

Fernando Contreras Rodrigo, *Sanisera, A Roman City in Menorca: Its origins*, La Mirada del Pasado, Edicions de Turisme Cultural, 1998, pp. 303-305.

MENORCA, 123 B.C.

The majority of the island's indigenous population lived in villages. These villages were enclosed by defensive walls within which, every function of a hierarchical society was clearly reflected. The areas reserved for religion were Taulas. Talayots where structures built for the control and defence of the surrounding territories. The villager's lived in houses with circular plans. Other buildings, such as storage areas for the provisions and for the safekeeping of livestock were called Hypostyle Halls. In this way we could summarize the character of this society which, in time, evolved due to the constant relations with other geographical areas on the Mediterranean coast from where came a flow of different races, products and spices originating from the East, Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica, the North of Africa, Carthage and ,especially, Ibiza.

A section of this Talayotic society which kept direct contact with the outside and its different lifestyles, traditions, laws and religion was, without doubt, the military force which was represented by the figure of the slingers.

In peace time, the slingers would not only protect their own but they also became part of the civilian society, working the land and tending the livestock as shepherds. During the wars between Rome and Carthage, the slingers became mercenaries in the Carthaginian light infantry and were always in the front line of battle.

When the slingers served as mercenaries, they, like every other man who fought as auxiliaries for the Carthaginians, in exchange for their service and loyalty, were compensated with a stipulated pay and with part of the booty from battle that was distributed among the soldiers and consisted of weapons, horses and other goods.

The mercenary, except in certain cases, did not participate in the recruiting for the Carthaginian army because of need or to provide substance for his village, but instead, as a way of demonstrating his bravery, audacity and strength, giving him prestige and power over his community which resulted in his leadership. In his town he would become a hero and a role model, especially for the younger members, who, from an early age, were learning the skill of the sling with the hope of being recruited and fighting a war.

The Third Punic War (146 B.C.), the last war in which Rome and Carthage fought against each other, would have decisive results and consequences for the historical evolution of the Balearic Islands. The result of the war would mean the destruction of the Carthaginian Empire. From 146 B.C. to 123 B.C. two important occurrences happened. The first one was that, after the vacuum left by Carthage as a dominant force in the Mediterranean and the neglect of the Balearic Islands by the Romans, Ibiza was able to monopolize much of the maritime trade giving her a period of prosperity which Rome did not care for. Second, according to classical sources, the Mediterranean Sea, due to a lack of military control by Rome, became plagued with pirates who sailed the seas freely, settling on the coasts of the islands and seriously damaging the distribution of goods of Italic origin.

These pirates, whose place of origin is unknown, could have had amiable relations with the mercenaries from the islands' communities. However, it could have been

the latter who, due to military inactivity, became experienced in the practice of piracy.

Ibiza's splendour and piracy in the islands, therefore, could have been two factors in causing Rome to consider the Balearic Islands as an obstacle to the growth and development of the Empire.

Quintus Caecilius Metellus, 'the Balearic'

According to Strabo's classical text, when he describes the conquest of the Balearic Islands in the year 123 B.C., he mentions:

<<... Because of the land's fertility the inhabitants are peaceful, the same as those from Ebusus (Ibiza). However, when a few bad ones got together with the sea pirates, everyone got the bad reputation and Metellus the Balearicus conquered them and founded the cities there. It was due to this fertility that they were attacked, even if they were peaceful, and were famous for being the best slingers...They train in the use of the slings from childhood in such manner that the children were not given bread to eat until they were able to hit it with their slings. For this reason, on approaching the islands, he ordered animal hides to be extended over the decks (of the ships) to protect them from their sling shot. He took three thousand Romans from Iberia as colonizers...>>

Who was Quintus Caecilius Metellus 'the Balearicus'? And what reasons led him to conquer the Balearic Islands? Quintus Caecilius came from the noble Metella family which was renowned in Rome mainly because of his father's ('the Macedon') great military feats who, as his name already implies, conquered Macedonia. Quintus Caecilius must have been trained from a child in the ways of the military because one had to be a soldier to gain positions in Rome's Senate.

The Senate was the entity responsible for everything related to foreign affairs and control of the armies, also having the exclusive vote in the organizing of wars. The consul was the Commander in Chief of the army and it was he who would carry out the Senate's plans, informing them the troops and money that would be needed to carry out the assigned duty. In the year 123 B.C., the Senate decided to conquer the Balearic Islands. The consul at that time was Quintus Caecilius Metellus.

The reasons the Senate decided to order military action against the Balearic Islands were several:

1. The search of new lands for settlements

The Italian territory had been exploited agriculturally by small families that worked small plots of land. Adult men had to spend six years in the military service. Military service was beneficial to some families because the member who was recruited by the army would contribute to the family's economy with an alternative profession and a wage paid by the State. However, for most families, the recruiting of a male member who was the bread winner reduced them to bankruptcy and poverty as no one was left to work the land. As a result, the Italian countryside became a large estate governed by landowners and worked by slaves.

