

Sa Nitja, *The Roman Portuary City of Sanisera (Menorca)*, **Revista de Arqueologia**, September, 1996, nº 185, pp. 36-43.

The archaeological site of Sanisera, which belongs to the farm of Santa Teresa is located on the north coast of the island of Menorca at the natural port of Sanitja, beside Cap de Cavallería, in the municipal borough of Es Mercadal. It is currently under archaeological intervention, with the purpose of documenting the Roman city's origin and its development.

The historical references found referring to the Roman city of Sanisera are scarce and are mainly limited to the description Pliny the Elder makes of the Balearic Islands in the middle of the I century AD in his work *Naturalis Historia*, III 77-78: "*Las Baleares belicosas por la honda, llamáronlas los griegos "Gymnesiai."* *La Mayores de una longitud de 100.000 pasos y un contorno de 475.000 pasos; tiene las siguientes poblaciones: de ciudadanos romanos, Palma y Polentia; de ciudadanía latina, Cuio y Tucis y fue ciudad federada Bóccoro. De esta isla dista 30.000 pasos la Menor, de una longitud de 40.000 pasos y un contorno de 150.000 pasos; tiene las poblaciones de Iamo, Sanisera y Mago*<sup>12</sup>.

#### LEGENDS

Thanks to authors like F. Camps y Mercadal legends from Menorca have survived. It is in his book *Folklore menorquín del campesinado* that the only legend about Sanitja appears: "La leyenda de Ses Vilotes": "*A sa part ponent des port de Sa Nitja, hi ha mostres - sa principal és el cementiri o carnatge - d'haver-hi existiti una població. Es nom des rodol en fa esment: es diu Ses Vilotes. I diuen que en dies de bonança, an es fons de la mar, dins es port, se veuen cases. Conten que sa població se deia Janissari; que a Janissari, en es punt dit s'Almadrava, hi havia una esglesieta, de sa que prevé sa imatge de la Verge del Carme, sa patrona de s'Oratori públic des proper casal de pàges de Santa Tresa sa imatge sembla verament molt antiga. Junt a Ses Vilotes està es Canal de Sa Cadena, dit així perquè un Bisbe, lligat a una cadena, hi fou arrossegat, fins que morí. Sería un mártir? Persones compatívoles donaren sepultura an es cos des Bisbe en es Mitjà de ses Abelles, que està damunt una esquena que domina es Canal de Sa Cadena. Sabent-se acó per tradició, un día, llaurant dins es Canal, amb sa rella se va descolgar una cadena llarguíssima, la que, en cert modo, vingué a confirmar sa veu pública, a sa històrica cadena, que tothom diu que ha existit, no es sap de ningú que l' hagi vista*<sup>13</sup>.

#### HISTORIOGRAPHY

Since the XVIII century various local scholars have described the qualities of the port of Sanitja, identifying it with the name of Sanisera. Also, between 1979 and 1984, a series of excavations took place dating the site to the Balearic's period of conquest (123 -121 B.C.) and lasting until the VI century A.D.

## STUDY OF A COLLECTION

In order to take over the archaeological work from where it had been left off and with nearly a decade of inactivity at the site, J. de Nicolás made available to us some of the material that had come from the port of Sanitja.

In studying this collection we attained a good idea of the ample chronology that the published research indicated. Furthermore, it allowed us to recognise the types of finds that would be present at this site and enable us to compare them with anything we would find in future prospectings.

A close analysis of this collection showed that the oldest piece, be it fine ceramic or amphorae, was a Punic amphora, a Maña C1/2, giving us an antequem of 350 to 250 BC. This dating seems to be reinforced by other existing pieces of Maña C and Punic Ebussitan pieces which even though are not as old, share many similarities and also by a fragment of Campanian A and Iberian artefacts in the form of painted pottery or amphorae. At the end of this chronological framework we find numerous pieces of Clares D pottery from the VII Century A.D. of which the most recent is a Hayes 105. This dating is reinforced by the amphora of which the most recent one is a Keay LXI dating from 450 to 700 A.D.

