

TO COMMUNICATE THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE
MEDITERRANEAN ISLANDS: THE CASE OF MENORCA AND
SARDINIA IN PREHISTORY

*Comunicar las relaciones entre las islas del mediterraneo: el caso de Menorca
y Cerdeña en la Prehistoria*

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ABSTRACT

In the last 50 years, archaeologists who studied the prehistory of Sardinia have shown great interest in other islands of the western Mediterranean. This interest has grown out of the need to expand our knowledge about the archaeology of typical island environments. In the early 1990s the project "Cap de Forma (Menorca): The Navigation in the Western Mediterranean from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age" was initiated, sponsored by the Universities of Cagliari (G. Tore, C. Del Vais) and Sassari (G. Tanda, A. Depalmas) and the Museu de Menorca (Ll. Plantalamor Massanet). The goal was to make a detailed comparison of some peculiar aspects of pre- and protohistorical periods in Sardinia and Menorca.

One aim of the project is to acquire the means to verify whether insularity really stopped the cultural development of island communities (as often claimed) or whether, instead, it contributed significantly to the construction of specific cultures of extraordinary value and importance, some of which showed signs of advanced social and economic development, as seems to have been the case with the Nuragic civilization in Sardinia and the Talayotic culture in the Balearic Islands. Therefore, the specific objective of this research is to analyse whether there were relationships and cultural influences between the islands of Menorca and Sardinia during the Bronze and Iron Age.

The investigation focused on the coastal fortification and the hypogeal necropolis of Cap de Forma (Mahon, Menorca). The idea was to identify potential similarities and differences with archaeological sites in Nuragic Sardinia. Cap de Forma is an archaeological complex of particular importance. It is coastal and fortified, as are

few other sites on the island. Moreover, its strategic position, which overlooks and provides vistas of all the south coast of Menorca, is of particular relevance to the study of navigation and routes to and from the islands.

Recently, research excavations at the site were completed and in the project for accommodation of the area aiming to visits, it seems important to think about the message we want to give to the visitor. The information that we would like to communicate to the public are not only technical ones, related to the excavated structures, but also about the type of research in international cooperation that has allowed the discoveries and about suggestions that a fortified site as Cap de Forma, gives us on the study of ancient navigation and contacts between Mediterranean peoples.

Key words: Transmarine Contacts, Prehistory, Minorca, Sardinia, Monuments, Archaeological Materials, Cooperative Research

RESUMEN

En los últimos 50 años los arqueólogos que estudian la prehistoria de Cerdeña se interesaron mucho a las otras islas del Mediterráneo occidental. El interés nació de la necesidad de acrecer el conocimiento sobre el arqueología de los ambientes típicos de las islas. En los primeros años noventa se empezó el proyecto “Cap de Forma (Menorca): la navegación en el Mediterráneo occidental entre la Edad del Bronce y la Edad del Hierro”, financiado por las universidades de Cagliari (G. Tore, C. Del Vais) y Sassari (G. Tanda, A. Depalmas) y por el Museo de Menorca (Ll. Plantalamor Massanet), con el fin de comparar algunos aspectos peculiares de la prehistoria y protohistoria de Cerdeña y Menorca.

Uno de los objetivos del proyecto es adquirir los medios para verificar si la insularidad limitó el desarrollo cultural de las comunidades de las islas (como muchos creen) o si, al contrario, ayudó de manera importante a la creación de culturas específicas de valor extraordinario, algunas con un desarrollo social y económico muy avanzado, como la civilización nurágica en Cerdeña y la cultura talayótica en las Islas Baleares. Por lo tanto el objetivo específico de esta investigación es analizar si existieron relaciones e influencias culturales entre las islas de Menorca y Cerdeña durante la Edad del Bronce y la Edad del Hierro.

