



An archaeometric study of some pre-Roman glass beads from Son Mas (Mallorca, Spain)

Mark Van Strydonck^a, Bernard Gratuze^b, Joëlle Rolland^c, Guy De Mulder^{d,*}

^a Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage, Jubelpark 1, B-1000 Brussels, Belgium

^b IRAMAT UMR 5060 Centre Ernest-Babelon, CNRS/Université d'Orléans, Orléans, France

^c Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, Paris, France

^d Department of Archaeology, Ghent University, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 35, 9000 Ghent, Belgium

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ABSTRACT

Son Mas is a ritual site in the north of Mallorca (Spain) which has known a long occupation from the 3rd millennium until the early Roman period. Two main phases have been discerned. A selection of glass beads from the site has been studied by LA-ICP-MS analysis. These glass beads can, based on their chemical composition, be split up in three main groups, which correspond with, known other studied Mediterranean groups. Furthermore, the obtained chronological information fits with the history of the Balearic Islands, which after a period of isolation starts to develop contact with the rest of the Mediterranean communities from ca. 550 BCE on.

1. Introduction

The site of Son Mas is situated in the northern mountain region of Mallorca (Balearic Islands, Spain), the so-called 'Tramuntana' (Fig. 1). It is located in the Mallorcan mountain basin called the *Pla del Rei* (Plain of the King) (39° 42' N, 2° 36' E). The valley is surrounded by a mountain range except to the north, where the plain is cut off by a 400 m high cliff, overlooking the sea. The Son Mas complex consists of a heavily eroded sighting-stone (Fig. 2), a horseshoe-shaped sanctuary with a concave frontal wall and an entrance in the middle (Fig. 3) and a naviform (boat shaped) dwelling (Fig. 4), sometimes referred to as the 'agora'. The sighting stone is situated about 1 m south of the eastern corner of the sanctuary, the naviform complex about 9 m south and about 6 m west of the western corner of the sanctuary. Radiocarbon dates have revealed two occupation phases: one from the late 3rd millennium until the early 2nd millennium BCE and one from ca. 1300 BCE until the Roman period (Waldren, 1996; Van Strydonck et al., 1998). The first occupation phase is related to the sighting stone and the presence of Bell-Beaker pottery (Waldren, 1997) in the archaeological layers. The position and orientation of the sighting stone indicates that, most probably, Son Mas was already a religious site in the late 3rd early 2nd millennium BCE (Van Strydonck et al., 2001). After an abandonment period of ca. 600 years, the site was reoccupied at about 1300 BCE. The construction of the horseshoe-shaped sanctuary is

dated around 800 BCE based on the pottery and ¹⁴C dates on charcoal and bone found in the construction layers of the sanctuary wall. There is no construction date available for the naviform dwelling. It is uncertain whether this ensemble was built in one or more phases. A ¹⁴C date on a charcoal sample found under one of the walls dates from the 5th century BCE while a rim sherd from a large vessel was ¹⁴C dated in the 6th–4th century BCE by means of the chaff used as temper in the clay to fabricate the pot. The presence of Samian ware (*terra sigillata*) proved that the agora area was in use until the Roman occupation of the island (De Mulder et al., 2007).

The use of the site as a religious centre in the late Iron Age was not only proven by the discovery of a Punic phallus symbol. More important even is that evidence was found, in and around the apsidal naviform dwelling of a local production of lead cast ornaments used as votive funerary jewellery. Although no moulds were found, sprues, ingots (in the form of small round plates) and miscast pieces show that lead casting was done on-site. Identical pieces were also discovered at Cova de'n Alova, Son Matge and Muertos Gallard (Enseñat Enseñat, 1975). A dating project has proven that those lead ornaments were made between the 4th and 2nd century BCE (Van Strydonck, 2014; Waldren and Grimalt Cubi, 1995).

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: marbolleke@telenet.be (M. Van Strydonck), gratuze@cnrs-orleans.fr (B. Gratuze), joelle.rolland@mae.univ-paris1.fr (J. Rolland), guy.demulder@ugent.be (G. De Mulder).

