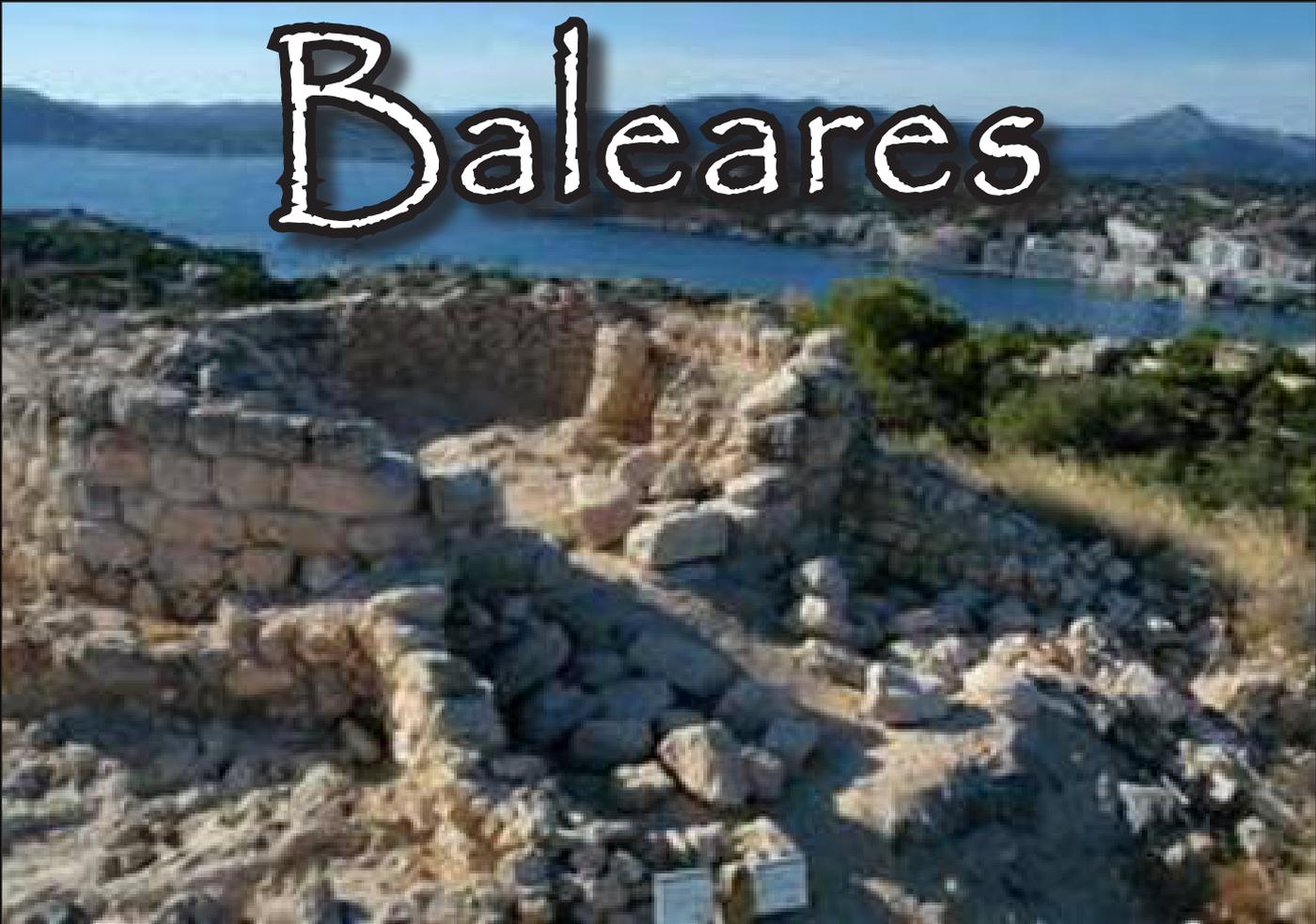