El estudio se centró sobre la fortificación costera y la necrópolis hipogea de Cap de Forma (Menorca), con la idea de identificar semejanzas y diferencias con otros yacimientos nurágicos de Cerdeña. Cap de Forma es un complejo arqueológico muy importante, costero y fortificado como otros pocos en la misma isla. Además su posición estratégica, que controla el Sur de la isla de Menorca es de particular interés para el estudio de la navegación y de las rutas desde y hacia las islas.

En los últimos tiempos se acabaron las excavaciones en el yacimiento y parece

importante, en el proyecto de acomodación del área para las visitas, pensar al mensaje que se quiere dar a los visitantes. La información que se pretende dar al público no es simplemente de carácter técnico, relacionada a las estructuras que se excavaron, sino que también sobre la cooperación internacional en la investigación y sobre los indicios y la información que aporta un yacimiento fortificado como Cap de Forma al estudio de la navegación antigua y de los contactos entre los pueblos del Mediterráneo.

Palabras clave: *contactos transmarinos, prehistoria, protohistoria, Menorca, Cerdeña, monumentos, cooperación, investigación*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the last 50 years, archaeologists who study the prehistory of Sardinia have shown great interest in the other islands of the western Mediterranean. This interest has grown out of the need to identify, and expand our knowledge of the archaeology of typical island environments. In the early 1990s, the project *Cap de Forma (Menorca): The Navigation in the Western Mediterranean from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age* was initiated, sponsored by the University of Cagliari (Tore G., C. Del Vais) and Sassari (G. Tanda, A. Depalmas) and the Museu de Menorca (Ll. Plantalamor Massanet). The goal was to make a detailed comparison of some peculiar aspects of pre- and protohistorical periods in Sardinia and Menorca.

One aim of the project is to acquire the means to verify whether insularity really stopped the cultural development of island communities (as is often claimed) or whether, instead, it contributed significantly to the construction of specific cultures of extraordinary value and importance, some of which showed signs of advanced social and economic development, as seems to have been the case with the Nuragic civilization in Sardinia and the Talayotic culture in the Balearic Islands.

Therefore, the specific objective of this research is to analyse whether there were relationships and cultural influences between the islands of Menorca and Sardinia during the Bronze Age and Iron Age.

The investigation focused on the coastal fortification and the hypogeal necropolis of Cap de Forma (Mahon, Menorca). The idea was to identify potential similarities and differences with archaeological sites in Nuragic Sardinia.

Cap de Forma is an archaeological complex of particular importance. It is coastal and fortified, as are few other sites on the island. Moreover, its strategic position, which overlooks and provides vistas of all the south coast of Menorca, is of particular relevance to the study of navigation and routes to and from the islands (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Aerial view of the main monument and of the excavation area by Gustavo Taboada-Aeroview.

The research initially had the aim of investigating in depth the cyclopean monument, in order to determine the period of construction and the culture to which it belonged and, subsequently, to understand the organization of space and the use in the area close to the main monument.

2. HISTORY OF THE RESEARCH

The site of Cap de Forma is frequently mentioned in the cartography of the 18th and 19th centuries, particularly the tower of Es Canutells. As well as the numerous references to the site in different lists of monuments (e.g. J. Mascaró Pasarius 1968), the structure of Cap de Forma has also been the specific subject of articles on prehistoric coastal settlements. Indeed, at the Second International Congress of Phoenician and Punic Studies in Rome, Lluís Plantalamor presented a paper on coastal settlements on the island of Menorca, analysing them in their particular context and in relationship to other similar coastal settlements on Mallorca and Pitiuse (Plantalamor Massanet 1991).

The research on Cap de Forma started in 1991 and are focused on cleaning the monument and making a photographic and graphic survey of the wall that separates the coastal cape from the interior. The first excavations took place in 1997 (Plantalamor Massanet et al. 1999). These excavations were of the outside area (in the north) and the inside area (in the south) of the cyclopean structure, as well as *Cuevas* 3 and 22. They included a survey of the surrounding area.

