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**EVOLUCIÓN DE LA AGRICULTURA Y DE LA PROPIEDAD RURAL EN LA ISLA DE MENORCA, Revista de Menorca, 1969.**

P. 21, Col. 2

...Unlike Majorca there does not exist a register of the distribution of lands and royal concessions have to be recovered from chancery documents of the time. Today we are aware of many documents ceding houses, principally in Ciudadela that must have been of interest to merchants and artesans and some of the concessions of farmsteads or alquerias as the documents call them. In 1287 Ramòn de Mozòn was awarded a farmstead called Tobilla (possibly Torellò) which to judge by its boundaries was vast, occupying the area to the South West of the current municipality of Mahòn. This farm could have been the predecessor of the Caballeria of Torellò already documented in 1390 and whose approximate boundaries can be seen in the map of the caballerias. Another farmstead awarded in 1290 was that of Alfurì, possibly the predecessor of the caballeria of Algaiarens documented in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, awarded to a certain Mercader de Luca (merchant from Lucca ?) and finally in 1287 was given to Felipe of Chiaramonte, an antonine friar, the farmstead of Biniçoida and the hamlet of Binisataf, possibly Binisaida and Biniatap today in the commune of Villacarlos, farms which at least in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century formed part of of caballeria or fief.

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**KNIGHTLY FIEFS (“CAVALLERIAS”)**

In feudal times cavallerias were distributed and the recipient was exempt from almost all tax burdens. In exchange he had to live on his lands and have an armed horse ready at all times to defend the island at royal request. The cavalleria could not be sold or otherwise alienated and in the event of death or refusal on the part of its owner it had to pass whole to a single heir<sup>1</sup>. Each cavalleria had to consist of a parcel of land capable of cultivation more or less equal to the work load of fifteen pairs of oxen<sup>2</sup>. The extent of such lands is difficult to calculate since the speed of the work load depends on the nature of the land and on the means by which it is worked. Although in fact now the land is not worked by oxen, but by mules or horses, the Minorcan peasants know from tradition how much oxen are capable of working and they calculate that fifteen yokes of oxen would correspond today to a plot of 150 of strips for sowing or rather 100 hectares, a considerable stretch of land which would readily support the maintenance of a war horse. If we recall that the earliest cavallerias would

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<sup>1</sup> Serra Belabre, p. 12. From this fact the author draws a highly debatable conclusion. She deduces that the institution of “heir” in Minorca extracts from this condition of indivisibility of the cavallerias, when such an institution was already firmly rooted in the mentality of the Aragonese and Catalans who came to populate the island.

<sup>2</sup> Serra Belabre, p.12. She argues uncertainly that the size of the land to be cultivated were what fifteen pairs of oxen could work in one day. If it were so the plot of land would be derisory at 3 or 4 hectares, and not the 100 hectares that she claims.

