

## RESEARCH PROJECT ON THE SA MOLA HYPOGEUM (ALAIOR)

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of February 2020, an exhibition was inaugurated dedicated to Joan Flaquer and his facet as an archaeologist and researcher: **Joan Flaquer and the Enigma of the 400 Cups. 50 Years of Menorcan Archaeology (1910-1960)**.

Study of materials and bibliographic research allowed for the creation of an inventory of 269 high-bottomed cups (HBC), a type of receptacle typical of the Late Talayotic period in Menorca, which were conserved as part of a collection in a hypogeum at the necropolis of Sa Mola (Alaior).

Surprisingly, despite adding the archaeological materials originating from this hypogeum to his collection, Joan Flaquer published nothing in this regard.

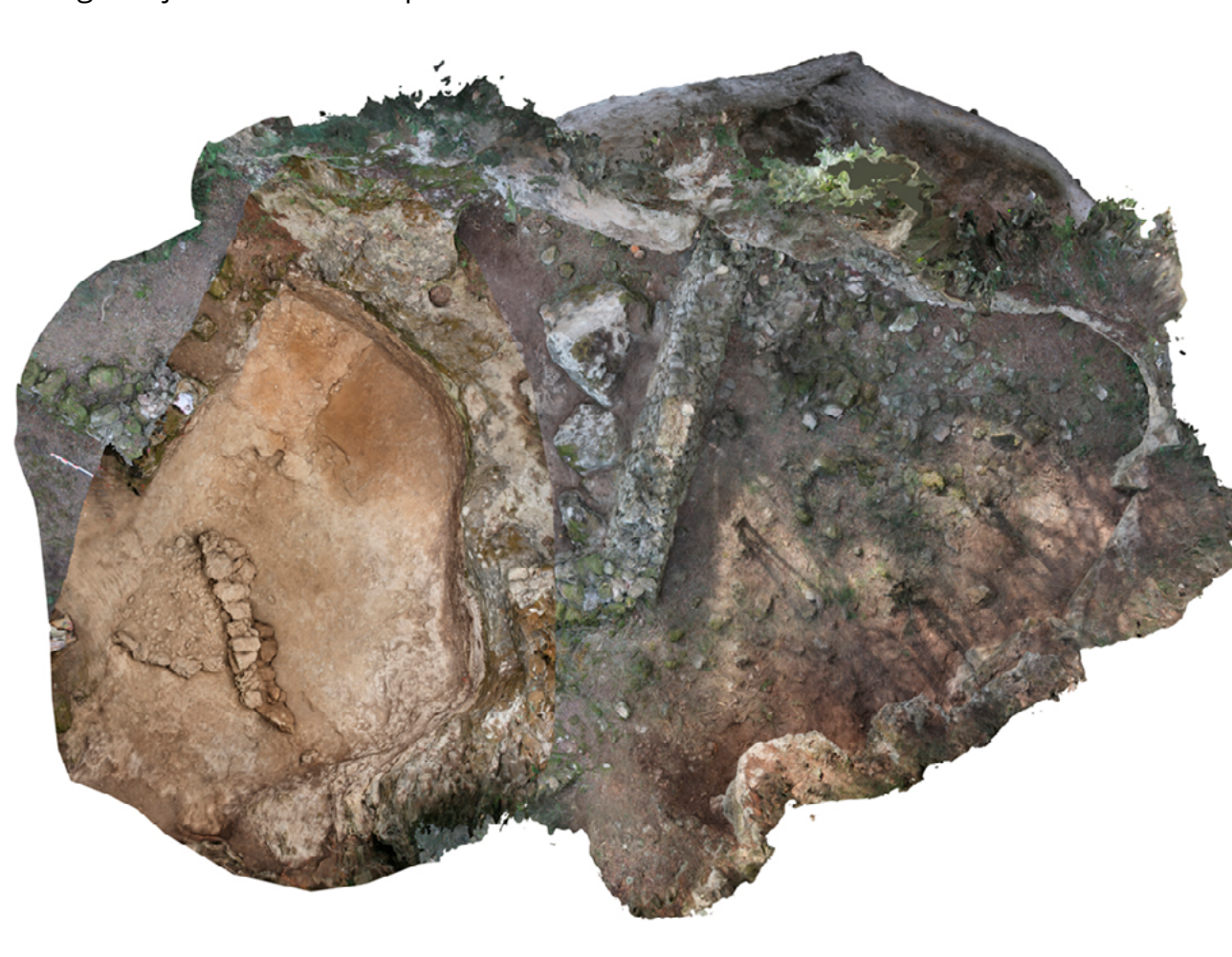


However, this exceptional find did not leave other researchers of the period indifferent, and those with access to his find did report on the news in several publications. We thus know of the discovery of a significant collection of **high-bottomed cups**, over 400, as well as other materials, from a pit excavated from the rock, known as the "patio", located before the hypogeum's entrance. Research material from the period also mentions other finds: bowls, goblets, glass beads, several coins, and more. No mention was made of bone remains, which in all likelihood were unearthed but not collected.

The interpretation put forth in scientific literature of the day supposed that the hypogeum was likely used as a votive site, more specifically as a sanctuary dedicated by the island's prehistoric communities to an "unknown" god (Santa-Olalla, 1935). The collection of cups corresponded to an offering to god.