As far as fine ceramic is concerned, more than half the finds ( 53.3%) are of African origin: Terra Sigillata Clara A and D and African pots for cooking while amphorae of African origin consist of only 21.4% of the total.

## TERRESTRIAL PROSPECTING

After studying this private collection we initiated the first systematic prospecting work which we defined as such because of the high level of contact we would be having with the surface of the site. We had to take into account that this was the first time we were analysing what this land had to offer.

Because the site covers a considerable area, we decided to divide it up into plots so as to be able to work more efficiently. We drew up a plan showing all these plots and numbered them in correlation. This way the archaeological material we selected at the surface of the terrain would be identified according to these areas.

To study the ancient material lying on the surface, we decided to collect the most significant fragments, choosing especially individual pieces (rims and bases) and all the others which, because of their decoration, varnish or type of clay they were made of, could give us the most information possible. We decided against collecting all the fragments lying on the surface because some areas had such large quantities we would have been unable to keep within our time frame.

The chronological analysis of the ceramics demonstrate that the oldest materials, just as they were in the above mentioned collection, are the Punic amphorae, precisely the Maña C or the Punic Ebussitan (PE 14, PE 17). From the late Republican era we see a large quantity of Dressel 1 which represents 4% of everything found on the site (21% of all the amphorae).

As in the majority of Balearic sites, there is a progression in the presence of patterned clay products. First we see a slight presence of Italic material (2% of the total of the site), then it rises with the South Gallic material (3.5%) and then there is an impressive increase from material of African origin (6.3% of Clara A and 18.5% of Clara D). This progression is due not only to the increase in trade but also to the fact that the production techniques of fine ceramics were becoming more industrial.

In the case of the TS Clara A, the most frequent types are those we also find at other sites with the same characteristics as Sanisera (natural port of call; strategic point on a shipping route etc.) as we would find with the Hayes 3, 6, 9 or 14. But it is evident that the variant of TS Clara D is the most numerous. We collected a total of 48 different types of which the most important are: The Hayes 91, 94, 99 and 104.

The most abundant African material is not fine ceramics but cooking pots which account for 21.6% of the total site. The reasons for this great presence are as follows: the longevity of the production, the fragility of the pieces and the existing relations with North Africa. The most representative variants we found are: Hayes 23, 185, 196 and 197.

The material of North African origin represents 57.5% of the site's total a fact which, confirmed by the study of the collection, corroborates the theory that there was direct commerce between the Balearic Islands and the North of Africa. This theory is not just because we have found large quantities of fine ceramics and amphorae but because of the geographical location of the islands in relation to the continent of Africa.

The second kind of material we found an abundance of was common, oxidised ceramic which represents a 20% of the total. However, we can say very little about this material because as it lacks its own typography and there has been no petrologic testing carried out on it, we are unable to determine its origin. It could be local or imported.

As far as relations with the Iberian peninsula were concerned, these were not particularly important until "happy" wine was imported. This era also coincided with the new Imperial agricultural policy that endorsed provincial farming to the detriment of Italic farms around the year 1 A.D. We found a considerable amount of Tarragona amphorae; around 2.9% of the total material found, yet very little material was found dating prior to the year 1 A.C.

We must also mention the presence of artefacts from Southern Spain which is logical if we bear in mind the important role that this province played in the commercial policy of the Empire. Material collected, including amphorae for preserving fish, Dressel 7/11 and Dressel 20, accounted for 1.2% of the total.

Another interesting point to emphasize concerning goods coming from Hispania is the virtual lack of patterned ceramics: we have only come across four fragments. The reason for this is that this product is mostly found inland and on the coast is replaced by patterned ceramics of African origin.

## TOPOGRAPHY AND PLANIMETRY

During the months of February and March, 1994, we undertook the topographical and planimetric survey of the site at the port of Sanitja. Following the inspection of the surface carried out during the non-systematic exploration, we decided to carry out the topography of the area because the structures which are numerous on the surface might give the first clues to how the town was planned.