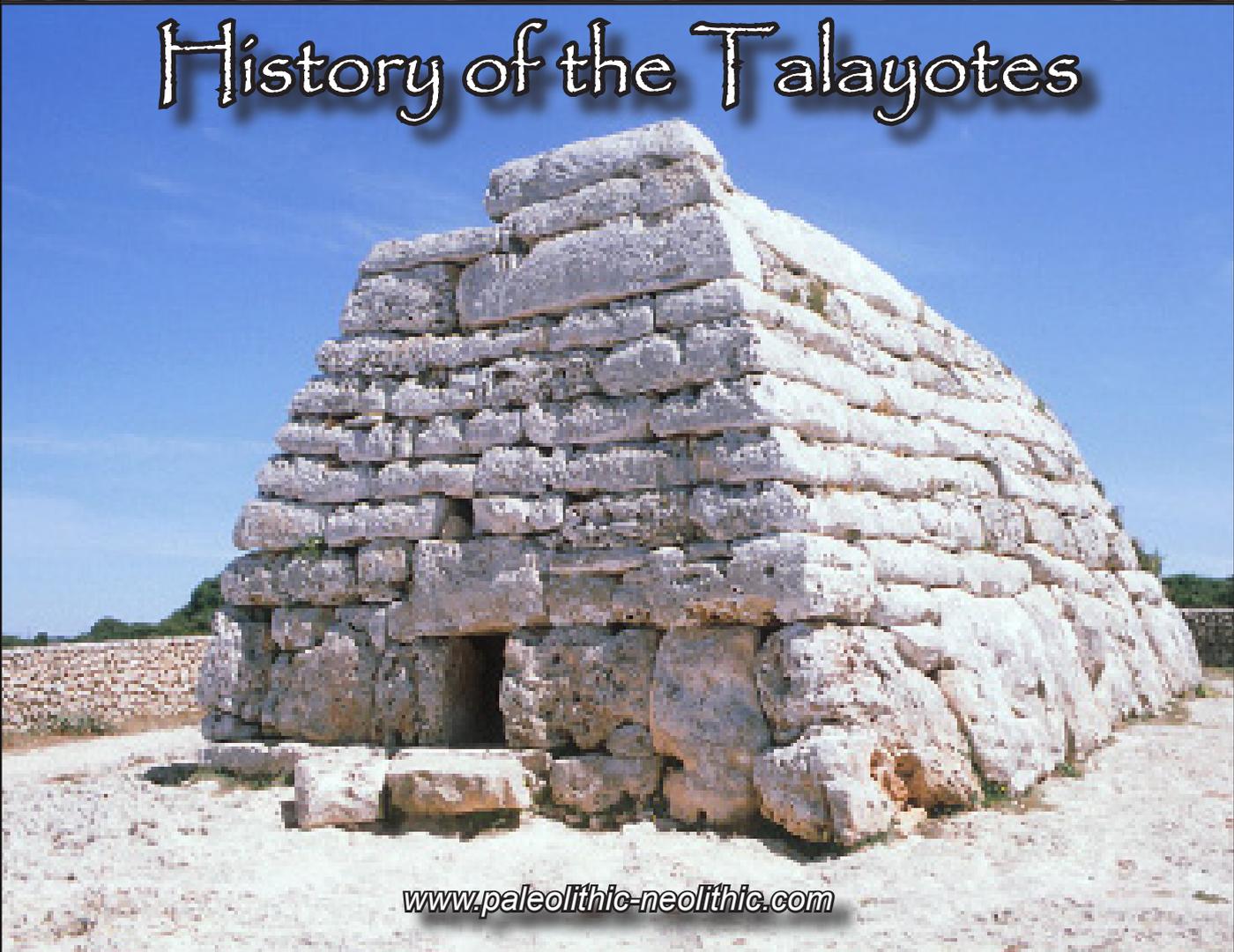


