

Chiltern U3a Archaeology
Talayotic Menorca (Minorca)
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[001] Good Morning everyone.

Before I start sharing the screen, may I quickly check if any of you have been to Menorca or Minorca as some call it, and visited any of the archaeological sites there?

This talk is based on my visit to Menorca in Apr 2017. That is four years ago. Menorca is like an open-air museum.

[002] The word ' Talayot' means Watchtower or Observation Tower... usually located within a settlement rather than on its boundary wall. Sometimes, a room has been found at the top of the towers. There are about 300 in all in Menorca. They were situated in isolated places as well as in settlements. Some settlements had 3 or 4 Talayots. An alternative spelling you may find is Talaiot ... with an 'l' rather than a 'y'. There was probably a visual network of Talayots and they could communicate with each other quickly.

Talayotic construction is made with different sized stones placed dry, with no mortar.

Talayotic period covers 1200 BC to 550 BC ... that is a period about 2,500 to 3200 years ago.

After a short background to the history of the island, I aim to cover today's session in four parts.

The first two deal with the dead end of life – tombs and burial caves.

The first one, Naveta des Tudones, is one of the largest and longest tombs.

The second one, Caves in Cala Morel, is by the sea. It has 15 burial caves on a hill side.

The third and fourth sections deal with settlements – San Catlar and Torre de'n Galmes. The latter one is believed to be the biggest in Menorca.

We visited items 2 and 4 as a part of a group tour, and items 1 and 3 on our own.

As usual, I was trigger happy with my little camera and all the pictures of the sites you will see today were taken by me – apart from Google maps.

In terms of sources of information, in spite of my digging a great deal during this long covid19 lockdown period, I could find only limited explanations to correspond to all the pictures I took. I found one little book listing all the talayotic sites in Menorca with beautiful sketches of the sites with short notes.

Background:

[003] Menorca is a small island in this part of the Mediterranean. It is in a good strategic spot if you want to keep an eye on what is going on in the Mediterranean.

It is a very small island, roughly 30 miles long and 10 miles wide. Menorca means 'a little one' compared to the larger one, called 'Majorca'.

The island was protected by the natives who were experts in use of slings in warfare. They learnt their skills from younger days. Apparently, there were three lengths of slings, and they would select the right one depending on the distance from the target. The Carthagenians used the islanders as mercenaries when they were fighting the Romans.

The British ruled the island for much of the 18th century. Strategically, it is a very important place to keep an eye on what's going on in the Mediterranean.

It was returned to Spain in 1802.

Let us start with the first site - Navetas des Tudones.

1. Naveta des Tudones [BC 1000 – 800, as per info on display at the site]

[004] It is located here.

[005] Navetas are special tombs exclusive to Menorca. They may be circular or rectangular.

[006] This one is roughly rectangular, like an inverted boat, with two levels. It was discovered in the 19th century. It was the first naveta to be discovered. It was baptised by Joan Ramis I Ramis. He used the word 'naveta' meaning an upturned boat.

[007] This site was excavated in 1960 by a team led by Maria Lluís Serra and Lluís Pericot. The façade was intact but the upper level together with the apse were in ruins. There must have been a lot of looting. They managed to recover a fair amount of human remains and some artefacts which are now in the museum of Menorca. I need to try and visit the museum during my next visit.

[008] Its size:

External: 14.5 m long by 6.5 m wide and 4.55 m high. Originally it was probably 6 m high.

Made of limestone blocks. The walls were very thick, around 2 m.

Lower chamber: 7.45 m x 2.45 m

Upper chamber 7.10 m x 1.9 m x 0.85 m They had holes in them for ventilation.

Access to the upper level is via a chimney in the passageway, as you can see on this display board. This also shows some of the items that were found. The corpses were laid uncovered along with a few personal items. They have found some brass items, bronze bracelets, spiral hair adornments, spearheads, ceramic buttons, bi-conical beads and bells. The bells were supposed to keep the evil spirits away.

[009, 010] We could have a peep at it but not get in.

[011] The upper level was probably used for initial drying of the bodies. The lower chamber was used for storing the disarticulated bones after the flesh has been removed.

[012] The façade is slightly slanted.

[013] At least 100 people were buried here over time.

[014] We leave the site to move on to the second one ...

Cala Morell [Early Bronze Age 1800 BC to AD 200]

[15] It is a necropolis located by the sea. It is in Cala Morell. Cala means a cape.

[16] This is the entrance to the site. You need to go down the steps, and then climb up a little.

[17] It is about 40m above sea-level. There are stunning views from the caves here. If the dead were to come alive, they would have had wonderful views.

[18] There is a series of 15 caves of different sizes and shapes. Some are artificial caves cut into the cliff walls. I wonder if they were used as living accommodation prior to their use for the dead. Some caves have level floors, and some others have stepped floors.

The size of caves vary. For instance, one is 7.2 m long X 7.70 m wide x 2.3 m high. Another one 8.1 m X 8.3 m x 2.15 m high.

[19] This display shows the location of various caves. The earliest burials were in small caves (Nos 11 and 12), dating to 2nd millennium BC. The ritual included covering of the dead and their grave goods in quicklime.