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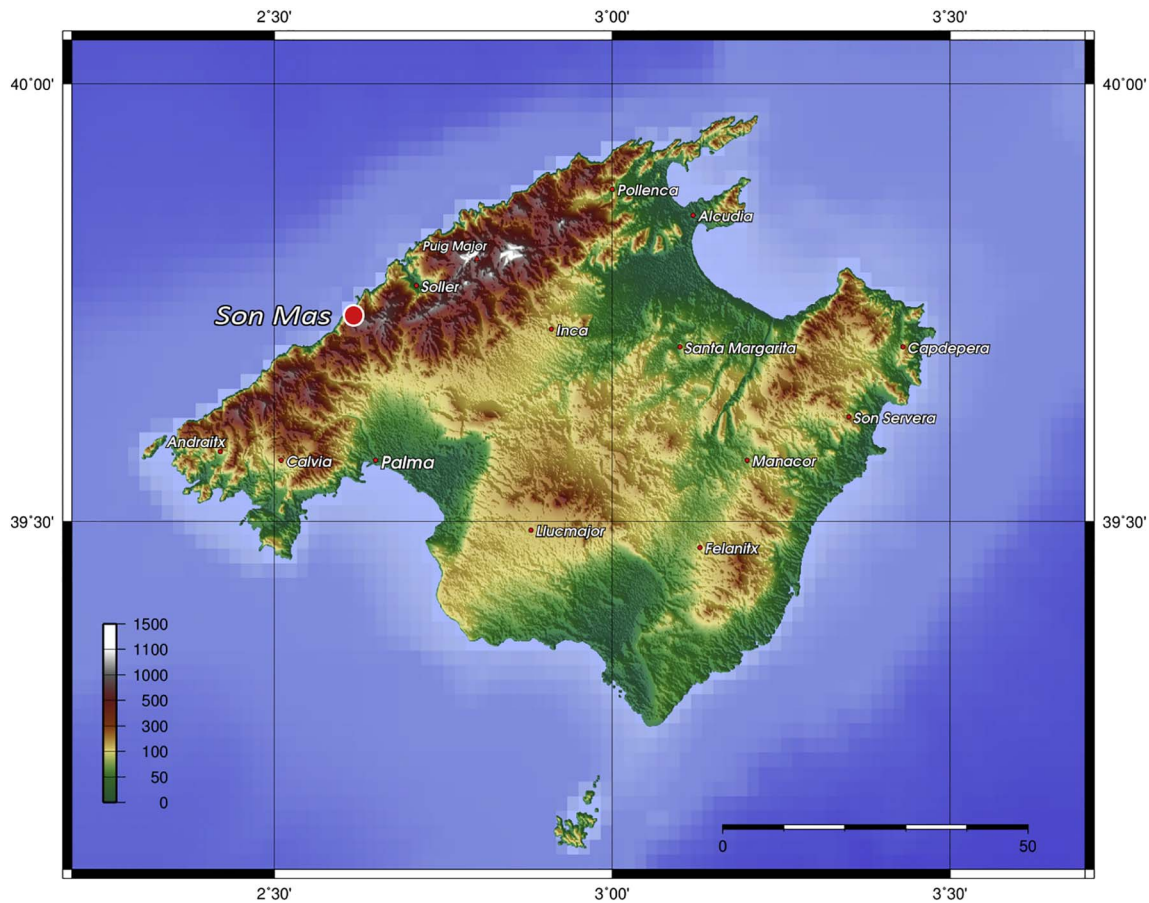


Fig. 1. The location of the Son Mas site in the island of Mallorca.

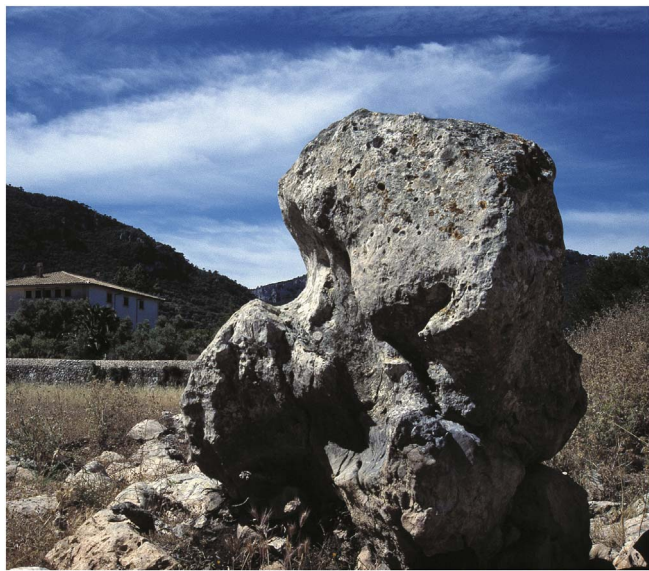


Fig. 2. Son Mas, sighting stone.
(Photo M. Van Strydonck.)

2. Glass objects

Glass beads were frequently appearing during the Iron Age on the Balearic Islands and in the Iberian Peninsula. There exists a large variety of forms, shapes and colours during this period. They are discovered as well on Phoenician/Punic settlements, as for example Ibiza (Ruano Ruiz, 1996), as on indigenous sites, like the site of Son Mas or in

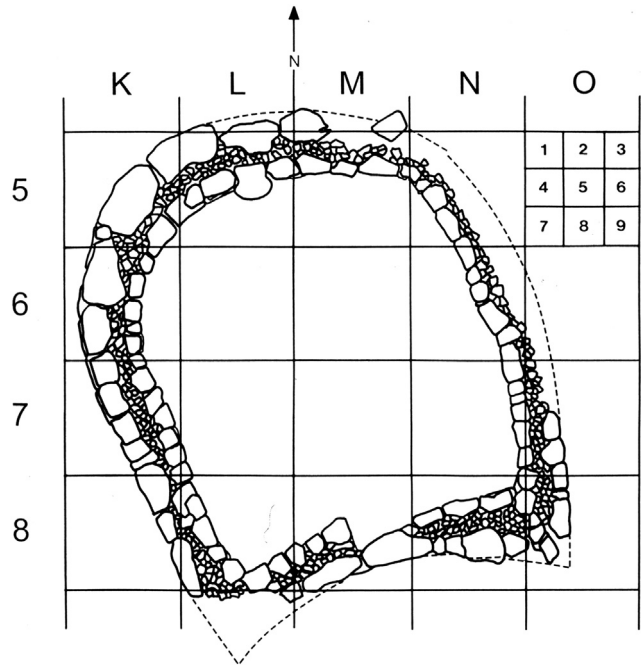


Fig. 3. Son Mas site, horseshoe-shaped sanctuary (after Waldren). Grid 3 × 3 m.

funerary caves (Enseñat Enseñat, 1981). Archaeometric studies of glass beads on the Balearic Islands and Iberia are rather rare. Finds from some caves in Mallorca and Menorca have been analysed in the previous century (Rincón, 1993) and there is a study from some examples

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