

Garrido, C.: *Sanitja, Es Mercadal. The Lost City of Sanisera, Arqueoguía de Cataluña y Baleares. Una guía práctica para visitar el pasado*. 1998. Editorial Planeta. Barcelona, España, pp. 445-447.

HOW TO GET THERE

The access to Sanitja does not offer many obstacles. We need to take the road leading to Fornells and then turn left, towards the beaches of Cavalleria and Binimel-la. This way we arrive at Camí la Tramuntana and follow it until we reach the crossroads that leads to Cavalleria.

The access to the Ecomuseum of Cavalleria, which includes the site of Sanitja, is located on the farm of Santa Teresa on the road towards the Cavalleria lighthouse.

WHAT TO SEE

The small inlet of Sanitja is one of the most beautiful areas on the northern coast of Menorca. This small inlet, which is open to the Tramuntana wind with the lighthouse at its back, resembles a lake on calm days, bathed in a silence that comes from being so far from civilization. It is also the headquarters of the Ecomuseum of Cavalleria, from where you can gain access to the excavation site.

The history of Sanitja has a great mythological factor. Pliny the Elder wrote in his *Natural History* (I century A.D.) that Menorca had the civitates of *Mago* (Mahón), *Iammo* (Ciutadella) and *Sanisera*. The fact that four centuries later, the Epistle of Bishop Severo only mentioned *Magona* and *Iamona* made historians ask themselves what happened to the third city in Menorca. The name <<*Sereyna*>> appears with Pere Martell's ancient maritime codex from 1228, and Jose de Vargas Ponce noted a reference about this enclave in 1785.

It was precisely this toponym discovered amongst the remains of architectural finds that made Joan Ramis y Ramis, the pioneer of Menorcan archaeology, believe that the name Sanitja belonged to *Sanisera*.

Various legends collected by Francesc Camps also mentioned a sunken city, named Ses Vilotes, whose deck appeared out of the water. He also collected the story of a bishop who was tortured and dragged off in chains, but offers no more details. The existence of some archaeological remains from the farm of Santa Teresa and the various remains on the surface imply that there was an ancient centre of population in the area.

At present, a great part of the site of Sanitja has been identified. At the furthest part of the inlet, towards the east, a Roman Fort can be found. This site has been excavated by Fernando Contreras since 1996. Its foundation coincided with the island's conquest by Quintus Caecilius Metellus in 123 B.C. A series of rectangular structures, defence walls and a ditch, rich in archaeological material, have appeared. The structures were built upon a stone base on which walls of adobe were erected and then covered with roof tiles. A number of sling projectiles were found in one area, some of which showing signs of having been used. These finds makes archaeologists suspect that there was a *training field* for indigenous slingers, recruited by the Roman occupiers.

The existence of this *castrum* was relatively short as it was abandoned 70 years after the first buildings were built. It was around this time that a city began to grow on the other side of the inlet. It was built by traders, local folk and retired army veterans who used a great deal of building material from the military fort. This city would become Sanisera, which Pliny makes reference to, and which could eventually have grown to occupy an area of 13 or 14 hectares with a maximum of population of around 3000 people.

Evidence suggest that Sanisera survived as a city until the Late Empire. In the III century it went through a period of decadence but it was able to overcome it due to its contacts with the North Africa during the IV and V centuries. Nevertheless, it was finally abandoned in the VI century. In the XIII century, the site saw a little activity when a Muslim house was built on it.

The Roman city benefited from the natural harbour which includes the territory from the Island of Porros to the rear of the port. Protected from the feared tramuntana winds, which in some areas can be very dangerous for navigation, the port would have served well, especially around the middle of the inlet, at the height of the watchtower which was built at the beginning of the XIX century.

This gave way to an important underwater deposit, which has only recently begun to be excavated. Many finds, such as anchors, amphorae and a Roman inkwell made of Terra Sigillata, used by the captain of the ship to record the cargo on board, have been located.

On the sides of the cliff, on the western side of the inlet, various buildings can be seen.

Two groups of buildings were excavated by Maria Cristina Rita and Jaume Murillo in the Eighties. The first group, known as Building E, is halfway up the cliff face by a stone *margin* in a North-South direction. It is a group consisting of small-stoned rectangular buildings. Various shards of domestic pottery, animal bones, many amphorae, two yards and very good quality building material (belonging to a more important building and reused at this premises), were found here. Another considerable find was what archaeologists named the industrial site (covered by sand today). This consists of a small squared pick that culminates at a small well which may have been a system for wine- pressing.

The ceramic found indicates that this building was used from Roman Imperial times well into the VI century when it was abandoned.

The next archaeological grouping is the one formed by the burial sites, located a few metres to the north, bordering with the stone wall that goes in the East-West direction. The excavations revealed 21 tombs in stone pits, of which four belong to children, and another one was formed by an ossuary of three adults and one child.

According to the excavators publishing, << the adults' tombs consisted of rectangular flagstones both at the sides and on top of the tomb, used as a lid. All were well constructed. On the inside of those that have been excavated, we found iron nails suggesting that there was also a wooden coffin inside. On top of the stone boxes, all of them present a lining of a thick layer of *opus signinum*. The ground had been excavated in order to place these tombs, and then others were placed on top of them. We do not know why this happened but it could be due to social status or different chronology etc. This lack of understanding is due to the lack of a trousseau accompanying the dead. They had possibly been buried with a shroud, as

there are no traces of buttons or fibula to tell us about their clothing, however, this is not uncommon in Late Empire necropolis. In this same sector, the remains of a possible Paleo-Christian Basilica can be seen.>>

The site is not in any way limited to these two areas. At this same level, a few walls and numerous isolated remains appear, crossed by stone walls and covered by shrubs. In one of the first outlets, a Muslim rural mosque from the XIII century can be seen. Built with Roman stones, it has a *mihrab* facing Mecca. For the time being, there is no archaeological recollection of any settlement earlier than the Romans, though the idea that some buildings yet to be excavated reveal the existence of a Talayotic or Pretalayotic settlement cannot be discarded.

The site of Sanitja adds a very attractive and natural landscape to a fascinating archaeological complex which is slowly revealing its secrets. This is why this place is one of the most exciting visits of monumental Menorca.