The structure in some caves suggest that they probably worshipped the dead.

There are columns / pillars, and some of them have capitals.

Also, there are about 20 oval cavities ... such as shown by A. They were for remains of children or funeral urns. They were popularly known as 'capades de moro' (Cavities of the Moors) - a reference to the Arabs who ruled over them for a period.

These were some of the items found in various caves numbered. They look very artistic and beautiful. They are in the museum.

[20] We could wander around these caves and enter them.

[21] One cave has remnants of a relief at the entrance. This is a fairly large cave, 10 m long and 11.8 m wide.

[22, 23] We entered a few and this is one of them.

[24,25] This is a fairly large one with big pillars and simple capital.

[26] This is the view inside another cave.

[27] Entrance to another cave is via steps which were added in later years.

[28, 29] In this cave, the pillar has a nice stepped capital.

[30, 31] This is another cave..

[32] In this cave, there is some art work at the entrance.

[33, 34] It has a tapered capital.

[35, 36] There is a little stream trickling down and they could collect water from this.

[37, 38, 39] This cave has pillars.

[40} Additionally a circular opening at the top.

[41, 42] It may have been used as a cistern.

[43] Entrances to couple of more caves

[44] The the oval cavities on the right are for children's remains or urns.

[45] As I mentioned earlier, they are known as 'capades de moros'.

[46] One such rock has been used on the boundary wall of a site that we will see later on.

We can now leave the dead ends of this period and move on to see two of their settlements. Firstly, Son Catlar.

Son Catlar

[047] It is located here.

[048] This is the Google Map satellite view of San Catlar. The boundary wall is fairly clear and you can see some of the excavated areas. The boundary wall is about 900 m long. It is a cyclopean wall – i.e., they are built with fairly tight fitting limestone boulders with no mortar.

We hardly saw any one else on the site. We walked around the boundary and saw some highlights. Please note that the direction of North is in the 12’0 clock position which is normal in most maps.

[049] This map was on a display board there showing some of the key points. You will see that the direction of North in this particular map is in the 10’ O Clock position. Fortunately, they do indicate the North somewhere in the map.

You go past a rock cut tomb (No. 1) before entering the site. The settlement has only one entrance which is good for security. First, we walked all along the boundary wall, on the outside, as recommended. The original entrance is at No.5. There are remains of several towers (not Talayots) as part of the wall. One of the big stones on the boundary, at No.8, has ‘capades de Moro’ ... the little cavities for the dead as we saw in the previous section.

Inside the boundary there are remains of four talyots (watch towers) shown in bright yellow circles – near No. 13, 14, 16 and 19. We could easily spot two of them during our tour.

At No.15 there are remains of a house.

The religious sanctuary, called Taula, is at No.18. Taula means a table in Catalan.

We can have a look at what remains with the pictures.

[50, 51] The burial cave – a rock cut tomb.

[52] This large gap in the wall is for current access. [The original entrance is elsewhere as we will see later on].

[53] Beating the boundary as it were....

[54] Evidence of a Tower.

[55] Two more towers – opne on the far left and one far right.

[56] Much of the wall is missing in this section.

[57] Eastern Tower.

[58] Now we are close to the section of the wall with the original entrance, in the middle of the picture.

[59, 60] This is the entrance ,

[61, 62] We can also see what it looks like from the other side. There is a little zig zag pattern on the inside, perhaps to slow down any enemy onslaught. Not unusual in castles built in later years.

[63, 64] We continue the walk outside the walls.

[65] You can see the 'capades de Moro' in one of the rocks. They probably transported this from elsewhere.

[66] This was another unusual rock ... not sure as to what it is.

[67] Another, with some cavities. There was real mix of different sized rocks.

[68] We entered the site. View of remains of some structure.

[69] This map shows the position of the four Talyots – the Watchtowers.

[70] We saw evidence of only a couple of Talyots easily. This is the first one. Basically a pile of stones at the moment!

[71, 72] This is the second one. You can see some order in this structure.

[73, 74] These are the remains of a Talayotic House ... rather circular

[75] This trough is perhaps for animals for their drinking water

[76] We now come to the religious sanctuary – the Taula enclosure. Such enclosures are exclusive to Menorca.

Taula means a table in Catalan. The focal point is a T shaped structure. In the post-Talyotic period (550 BC to 123 BC), rituals were performed in which fire, wine and consumption or sacrificing of lambs or goats were common.

Unfortunately, the top piece of the T is broken and it is not on the site. The Taula here is supposed to be one of the largest known Taulas. Also, I understand that the enclosure is unique as it has two entry points. It was excavated in 1923 and unfortunately the findings have never been made public.

An interesting **theory about the Taulas** has been put forward by Fenn, with this illustration.

[77] If you looked at the entrance to the Taula in December, the full moon would be located at the left corner of the top piece. The following year, the moon would be 1.5 deg to the right. After nine years, it would be at the other end of it. This movement over nine years would create a sort of semi-circle over the top. During the next nine years, the position of the moon will be back on the left corner.

