

The Consell de Formentera's president and patrimony councillor, Alejandra Ferrer and Raquel Guasch, laid out details today about an archaeological find made this August in waters near es Caló and that experts are calling extraordinary and groundbreaking. Figuring among the haul are eleven swords resembling 19th-century straight sabres. President Ferrer and Councillor Guasch were joined at the presentation by Javier Rodríguez Pandozi, marine archaeologist and president of the Balearic Institute of Marine Archaeology Studies (IBEAM) and Manel Guasch, captain of the vessel involved in finding the first sabre.

Ferrer heralded the discovery as a regional first and applauded the islanders and companies that helped in retrieval. "These artefacts will enter into Formentera's catalogue of historical heritage", said the president. "For now they'll be kept among the holdings of the Eivissa-Formentera Museum of Archaeology [MAEF]", she explained, "but we'll see them back here just as soon as we have a museum properly equipped to receive them".

For her part, Councillor Guasch underscored collaboration—between the local government and MAEF as well as on the part of islanders—not to mention efforts from within the Consell to coordinate an "emergency preventive intervention to ensure the objects were kept safe".

A fortuitous find

15 August, as Manel Guasch and Guillermo de Barnola sought to retrieve an object that had fallen overboard, the pair identified what at first appeared to be a modern-day sword. They immediately reported the find to Comandància de Marina and the Consell de Formentera—the latter having authority over issues of historical heritage—and took the sword to MAEF, the entity charged with taking in and caring for archaeological items.

From 26 to 29 August, a team of divers from the underwater operations division of the Civil Guard visited the site together with an archaeologist from IBEAM, which has been engaged in efforts to complete an undersea archaeological map for Formentera. The dive gave rise to the discovery of a new group of similar objects—all with characteristics typical of early-19th-century

straight sabres

After viewing an IBEAM-drafted report that included proposed strategies moving ahead, Consell officials signed off on an emergency archaeological intervention to guarantee the safekeeping of the objects and potentially locate other artefacts.

Conducted on 31 August and 1 September by two archaeologists and an IBEAM restorer, the emergency intervention involved salvaging ten subsequently identified sabres.

The objects will be sent to MAEF, where they will be held pursuant to Law 12/1998 (21 December) on historical heritage and Decree 14/2011 (25 February) on standards for archaeological interventions in the Balearic Islands.

Considering the unique nature of such archaeological artefacts in the Pityusic Islands, MAEF has offered to oversee restoration efforts, though the final conservation and restoration proposal will require close study of the objects' condition and review of the technical reports produced by the emergency archaeological interventions.

Rodríguez explained that "with the help of the Civil Guard's special undersea division, IBEAM will continue conducting archaeological probes in the area to identify any sunken ships that might be tied to the swords".

Locals pitch in

The assistance of islanders proved essential to documenting and safeguarding the finds. Indeed, details provided by the pair that located the original sabre made possible subsequent efforts to study, authorise and carry out the emergency intervention associated with Formentera's undersea archaeological map, a Consell de Formentera-led initiative that IBEAM has piloted since 2015.

For that reason, islanders are encouraged to report any information about underwater discoveries of archaeological artefacts to the cultural heritage office of the Consell de Formentera. In this way, such objects can be documented and protected as part of the island's cultural inheritance.

In addition to help from the undersea division of the Civil Guard and Comandància Naval, both Trasmapi and Formentera Divers provided material support. The two companies have collaborated in the past with various parts of the undersea archaeological map initiative.

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