Consequently, both the population which had lost its livelihood due to recruitment of family members, and the recently veteraned soldiers who had neither land nor means to subsist, were forced to move to new territories that Rome assigned them. This is how Rome initiated the programme to create new cities and colonies with the style of the capital, in strategic areas with fertile lands for the development of

agriculture, establishing communication routes and consolidating the control of the territory by means of the armed forces. Two examples of these colonies founded by Metellus in Mallorca were Pollentia and Palma.

2. Piracy

Piracy put the maritime trade routes in such danger that vessels carrying shipments of wine, olive oil, fish sauce or wheat of Italic origin had minimum guarantees of reaching their destinations safely. Furthermore, the land route from Rome to Hispania, on its way through Gaul, was dangerous and unsafe, as relations between Rome and the tribes which inhabited those territories were not good.

Rome's priority was to protect these cherished routes which supplied goods. This was important because when Rome was intervening with her army in Hispania, every Roman garrison, camp, fort or colony in Hispanic territory depended on these routes for their regular supply of food and weapons.

3. Honor, Power, Glory and Triumph

'The Macedon' and 'The Cretan,' were nicknames given to both father and brother after their victories for the greatness of Rome. Quintus Caecilius was expected to gain a title or nickname of his own adding to the Metella family's pride and honor. War played a very important part in the formation of a Roman aristocrat whether he was adolescent or adult.

The rivalry among noble families, to stay within the elite class, could be seen in the centre of Rome which was full of war trophies, altars, arches and temples that were promised during battle, and built later with part of the booty obtained. These structures were triumphal arches and statues, temple columns covered in military standards, shields and insignia, as well as stone and coins with inscriptions commemorating the triumphs over the enemy, always represented as kneeling at the Roman General's feet, beaten and subdued.

4. Natural and human resources on the Balearic Islands

The fame of the Balearic slingers made them great assets as mercenaries in the Roman army. Also, the land on the islands was rich, both in the production of wheat and wine, and in its great surplus of cattle.

5. The Conquest: Garrisons and "Cannabae"

Springtime was the season of the year in which the military cycle began, in which the purification ceremonies for weapons, horses, trumpets etc. took place. Metellus parted for the Balearic Islands with his army, conquered the territory and fulfilled the mission that the Senate had entrusted him. Winter soon rolled in and the army had to be stationed. Metellus divided his army into garrisons and distributed them around the more strategic coastal areas of the Islands to defend themselves from foreign hostility and the recently subdued native peoples. In Menorca a minimum of three garrisons: one in *Mago* (Mahón), *Iamo* (Ciudadela) and *Sanisera* (Puerto de Sanitja). If there had been an attack by the enemy, the army would have united at once to crush the enemy and avoid the isolation and annihilation of the garrisons. A year later, Metellus returned to Rome to receive the honors of his triumph, becoming "The Balearicus."

The archaeological excavations in the port of Sanitja that have taken place in the last two years have uncovered part of one of Quintus Caecilius Metellus' garrison. The archaeological material recovered gives us a peek into the lifestyle of the camp. Through this material we can see how the slingers lived among the Italic soldiers, training in the tactics and discipline of Roman war that would be used on battlefields. We can also see the degree of specialization in their daily work: soldiers tending to the wounded after training sessions, the manufacture of military clothing, boot repair, the smelting of lead for making sling shot, weapon maintenance and building.

The provision of wine, oil, wheat, fish and other products for the camp was constant and was brought by sea. The boats had two possible routes. They could follow the route from Ostia, the port of Rome, to the island of Menorca. The first itinerary followed the Italian, the Gallic and the Iberian coasts: Ostia – Marseille – Ampurias - the Levantine coast – Ibiza – Mallorca – Menorca - the Boniface Straits - Ostia. The second route included the ports already mentioned, except that the Italian coast would not be passed. Instead, they would sail through the Boniface Straits as it seemed a shorter route. Once they had docked at a port, they would unload some of the cargo and load new ones so that the ship's hold would never be empty.

The establishment of a garrison meant not only the transfer and settlement of soldiers but also of traders, artisans, natives, sorcerers, fortune tellers, tavern workers and prostitutes... all of whom expected to make a living supplying the troops with whatever needs they had. This is how a *cannabae*, which was nothing more than a cluster of houses, buildings and baths, with no urban planning, was created around the camp, at the port itself. Romans with an unequal social status lived in these clusters where one could find war veterans who, after leaving the army, would settle close to their comrades in a familiar environment and make a living as civilians.

As time went by, these improvised buildings along with the people living in them developed to the point that they gave way to a new Roman city named Sanisera.