Also, I believe normally there are 12 large columns and one small column surrounding it. Fenn related that also to the moon as there are 12 or 13 full moons every year.

[78, 79] These are some other views of the Taula.

[80, 81] You can get an idea of the size of the rocks, with Josefina standing near them. In Scotland, I heard that the depth of rocks under the ground in their stone circles is nearly twice the depth above the ground.

We now move on to the fourth and final site ...

Torre de'n Galmes [from 1600 BC]

[82] It is located in this part of the island.

[83] It was occupied from 1600 BC. Its hey days were from 1300 BC until the Roman era. Estimated population was around 900. It was abandoned after the Roman era. The buildings were reoccupied by Muslim refugees from the reconquest of Spain by Christian Kingdoms.

[84] It is set on a hill and one can have a panoramic view over the south coast. It is believed to have had some supremacy over the other settlements in the island.

[85] This a Google 3D Map of the site. This settlement extended over six hectares – about 15 acres. It is the biggest in Menorca. It is considered to be highly monumental with high quality of construction.

It had three talyots, several talyotic houses – circular in shape, a taula enclosure, a water collection system or a processing unit and a dwelling known as 'Cartailhac House' on the bottom right. You can still see the stone roofing over one of the areas in this house. Such enclosures are known as 'Hypostyle Halls'.

[86] This slide shows the position of the three talyots. We will refer to them as A, B and C, You can see fairly clearly what is left of them from the aerial views on this display board. Lower picture is under normal view.

[87] You can see the first tower, Talayot A, in the distance here – on the top left hand side.

[88, 89] Some close up views of it.

[90, 91 and 92] Some views of Talayot B

[93] Views of the final Talayot C.

[94] Another view of Talayot C with a section of the boundary wall of the settlement.

[95, 96, 97] We are now by a house called 'Casa de Duca'. Fairly circular, Views from different angles. We were not allowed to wander into it.

[TG 16] This board shows some of the other highlights we will see – and their locations on the site.

No. 1 is the circular building with a roof. See details.

Numbers 2 and 3 are other dwellings.

[99, 100] We are looking at the roof of the circular building with pillars and beams across the roof. It was probably used as a store room and for livestock.

[101] You can see bits of the neighbouring house, No 2 on the left of it.

[102, 103, 104] Different parts of the room with covered roof. We were allowed to wander into some parts of it.

[105] Note that the columns are tapering, and narrow at the bottom.

[106, 107] More views of the house.

[108] Continuing on to the other parts of House No.1

[109] A well

[110, 111, 112] Exploring the house further

[113] An overall view, with a well in the top centre.

[114 and 115] Some more wells

[116] A display board showing a series of connected wells. The water may be for consumption or some processing. My guess is that it is the latter because of its location.

[117] You can see in the Google Map that it is further away from the accommodation areas. Most of the other parts seem to have a source of water close to their compound.

[118] We can see another house and I am calling it House No.2. We will just skirt around the boundary.

[119] The walls are in reasonable order. There are a couple of wells just outside the boundary wall of the house.

[120] There is a T-shaped structure in it. You can see a well just outside it. A ring has been added around it for safety purposes.

[121] A close-up of the T – structure.

[122] We now come to a sacred place - the Taula Sanctuary. Unlike the houses which are roughly round, this is rectangular. There is a big T-shaped structure. Some of the items found here are in the museum.

[123] It is situated on top of a little hill within the complex.

[124] A fairly grand entrance.

[125] The top horizontal part of the Taula is unfortunately on the ground. At least it is still on the site, unlike the previous one in Son Catlar. It is right in front of the vertical piece.

[126, 127] The stones around the Taula are quite huge as well.

[128] This is the view from the other side of the Taula. You can see the vertical piece and a short section of the horizontal piece.

[129] We move on to the next complex, known as Cartailhac Precinct. It is named after a French Archaeologist who worked here in 1892.

It is of a much later period, 250 -100 BC. Still, it is over 2000 plus years old.

Many of the daily activities of the occupants have been researched and documented. They may have had a stable for livestock, at least for use at night. They had sheep, pigs, cows and some horses. The sheep were used for their wool as well as meat. They ate rabbits as well but it is not certain if they were reared or hunted.

It is suggested that they had fire on a layer of clay over some ceramic fragments, and when it was hot enough, they removed the embers. The clay would then release the heat slowly to cook the food. They probably had fish as well as some fishing hooks (item 2 in the slide) were found nearby.

[130a] A panoramic view of the precinct from the outside. We will be coming out of the precinct via this, at the far left.

[130b] Panoramic view inside.

[131, 132, 133]

[134, 135] A chamber with a roof structure. There were probably two floors.

[136] A similar chamber with the roof, on the other side as well.

[137, 138] Double wall of the compound.

[139, 140] We exit the precinct.

[141] I would like to end the presentation with a view of the complex from a building in an area in post Talayotic period.

[142] We have now completed the four areas we set out to cover ... The Tomb, Some Burial Caves and two settlements at San Catlar and Torre del Galmes.

I hope you will have an opportunity to see them one day if you have not already been there.

[143] This is to prove that I was actually there.

Thank you.

References:

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