## UNDERWATER PROSPECTING

During the 1<sup>st</sup> through 14<sup>th</sup> of September 1994, an underwater archaeological exploration campaign at the port of Sanitja was carried out by M. Pujol.

We carried out a superficial exploration limiting ourselves to a visual inspection of the bed of the cove and the reef and to collecting visible samples and to the topographical location.

At different points where we observed the isolated presence of a group of amphorae, anchors or any other archaeological remains, we have identified them as the anchor sites of Sanitja interpreting "anchor" to mean the large area between the Isla de Porros, the west side of Cap de Cavallería, the entrance to the port of Sanitja and the small island to the west of it.

Inside the port, silt and the huge meadows of seaweed have covered over the archaeological remains that undoubtedly lie below.

In order to collect data which were homogeneous with the exploration carried out at the land site, significant material was gathered for classification and accounting for before being returned to their place of origin. Several pieces and samples were extracted as well as a patterned inkwell from South Gaul in the shape of Hermet 18.

Concurrently, a plan was drawn showing the accumulation of iron anchors found in Cavalleria. Of the six anchors found in this sector, four seem to be from the Roman era, apparently from the high Empire and two corresponding to the Modern class, a type used from the Middle Ages to the present day although from their appearance they certainly do not seem particularly contemporary.

All of the anchors are very large and probably belonged to equally large vessels.

## THE TOPONIM

J. S. Hernandez, after his place name study of Sanisera, has established that the etymological origin is uncertain. No similar form within either Mediterranean or pre-Roman name has been found. From its morphological composition it is probably a long way off being of Latin origin.

The place name Sanisera could be made up of two elements: "SANI + SERA". It has been considered these elements are foreign to the Latin language and that one

should seek a native or pre-Roman origin for the place name. If "Sani" makes up an element of the toponym, despite its lack of clarity, we think it could be considered because the element *sani-* appears in several epigraphs<sup>4</sup> in Iberian.

In the case of *-sera*, research has been much more difficult and has revealed little. Far from being considered an essential element in the Latin language, we have been unable to find any analogical evidence in pre-Roman languages. We have only found a hypothetical explanation: in Indo-European there exists a root *\*ser-/\*sor* which means "flow, run" referring to fast, heavy<sup>5</sup> flowing water.

For this interpretation, we did not want to ignore the geographical implication of the Sanisera settlement (a natural port in the North Central part of the island) since the meaning of the Indo-European root could have influenced the second half of our name: a geographical occurrence by the sea.

#### NOTES

1. The non-profit organization Sa Nitja Gestion del Patrimoni Mediterráneo is developing a project for the research of the Roman portuary city of Sanisera, situated on the northern coast of Menorca. The planning of the activities to take place will be the standpoint for the creation of an Ecomuseum in Cavalleria in order to find ways of spreading the knowledge of what has been discovered there. The members of the Association involved in archaeological activities are: F. Contreras, J. Esteban, J. S. Hernández, H. Kirchner, M. Pujol & M. Segura.
2. Translation by Schulten, A., "Maluquer de Montes, J.: Hispania Antigua según P. Mela, Plinio el Viejo y C. Ptolomeo", pp. 126.
3. F. Camps i Mercadal: "Folklore Menorquí de la pagesia", pp. 68.
4. s.a.n.i. (Siles 1288) Tivissa. Pátera. s.a.n.e.r. (Siles 1372): El Solaig. Plomo. *sani* [ ----] (Velaza 457) Pech Maho. Plomo. *sanibar* (Velaza 458) Pech Maho. Plomo. *sanibeira* (Velaza 459): Orley. Plomo.*sanikeai* (Velaza 460): Orley. Plomo.*sanibelser* (CIL I 709).
5. Pokorny, J. Pokorny, J. *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Bern, p.909-910.

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