

British Travellers in Mallorca in the
Nineteenth Century:
An Anthology of Texts

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FEW BRITISH TRAVELLERS VISITED Mallorca during the nineteenth century. Most of the writers included in this anthology commented on the lack of tourism to the island, despite the beauty and prosperity of the countryside, the courtesy of the Mallorcans, the low prices of food and lodging, and the absence of crime and beggars. Travel between the Spanish mainland and Mallorca was difficult in the days of sail. In 1809, in calm seas, Sir John Carr took four days to sail from Tarragona to Palma. Ferocious gales, lasting five days, placed Lady Belgrave's yacht in grave danger when sailing from Barcelona to Palma in December 1840. In March 1862, storms prevented the steamer in which William Dodd was travelling from docking in Palma. An unhealthy climate also inhibited foreign visitors. E. G. Bartholomew described the malaria-infested region of Albufera (1860). In 1886, the British consul Charles Toll Bidwell deemed Mallorca to be unhealthy for invalids. During the summer of 1887, Charles Wood's friend "A" nearly died of fever in the "miasmatic" air of Palma. Bidwell noted that there was little social life for foreigners in Mallorca, an observation confirmed by Wood.

Of those who described their experiences in Mallorca, only Bartholomew, Dodd, and Bidwell could speak Spanish. Their accounts are consequently the more knowledgeable and favourable to Spain. Bartholomew and Dodd noted the deep religious reverence

of Spaniards; the more superficial Captain Clayton and Charles Wood dismissed Spaniards as superstitious. Both Carr and Lady Belgrave, writing in the first half of the century, remarked the local prejudice against the *chuetes*, those Mallorcans whose ancestors had converted from Judaism. Whereas Clayton thought Spain to be a backward country, Dodd and Bidwell noted the considerable material progress to be observed in Mallorca. Bidwell offers a lively account of the inauguration of the locally-financed railway from Palma to Inca in 1875. Most travellers commented on the excellent state of Mallorcan roads. Wood noted the prosperity resulting from the draining of the Albufera marshes, the result of British investment. Dodd delighted in Spanish social equality; Carr and Wood, on the other hand, objected to the presumptions of the lower orders. Clayton, with his outspoken declaration of Spanish decadence, sloth, and lack of personal hygiene, is the most clearly prejudiced of the British travellers.

In the anthology, we omit the conventional summaries of Mallorcan history and descriptions of Palma cathedral common to most of the narratives. We respect the nineteenth-century British travellers' renderings of Mallorcan place names. In our introduction, we use the forms currently in use in Mallorca.

Sir John Carr, K. C. *Descriptive Travels in the Southern and Eastern Parts of Spain and the Balearic Islands, in the Year 1809*. London: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1811.

Sir John Carr travelled to Spain in July 1809, at a time when much of Spain was under Napoleonic occupation. (In the month of his arrival, Carr learned of the Duke of Wellington's defeat of the French at the Battle of Talavera.) Carr visited Cádiz, Sevilla, Gibraltar, Málaga, Granada, Murcia, Valencia, and Tarragona. He journeyed to the Balearic Islands in October 1809, having, he declared, found no

previous account of these islands written by a British traveller. In Palma, Carr noticed the contempt with which the British consul, a Mallorcan of Jewish ancestry, was held. Carr was received by the best Mallorcan society, dined with the captain general and the notables of the island, and met refugee members of the Spanish royal family. Carr found the markets of Palma to be abundantly supplied and life on the island inexpensive. Carr visited the monastery of Valldemossa (where George Sand and Frederick Chopin would live unhappily in the winter of 1839), travelled by mule to Soller, where he remarked on the well-kept countryside and happiness of the inhabitants, and was a guest at the country house of La Granja. Before sailing to Menorca, Carr stayed in the dreary town of Alcudia, its inhabitants made sickly by poor water and the proximity of the unhealthy lake of la Albufera. At some length, Carr resumes the war situation as it concerns Mallorca: the need for British officering of Spanish troops; the possibility of Mallorca being used as a base for resisting Napoleon; the consequences of British occupation.

Elizabeth Mary Belgrave, Marchioness of Westminster. *Narrative of a Yacht Voyage in the Mediterranean during the Years 1840-41*. London: John Murray, 1842.

Lady Belgrave, the Marchioness of Westminster, visited Palma during the last week of December of 1840. Her experience exemplifies the perils of sailing in the Mediterranean in mid-winter. Because of a massive gale, her journey from Barcelona to Palma took five days. In Palma, Lady Belgrave, like Carr, noted Mallorcan prejudice against the descendents of Jewish converts. She found the buildings of Palma handsome, the markets abundantly supplied, the "lower orders" contented, and the ruling classes indolent.

E. G. Bartholomew, C.E., M.S.E. *Seven Months in the Balearic Islands*.

Published in H. W. Bates, ed., *Illustrated Travels*. Volume I, pp. 266-68, 312-15, 338-41, 368-71. London, 1869.

The engineer E. G. Bartholomew, who had previously lived in Madrid, spent seven months in the Balearic Islands in 1860, in connection with the construction of a telegraph between Mallorca and the Spanish mainland. In a series of four articles published in 1869 in *Illustrated Travels*, Bartholomew noted the prosperity of Soller with its flourishing export of oranges, the beauty of the women of Soller, the malaria-ridden region of Albufera now being drained, the almost abandoned Roman city of Alcudia, the busy traffic on the highway between Inca and Palma, and the industriousness of the suburbs of Palma. In Palma, Bartholomew recommends the guest-house of Paola, whose culinary specialty is the preparation of hedgehog. From Andraix, Bartholomew witnessed a total eclipse of the sun. In the final extract reproduced in this anthology, Bartholomew details the sufferings of French soldiers imprisoned on the island of Cabrera in 1808. Not reproduced in this anthology are Bartholomew's elaborate account of Spanish irrigation systems (268), his acknowledgment of Spanish religious reverence (315), and descriptions of Menorca (338-41) and Ibiza (368-71)

William Dodd, A.M. *Three Weeks in Majorca*. London: Chapman and Hall, 1863.

William Dodd spent three weeks in Mallorca in the spring of 1862. Dodd's trip to Mallorca was prompted by a casual conversation in a Barcelona hotel and by his schoolboy memories of the Balearic slingers of classical times: "I was alone; travelling for health and amusement; free to go and come as I listed, so I resolved, on the moment, to pass over to the Balearic Isles, and thence cross to Valencia, in prosecution of my Spanish tour" (2).