have had a similar size to those in existence in 1600<sup>3</sup> of which the surface of all of them borders on 1,000 hectares, we would deduce that the surface area for cultivation of these would be about 10%. This calculation does not permit us to get an idea of the land suitable for cultivation on the island at the time of its division, since the greater part of the cavallerias, at least those in existence in 1650, were situated in the poorest areas where forest and scrub and even bare rock abounded<sup>4</sup>. The distribution of these cavallerias – and we are dealing still with those known in 1600 – appears haphazard across the island: some were on the coast, others inland, some made up of various farmsteads, others of only one. The most concentrated groups of them were found in the extreme East of the current urban locality of Ciudadela and to the North of Mercadad. In the eastern half of the island they were rare and isolated. In general they corresponded to the vast areas currently under cultivation (the so called “locs”) but one of them, called Torello, perhaps the most ancient, was situated in an area where today and already in 1600 small and middle sized plots for cultivation preponderated. The predominance of forest and scrub in the cavallerias makes one think of a tendency more to herding than cultivation on the part of the people sent to populate them, an aspect which the importance of wool in the island’s economy in the early Middle Ages seems to corroborate. Another aspect worthy of note is the mixture of Arab and Catalan names for the places that make up the cavallerias, since almost all of them are constituted of various plots generally grouped together. There is no account of the cavallerias still extant that predates 1600, but it would appear that they were not all brought into being at the same time and that the conditions that applied to the granting of them varied over the years. According to A. Ramis y Ramis<sup>5</sup> from the documentation of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century it is clear that in spite of their feudal character fiscal burdens over them were introduced and also that their owners ever more frequently had disputes with the municipal authorities over the nature of their military obligations. The military interest of the cavallerias was by no means lost over time, but rather acquired importance due to the constant threat of invasion or piracy on the part of Muslims but also of Castillians during the war between Pedro the Ceremonious and Pedro the Cruel. The dispositions for the defence of the island always included the owners of the cavallerias. In the 17<sup>th</sup> Century the use of war horses belonging to the cavallerias was forbidden for any purpose which was not the defence of the island and in the same century the governors inspected them and their armour imposing some kind of a mark on the horse and the armour to prevent the sale or exchange of either. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the institution of the cavallerias continued to thrive. The method of exploitation of cavallerias is little known. Within their territories their owners had total autonomy of a feudal nature and could impose on the persons that cultivated them various sorts of taxes known as fadigas, tithes and laudemios. We do not know who actually cultivated the lands nor their civil status, nor even their origin. It is very possible that the cultivators, managers, tenants, or partners involved in the cavallerias were Catalans and the hired hands descended from the Moorish Minorcans who had worked as slaves or serfs. From the document dated 1301 is clear the existence of partners who cultivated farmsteads on a limited basis, but it is not evident if they worked the lands of the lords (cavallerias) or the royal domain. The document speaks with no further explanation,

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<sup>3</sup> The first concrete mention that we have of the number, name and size of the cavallerias is from the year 1600. See the map no. 2.

<sup>4</sup> It is possible that the lands handed out as cavallerias were in some way lands of conquest and that they may have been broken up.

<sup>5</sup> Volume II; p.8.

as if of something self-evident, of limited partnerships. Serra Belabre<sup>6</sup> deduces from this reference the existence of a clear Muslim precedent, but it should be born in mind that the document is addressed at people come to populate the island from Aragon and Catalonia and not to Moorish Minorcans and rather leads one to think that the limited partnership must have been every bit as well known among Catalans and Aragonese as among Muslims since this type of partnership is found more widely than only in Minorca.

Over time another type of lordly ownership was introduced, the institution of fiefs the existence of which was still evident in Capbreu in 1600<sup>7</sup>. These consisted of plots of land and urban houses, the ownership of which however entailed no military obligations with respect to their owners. The possessors of the cavallerias must have made up the highest aristocracy on the island with their residences in Ciudadela, the mediaeval capital of the island. We know of now rural residences whose architectonic importance would correspond with the typical feudal castle. Fortified country houses which are to be found even today have very little of the castle about them. Their defences consist of a simple massive rectangular tower, not very tall, and topped off with battlements<sup>8</sup>. These towers abutted the residence of the cultivator and their sole function was to provide a temporary refuge for him and his family in the event of raids by pirates. The lands which were fortified were generally close to the coast and lands with towers are rare in the interior of the island. The relative importance of these towers is obvious in local place names. It is rare that a place which can count on one of these defensive elements does not have a reference to it in its name. The word "Tower" ("Torre") appears almost everywhere (Torreblanca, Torre d'en Quart, Binisaida de sa Torre, etc.). The most monumental of these towers are those nearest to Ciudadela (Torre Saura, Torre del Ram, Torre d'en Quart) perhaps because, given the proximity to this town, the owners of these manors actually lived in them for part of the year.

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#### THE LANDS OF THE ROYAL DOMAIN

To judge by Capbreu in 1600 the lands of the royal domain accounted for 75% of the island. We know almost nothing about the distribution of them except for the fact that the beneficiaries were the effective owners of the lands which they had received apart from the payment of a tax to the Crown.

