced to the geographical genesis and the different landscapes on Mallorca and Minorca. Symbolic for the own identity of the Balearic Islands is the presence of a specific animal species, the *Myotragus balearicus* which is endemic to the islands and seems to disappear in the period when the first human colonists arrive.

The human occupation of both islands starts quite late compared with other Mediterranean islands. The first indications go back to the second half of the 3rd millennium. The colonisation of Mallorca follows a different pattern than on Menorca and starts earlier. On Mallorca the human activity is very clearly visible with the presence of the regional variant of the Bell Beaker Culture. Human occupation on Minorca is attested for the first time through the construction of megalithic tombs and dolmens at the end of the 3rd millennium.

The Middle and Late Bronze Ages are characterized by the presence of boat-shaped constructions which can be used as dwellings, but also as funerary places. It is interesting to note that there is a lot of funerary diversity to treat the dead on both islands. During the Late Bronze Age the roots of the so-called talayotic culture start to develop. The Early Iron Age represents the heydays of the talayots. These towers can be round or square. They form the central point of the village, but are also located on prominent positions in the landscape. The archaeological record indicates that different functions are possible for these monuments. During the talayotic period both Mallorca and Minorca are isolated from outside cultural influence. From 600 BC onwards changes are visible on the Balearic Islands. The talayots lose their function and are abandoned. Influences from outside the island are visible in the archaeological record, especially through the economic contact with Punic traders from Ibiza. The enclosure of the settlements point at social instability. In this period Balearic mercenaries are becoming famous in the Mediterranean world as slingers. Both islands attracts the attention of Greek and Roman writers. In chapter 11 the author tries to integrate the information from the classical authors in the present archaeological knowledge. A certain degree of source criticism would have been advisably because classical writers tend to use generalities to present the so-called barbarian peoples at the fringe of the Greco-Roman world. The book ends with the occupation of both islands by the Romans in 123 BC and the slow integration of the local post-talayotic culture in a Romanized Mediterranean world.

The book contains not only a chronological overview of the prehistory of both islands but also 5 separate sections which high lightens a few extraordinary archaeological sites and their long term

history. Some of these sites as the caves of Carritx and Mussol offer an unique insight in mortuary rituals.

The book is richly illustrated with drawings and photos. Most of the photos has been taken by the author himself. The main purpose of this publication is to introduce the layman into the prehistory of Mallorca and Minorca. Due to its detailed archaeological information it is also useful as an handbook for students in archaeology, who wish to learn more of the archaeology on both islands.

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