The second fieldwork campaign (1998) took place without the participation of Giovanni Tore, who, unfortunately, died in November 1997. The work continued the earlier excavations: excavation of the inner area and extension of the survey of the plan of the cyclopean structure and continuing the excavation of *cueva 3*. The excavation of *cueva 3* was completed in 2001, and work on the cyclopean monument was continued through enlargement of the area of excavation.

Since 2002, I have led archaeological teams that have focused on the cyclopean monument and continued the excavation of the area to the south of it. The last archaeological fieldwork took place in June 2013. In December 2014 was realised a restoration intervention.

3. THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL COMPLEX

Cap de Forma, also known as Es Caparrot de Forma or Es Castellàs de Forma, is located on the southeast coast of Menorca, near the village of Sant Climent, and just inside the administrative boundaries of Mahon.

It is sited on a rocky promontory of steep cliffs overlooking the sea. The bay of Canutells is a short distance to the west, and the bays of Binidalí and Biniparratx are nearby to the east (600640-4411330 UTM). It was inventoried as No. 8375 and declared a National Monument (now Cultural Heritage B.I.C.) by Decree 2563/1966 of 10 September. It is, therefore, protected by the state.

The archaeological site of Cap de Forma, as already said, is on a coastal cape, and consists of a main cyclopean monument, which closes off an isthmus, a necropolis of rock cut tombs (*cuevas*) dug out the cliff overlooking the sea and a second, very degraded, more central area.

The promontory rises above the sea, with cliffs of more than 30 m in height. It is covered with small juniper and mastic bushes, which conceal the barely visible dry stone structures. On the isthmus, the large elongated rectangular cyclopean construction protects the entrance from the interior. It is not a Talayot, at least not in the common sense of the term, as the building is different from the known types of this class of monument.

For those arriving from the interior (i.e. from the north), the monument appears as a massive steep scarp wall (4 m maximum height). At ~33 m in length, it is long enough to block any possibility of access to the promontory. The external wall is roughly built. It consists of local limestone slabs, mainly placed horizontally but with some vertical ones juxtaposed among them.

Once one passes this wall, through an opening near the edge of the cliff, one can access the south of the structure. Here the slow collapse of the monument and its use as a modern military lookout post have combined to give the walls an untidy appearance. It consists of massive parallel walls arranged roughly in large steps, alternating with piles of small stones.

At the beginning of the research work, the remarkable consistency of the massive wall led us to believe that there might be interior spaces even though, at present, no entry has been found that would give access to the interior of the structure.

3.1. Findings of the Investigation

The research on the excavation of the archaeological complex of Cap de Forma (coastal fortification and nearby necropolis) aims to highlight the architectural structure of the cyclopean monument, to clarify the topography of the area, and to define the function and the chronology of the two areas (funerary and civil).

3.2. Tombs

Research focusing on the surrounding hypogean necropolis was carried out to verify the hypotheses that have been made on the phases of use of the tombs, the funerary rituals, the grave offerings and the anthropological characteristics of the population buried in the tombs.

The necropolis consists of 24 tombs. On the sides of the cliff, to the west of the cyclopean monument, two rock-cut tombs (*cuevas*), 3 and 22, were excavated between 1997 and 2000. The most ancient traces of the use of hypogea 3 and 22 seem to date back at least to the Talayotic III (VIII-IV BC) or even IV (IV-II BC) period (Plantalamor Massanet et al. 1999, pp.48-94).

3.3. Cyclopean Monument and village

In this part of the archaeological complex, the program of stratigraphic investigation goes beyond the identification of not currently visible structures to include the recovery of additional cultural material. These are essential if we are to date the monument more accurately. The upper part of the cyclopean monument and the area immediately to the south of it were excavated. The excavation of the monument was basically designed to verify the construction technique, to clarify the floor plan, and to see if there were any interior rooms.