Baleares



History of the Talayotes





The Balears are another group of islands in the Mediterranean with an interesting neolithic history. If you compare them with other islands in the western Mediterranean like Corsica, Sardinia, Sicily or Malta it is surprising that the first human settlement here took part over a thousand years later. Possible reason being that the immigration wave was initiated by seafarers coming from the eastern Mediterranean area.

Settlement Start in Mallorca

The Balears consist of Mallorca, Menorca, Ibiza and Formentera plus a few rather small islands which were not fit for sustainable settlement this early in history. Let's start with the largest island Mallorca which was occupied by settlers only 8,000 years ago. This is rather late and therefore the Copper Stone Age and Bronze Age began here much later than elsewhere. First settlers survived as farmers and breeders living in natural caves in the beginning. Based on the ceramic ware they produced it is clear they belonged to the so-called Bell Beaker Culture.

Mallorca Caves

About thirty natural caves used by early settlers were discovered so far. Good examples are the caves Cova de l'Azinaret near Cala Sant Vicenc. Excavators found various tombs here as well. Other impor-

tant caves from this first period of neolithic settlement are Vernissa near Santa Margarita, Sa Canova near Ariany, Cas Hereu near Llucmajor, Trispolet near Artà, Es Rosells near Felanitx and Cometa des Morts near Lluch.

Collective Tomb Caves

As space became a problem at the beginning of the Copper Stone Age, settlers began to dig caves into the rocks. But these caves were only destined for funeral purposes and never used as living quarters. Good examples are the five caves of Cova Calenta, Coll de sa Batalla, Confessionari dels Mors, El Bous and Son Torella.

Grave Gifts

The list of burial gifts is long and comprises of decorated and undecorated pottery items, stone axes, arrow heads, long cutting tools, the latter two produced from local silex, sea shells with drilled holes used for jewelry purposes, buttons in various forms produced from bones and bronze daggers with a special triangular form and wide handle.

Astonishing Megalithic Culture

Only 4,000 years ago the number of inhabitants grew and land was divided and fortified settlements with watch towers called Talayot were erected. These were similar

to the Nuraghen villages in Sardinia. The first of these new megalithic structures were built 3,500 years ago and were the standard settlement architecture for the next 1,000 years.

Impressive Talayot Settlements

Capocorb Vell near Llucmajor is the largest settlement of this kind and was used until roman times. As second most important experts regard Ses Paises near Arta. This village was protected by a five meter thick wall. From 123 before Christ Romans step by step conquered the whole island. One of the first Roman towns was Poi-lentia near Alcudia. The construction of an amphitheater was always part of any Roman town.

Massive Talayot Construction

The walls were erected as dry walls without mortar. The houses were already two or three floors high and its walls slightly inclined inwards for stability. Some buildings were square others erected in a round tower like shape. Experts believe that about five hundred inhabitants lived in Capocorb Vell.

Mallorca Dolmen Culture

On the island funeral structures like dolmen and tumuli were erected. Unfortunately, only seven examples survived. The others possibly were flattened for farming purposes or used as building material. Two dolmen are situated in the

area of Alcudia like Son Baulo near Can Picafort and Aigua Dolca near Colonia de Sant Pere. Son Baulo has an oval form and measures ten by sixteen meters. In its center archaeologists uncovered a chist grave. At the Aigua Dolca site thirty four burials could be proven. Both sites are about 4,000 years old. In addition, many rock tombs were being used for funerary purposes on Mallorca and Menorca.

Menorca's Amazing Navetas

On this smaller island a unique funeral structure was found. These so-called naveta burial houses only were erected here about 3,300 years ago for a period of 500 years. Its name describes their special form looking like the hull of a ship lying upside down. This reminds us of the gi-





ant tomb structures on Sardinia. There are about twenty good examples in different states of preservation. Some have been restored.

Naveta Details

Most of these collective tombs are situated in the communities of Ciutadella and Alaior. Communal tombs are typical during the Bronze Age period. Their form can be round, oval or rectangular. These structures could measure fifteen meters in length, ten meters in width and six meters in height. Their internal chambers for clan burials could be as large as fifteen square meters.