Once all relevant news and data was collected, the Flaquer collection analysed, and the hypogeum located, a technical team affiliated with the Museu initiated a quinquennial research project at the Sa Mola hypogeum. An archaeological intervention was established to gather new data on the hypogeum by applying current scientific methodologies with the use of new technologies for documentation. With this new research, scientific debate that had initially begun a century earlier was reinitiated, with a single objective: to reinterpret the site.



This archaeological intervention allowed for the creation of a record of Joan Flaquer and Antoni Vives Escudero's previous excavation of the hypogeum patio. Also found were deposits with funerary materials, which were likely deposited from the hypogeum's interior.

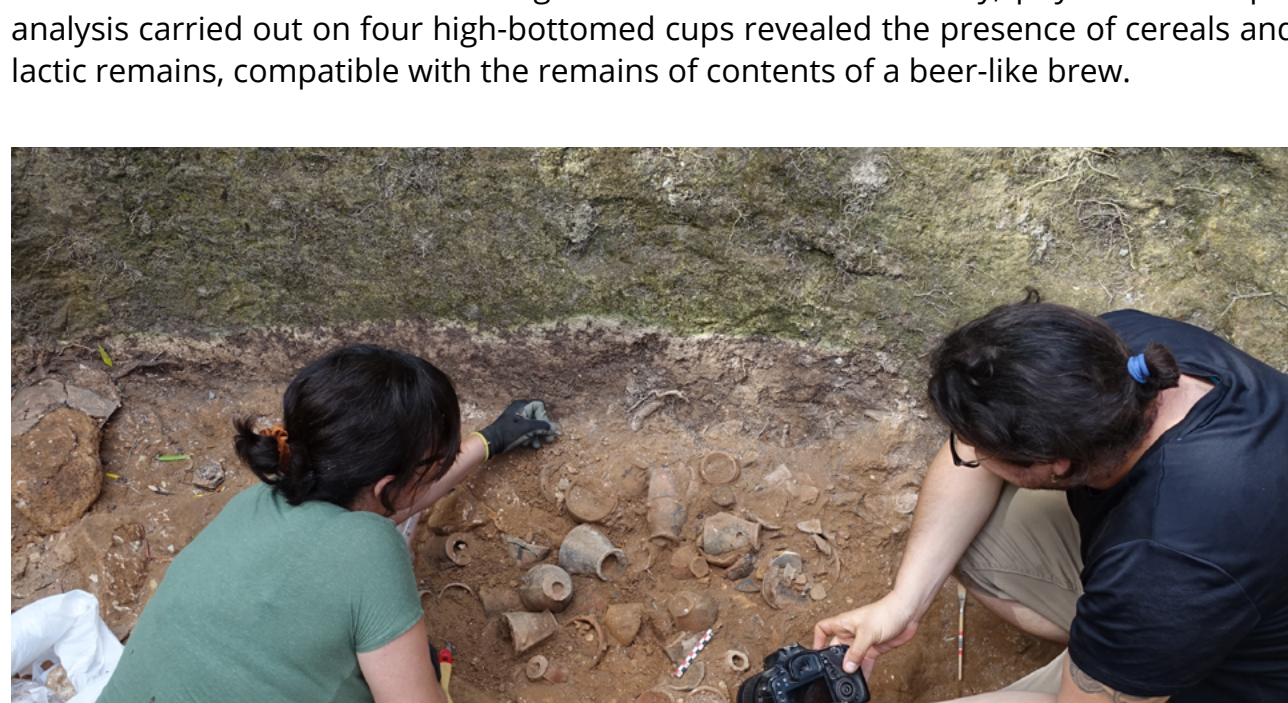


Although it already seemed apparent, due to the typology of the cave dug out from the rock and its anthropological remains and grave goods, it was confirmed that the hypogeum was in fact of a funerary nature. Also found intact was an archaeological record in the southwest corner of the patio that documented a new set of materials quite similar to those discovered in the earlier intervention of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.



These appeared to be deposited cups, of the high-bottom variety, primarily of local production; some of which imitated classical ceramic imports. Also found in the deposit were substantial bone remains of domesticated animals, almost exclusively from subadults, primarily pigs, followed by sheep and goats. Due to its ceramic typology, the set has been dated to between the late 3<sup>rd</sup> and early 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BC, a time when Talayotic communities interacted with other Mediterranean cultures, primarily the Punic culture of Ibiza.

The Museu has continued its work with all the materials and data gathered, resulting in a new interpretation of the Sa Mola site and Joan Flaquer's exceptional find. This more recent data from the Sa Mola intervention has led to the understanding that the hypogeum patio was the site where the remains from a commensality ceremony and the presentation of funerary offerings to the deceased buried within the hypogeum were encapsulated. Studies and samples have revealed the presence of substantial consumption of domesticated animals, primarily pigs, sheep and goats, which would have been sacrificed before the age of six months. Additionally, phytolith and lipid analysis carried out on four high-bottomed cups revealed the presence of cereals and lactic remains, compatible with the remains of contents of a beer-like brew.



The archaeological site can still provide additional data regarding the funerary world from the Late Talayotic period, which will allow for advanced knowledge of the funerary world of the final centuries before our era. Furthermore, the Flaquer collection and the Sa Mola project have contributed to a deeper knowledge of the high-bottomed cup, a receptacle that due to its aesthetic and historical value has become one of the Museu's most noteworthy objects from recent prehistory.