After cleaning and inspecting the masonry of the monument, it was concluded that the cyclopean structure originally included an earlier wall, which was erected to block off all access to the cape across the natural isthmus. This ran from north-west to south-east.

Afterwards, reinforcement walls were built against it, both in front of (to the north) and behind (to the south) the more ancient original wall. However, the rear wall, unlike the front one, was built using a system of parallel walls filled with small stones.

The significant deposit removed, partly from the top of the cyclopean structure and partly from its front, was a conoid of soil that largely consisted of stones that had fallen from the upper parts of the structure. Only from stratigraphic level 6/39 did levels appear that were recognizable as belonging to spaces used for domestic

purposes. Indeed, the excavation discovered some segments of walls that were parallel and orthogonal to the external surface wall of the main structure, which were interpreted as living spaces that leaned against the monument.

These rooms were created by building walls that leaned against the monument (the western and central areas) or leaned directly into it (eastern space). Thus, we uncovered the following:

- To the west, an elongated rectangular space with a well preserved structured fireplace. However it is in part covered by a fortified house built in the 18th century AD, this is identifiable as a longed house with curved wall in the front. It was brought to light during the latest field work in 2013 and has been completed the last year (2014) (Figure 2);
- A difficult to define quadrangular central space on its southern side;
- In the easternmost part, a presumably open space with a fireplace close to the monument in front of a large rainwater tank.



Figure 2. The inner front of the main monument seen from the south; featured it can see the fireplace of the western long room.

The entire perimeter of the rectangular central dwelling (about 6 x 4 m), was brought to light. This had rectilinear double-wall surfaces, with a hearth in the northern bottom wall that leaned against the wall of the cyclopean structure. The traces of the southern wall, which was probably destroyed by the troops stationed in the adjacent fortified manor house in the 18th century AD, were also detected in this space.

It is therefore possible to state that the dwelling on the eastern side was not closed in by the wall, but formed part of the adjacent open space (eastern sector). In this space, between the two living areas (central and eastern spaces), a large cylindrical hollow carved into the limestone was found in a depression filled with small stones (Figure 3).

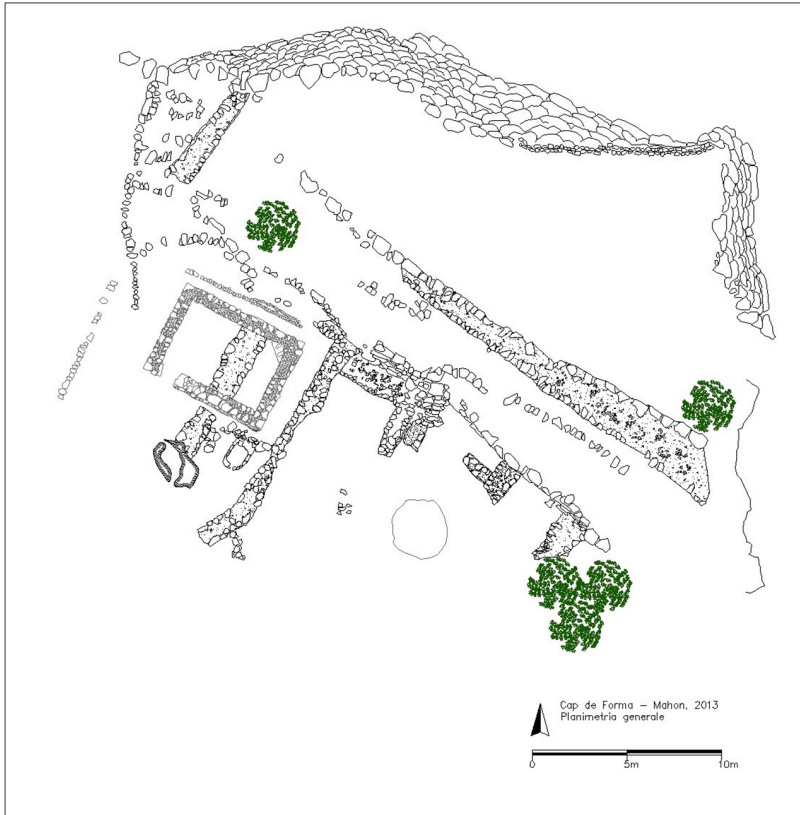


Figure 3. Plan of the area of monument in cyclopean technique drawn by Amilcare Gallo.