Famous Navetas

The navetas Rafal Rubi and Biniac are situated close to Alaior. Es Tudons is close to Ciutadella and housed over hundred burials. Experts established that navetas were used primarily for secondary burial as bone houses. Some navetas were erected with two levels which suggests that the lower level was used for first burials and later the bones were moved to the upper level.

Naveta Burial Gifts

Excavations indicate that burial rituals with fire and sacrifices were held in the ante chambers. It seems that these communal tombs were robbed because few funeral gifts were found. The list of left over items includes bronze bracelets, pearls possibly from a necklace, bronze daggers and various pottery items.

Early Medical Operations?

Of special interest to archaeologists is a female skull with various drilled holes. Which medical treatment was performed here is not known but leads to many assumptions. Unfortunately, many navetas were cleared of their prehistoric content in modern times and used by herders as stables for their animals. Therefore, important archaeological research and conclusions became impossible.

Menorca Caves

Only 4,000 years ago settlers invaded this island. In comparison neighboring Mallorca was occupied much earlier around 8,000





years ago. And its settlers originated from the same Bell Beaker Culture. And they as well first resided in natural caves which were fewer as on Mallorca. When space became a problem, new caves were hewn into the soft rock surfaces.

Many Ritual Sites

Two good examples of man made caves are Es Carritx and Es Mussol. These caves were also used as ritual sites. Discovered fire places where well smelling branches like rosemary were burnt are proof of ritual practices. The unearthed animal bones used for sacrifices are another good example of early religious actions. At Es Carritx experts could establish over two hundred burials were placed here. DNA analysis showed that the average life expectancy was around forty five years. Grave gifts indicate that in neolithic times men and women had an equal standing in their communities and clans.

Neolithic Funeral Developments

During the Copper Stone Age same as on Mallorca natural caves were used for burials. Later during the Early Bronze Age man made rock chambers were used. The first chambers were round. But later long artificial caves were hammered out of the rock with benches on both sides. This could suggest ritual meals being held here, like in some sites in the Middle East at the same time.

Three Phases

Archaeologists could establish three development phases with regards to use of caves for funeral purposes. Firstly, they were used for burial rituals and bone placements. In a second phase only the entrance area was used for burials. Finally, the caves were regarded as holy sites and used for sacrifices to gods and ancestors.

Important Finds

The discovered items are diverse and include several carved wooden artefacts



such as two wooden heads. Over time the found objects show more and more female attributes. Later around 3,200 years ago the religious beliefs must have changed because mixed features appear of animals and man typical for shaman rituals.

Intriguing Red Hair Ritual

Of special interest is a piece of horn attached with red colored hair. As similar artefacts were found at different places experts assume a ritual existed whereby the hair of deceased were colored red-dish.

Formentera Island

Similar to Menorca this island was inhabited permanently only 4,000 years ago. To live on a smaller island natural water resources and fertile ground was needed. Unfortunately, there are only few traces of our neolithic ancestors found here. Around twenty megalithic structures were discovered in the area of Cap de Barbaria. Important for archaeologists is the cave of Cova des Fum near Sa Cala. The name can be translated as smoke cave. This cave falls into the Copper Stone Age period. Of further interest is the dolmen type collective tomb Ca na Costa near Es Pujols.

Later Structures & Finds

In this article we limit our research on neolithic sites and findings until the Bronze Age inclusive its megalithic buildings and tomb structures. We disregard the Punic and Roman sites, of which many exist on the Balears. Often it is difficult for the untrained eye to distinguish them from neolithic ruins.

Summery

Of the two eastern islands Mallorca and Menorca sufficient information about its neolithic history exist. With regards to Ibiza and Formentera unfortunately very little is known despite the fact that they were inhabited at the time. But each island was and still is a unique island with



its different history and developments at the time and even until today. We can assume that many neolithic buildings have been flattened for farming purposes and its stones were used as building material for new structures. We hope to have raised the interest of visitors to spend a day away from the beach to explore some of these mystic places on their next holiday.

Picture Credits

We thank all institutions, museums and photographers for making available some of their pictures.

