

THE CITY OF PALMA

MIRACLE AND FASCINATION OF THIS BABEL THAT PROBABLY HAS MORE FOREIGN PRESS THAN NEW YORK AND IS AN ETERNAL CROSSROADS FOR THE GREAT AIR ROUTES, PALMA, NEVERTHELESS, IS STILL A CITY IN WHICH TO WANDER LAZILY, FOREVER FINDING SHELTERED SPOTS IN WHICH TO PAUSE AND REFLECT IN TRANQUILITY.

VALENTÍ PUIG AUTHOR



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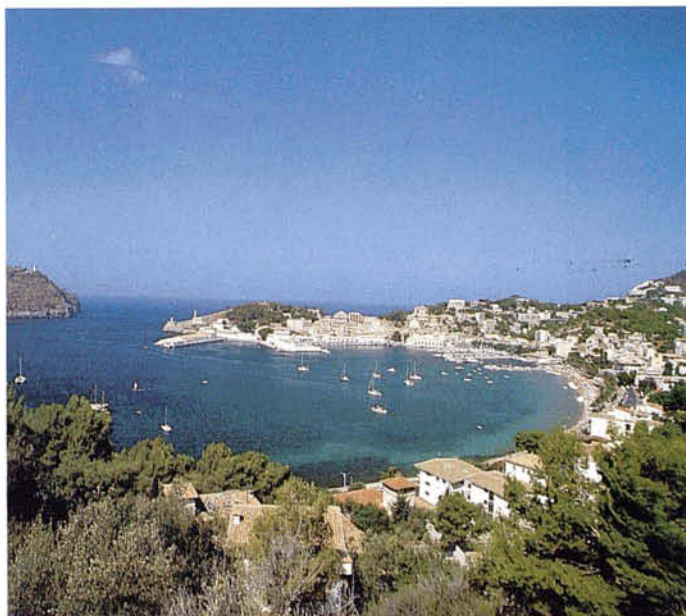
From the deck of the steam-boat, nineteenth century travellers arriving at the port of Palma were able to make out the outline of an ancient city that gradually, gently revealed itself to them. As the ship's bow cut through the calm water and the sea-gulls shrieked overhead, the traveller gazed at the city, perched on its hills, and at the harmonious lines of the castle above the houses that showed white in the morning sun. Everywhere was full of ancient light. Even today, the boats anchored in the port of Palma de Mallorca remind one of the brave vessels of past centuries, of

the rise of trade and of the fear of invaders and pirates. In these waters, boats of all sorts dropped anchor, and from here men from all the Mediterranean nations set out for the four corners of the earth.

On the isle of Majorca, halfway between the mountains and the plain, Palma was successively destroyed and rebuilt. It grew up around a primitive fortress at the back of the bay. Perhaps in those days there already existed that submission to outward appearances—both in essence and in behaviour—that, in spite of the mechanization of the modern world, becomes

one of the keys of Palma's inner life for anyone who walks through the city's ancient streets. This is the wise man's perception of Mediterranean life and, at the same time, a sound formulation of an irrefutable destiny: to live a silent passion while the world of appearances acts as a buttress, before everything collapses in ruins. Today, the old quarter still occupies an area of higher ground which was originally completely walled-in, with its *Palau de l'Almudaina*—seat of the kings of the Majorcan dynasty, with its beneficent bronze angel on its highest tower—and the Cathedral.

CITIES



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The ancient streets are narrow and gently winding, with delicious shade and soft light. The visitor can take in the aristocratic palaces' magnificent courtyards, with their graceful stately gateways, their elegant arches a proclamation of wealth and distinction. The streets still bear the names of the medieval guilds. The Cathedral—started about 1230 and dedicated to the Virgin Mary as a votive offering—represents at once the poignancy of space and the tranquility of Mediterranean life. It is an essential part of Majorca's existence. So much grandeur seems an impossibility: many years ago, when the waves lapped at the walls of Palma, the Cathedral was reflected in the harbour and a certain emperor asked to be allowed to sail in with his galleys by day and see it engraved on the waters of the port. The rhythm and strength of the buttresses support this lofty limestone building that glows amber in the sun's caress.

Not far away, at the convent of Sant Francesc, Albert Camus spent long hours in the sheltered silence of the little Gothic cloister while the world outside carried on as chaste, ironic and discreet as ever: here he found stability, though over it loomed

the apprehension of his own end. Here he found all his will to live, that silent passion because of which, perhaps, he had to escape. Meanwhile, the arches of the Jaume II avenue are the setting for morning greetings and, on the Born avenue, further south, while the bootblacks carry on their methodical work seated on the stone benches, swarms of men and women of all nationalities jostle for the newspapers of their language; this is the miracle and the fascination of this Babel that probably has more foreign press than New York and is an eternal crossroads for the great air routes. But Palma is still a city in which to wander lazily, forever finding sheltered spots in which to pause and reflect in tranquility.

Towards nightfall, where the avenues reach the sea, the traveller gets his first glimpse of the lights of the bay. The Cathedral brings to mind times of war and subtly convincing theology. Illuminated, it is a wonder of soaring grandeur and heroic energy. The sea front, from lighting-up time until the early hours of the morning, is a scene of incandescent beauty. There is an endless stream of traffic and, amidst the yachts and the music, myriad reflections sparkle on the sea. The Palma nights

find a spontaneity on the sea front, as splendidly senseless as any of fancy's whims. Further on, in the houses of the *Terreno*, lived Gertrude Stein and her friend Alice B. Toklas. They arrived in 1915, pursued by one of the Kaiser's submarines.

Through those same streets walked D.H. Lawrence and his Frieda in 1929. In Majorca, Lawrence saw the bluest sea he had ever seen. Bellver castle, lit up over the bay, watches over the night and reminds us of the island's long history, made up of invasions, absences, mistrust and mirages. In the castle courtyard, space is shaped with faultless precision: the varied rhythms of the two galleries—with the well in the centre—creates an exquisite sensation. Only hours before the Christian conquest of Palma in 1229, Jaume I surveyed the Saracen-occupied city and ordered the following words to be written: "...and it seemed to us the most beautiful city we had ever seen, both I and those with me". Today, beyond Porto Pi—a natural harbour, vital for the maritime trade of other times—from the Marivent palace, where he spends each summer, Juan Carlos, King of Spain, contemplates sails and wind and the blue sea. ●