This may well have been a cistern for collecting rainwater for the resident community. In the eastern sector, the highest levels consisted of an area of rather loose extremely powdery light grey soil; this was rich in charcoal and ash.

This open space is, indeed, characterized by a large burning zone, partly concentrated in a small space between the wall of the cyclopean structure and a short wall parallel to it (Depalmas 2014).

The fireplace consists of several layers of ash mixed with coal, pottery shards, and animal bones, mainly of cattle, sheep, and goats.

These levels correspond to the phase when the living places in the southern area of the cyclopean monument were built and inhabited. Some ceramic materials were found among the bones and charcoal.

They include jars with conical handles and large containers with triangular inward-facing thickened rims, sometimes decorated with comb impressions, and also miniature cups and truncated conical bowls with triangular handles and comb-stamped decoration.

4. TOWARDS THE SHARING OF THE RESEARCH SPIRIT AND RESULTS

The Cap de Forma project has come to a final phase but valorisation and musealisation of the archaeological complex, communication with visitors and spread of research results still remain to be managed.

It's expected to go beyond the usual enhancement and preservation measures of the site, enhancing communication and interaction with visitors.

The most important element that characterized more than 20 years of researches on Cap de Forma is the international cooperation between Sardinian and Balearic researchers, that made possible a compared study on architecture and materials, useful to find similarities and differences with nuragic Sardinia.

The aim of the project was to study the relationship between Sardinia and Balearic islands during Bronze and Iron age, and the mutual influences related to the sea routes that linked the two areas.

The choice of the site, a fortified coast cape situated in a strategic position for the control of sea traffics in the southern part of Menorca, is related to navigation and traffics during prehistory and protohistory.

The first and most direct level of communication with visitors has to be based on information on site, using informative panels positioned in strategic points of the site in accordance with the Consell Insular, in addition to the already existing ones.

One of them will be about description of the structures found during the last years excavation, with general and detail plans, information and photos of the finds and chronological data about the archaeological complex.

Another one will be dedicated to the history of research in the area, with particular attention to the International project involving the site from the '90s with excavation fields managed by both Italian and Spanish research groups and about their results. International cooperation research projects, with Sardinian, Spanish and Balearic researchers, were very important in order to study the relationship between the islands.

Different research approaches, academic education, training and specific experience lead to build an integrated research methodology that produced new knowledge. The most important reference will be to analogies between the two islands (Menorca and Sardinia) about material culture and architecture, that allow to conjecture moments of contacts and convergence during prehistory.

In that times Sardinia was an important base and reference for navigation in the western part of the Mediterranean sea, because of its strategic position. It was a perfect stop along the most important routes crossing Mediterranean sea, useful for water and food supplying, but also in case of adverse weather conditions.

These concepts will be explained to the public also using informative paper and digital sources. Clearly legible brochure in different language will be offered to visitors. There will be also found photos and links to the project web site, where will be possible to have more information and special insights.

It's also going to be used the QR code system, that gives fast and easy access to web links and digital material using a common smartphone. This code system, now very used also in cultural heritage management, combines the attractive of technology and the fast access to information.

Activities aimed to spread the research results and to show the history of investigation at Cap the Forma will take place both in Menorca and Sardinia (e.g. seminars, meetings), in order to enhance the bond created by archaeological research cooperation and to make better understand the theme of relationship between the two islands, even through direct contact and comparison between scholars.

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