According to Serra Belabre (37 : p.11) the proprietors of the lands in the royal domain would be the predecessors of the "Lords of the Land" whose social category depended solely on their wealth but it is appropriate to nuance this concept of "Lord of the Land". In fact the "Lord of the Land" is the direct cultivator of it and generally his property is restricted in size, for which reason he has not been able to leave it, turning it over to partnership. His role as owner / user gives him a superior social status within the society of the island but always inferior to the absentee landlord who lives in the city. If we consider that many of the farmsteads or "Lands" of the royal domain were as to size and quality in many cases equal or even superior to the "cavallerias" it

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<sup>6</sup> Serra Belabre, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> A. Ramis, Volume II. See also map no. II.

<sup>8</sup> The reader will have deduced that the bibliographical quotations relate to works mentioned in the section entitled "Bibliography".

would be strange that all the lords of the territories in the royal domain were the direct cultivators of them. From the beginning there must have been absentee non-feudal owners and their social status as in fact must have been practically equivalent to the owners of "cavallerias" all the more so taking into account that the latter had the benefit of no authentic noble title apart from extracting the most from the designation of "cavaller", something akin to an hidalgo therefore. Minorcan society was divided into four estates. The first was noble or military made up of "cavallers" and nobles, the second was the bourgeois, the third agricultural proprietors and the fourth was hired farm hands, sailors and the urban working class. It is impossible that in this third estate would have been found the proprietors of large non-feudal lands alongside the small scale direct cultivators, given the great economic differences between them which was forcibly also reflected in a great social gap. Something similar must have been the case between rich partners of farms and simple day labourers, although today the social gap between the two is slight and not fixed. In brief therefore we may deduce that the first estate may not have been the exclusive monopoly of the "cavallers" given they were so few in number - only 15 in 1600 - except that into it would also have fallen the numerous proprietors of the lands of the royal domain (38 : In the 17th Century the title of "cavaller" was bestowed on persons that possessed no Cavalleria". See : Fernando Martí Camps "Life in Minorca in the 17th Century", 1961, pp. 23-58).

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.... As far as the ownership of land is concerned, A. Ramis only gives very fragmentary details except when he refers to noble holdings represented by caballerias and fiefs. The former were sixteen in number according to A. Ramis who based this on the mentioned census and which were made up of 67 farmsteads although some were also feudal in part. Also included in the caballerias were houses in towns, smallholdings of land and vineyards and it is curious to note that the virtually barren "Illa de Colom" was part of one of them. The entities making up a caballeria were by no means always contiguous. According to a very interesting document unearthed by Riudavets there even existed a caballeria with no lands and his owner received a pension from the Crown of 25 Pounds in exchange for its title and military obligations. This document presented to the English authorities in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century was a copy of the census of 1600 with a recital of the caballerias and fiefs of the island in which was moreover listed the owners of same and the farms which made up each of them. IN great part the extract of this document published by Riudavets corresponds with the census published by A. ramis. If the owners of the caballerias given by Riudavets coincided as it seems with those of 1600 we would have an important point of departure to know the feudal class of landowners of the island. According to the version quoted by Riudavets the 16 caballerias belonged to only 12 owners, one of whom was sra. Margarita Oloves y Quart who held three, being Algayarens, Binifabini and Binicorràs which together must have constituted 3,000 ha. Another knight of similar name, Jaime Olives. held the caballerias of Binidonaire and Tirant with an extent of over 2,000 ha. Finally the knight Jaime Ximenes owned the caballerias of Binixabò and Torellò with an extent of 1,000-2,000 ha. The remaining caballerias belonged each to a different knight. The homonymy of the names of these knights with present important landowners and the coincidence of the cavallerias with some of the extensive properties today leads one to presume a strong continuity in the

social and agrarian history of the island over the last four centuries and that the latifundia of today is rooted in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century.

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... The knights received the style of "Mossen" and who gained the military privilege was called "Cavaller" and their descendants "Donzell". The title of knight was only transmissible in the male line.