

*Place, Visibility and Perception:
The materiality of Es Vedrà and its enfolding
within New Age discourse and media-lore*

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Abstract: The rocky island of Es Vedrà, off the south-western tip of Ibiza, in Spain's Balearic Islands, features prominently in tourism materials and in related social media postings. Its scenic aspects have prompted a physical orientation of shoreline buildings around its vista and it has also been the subject of accounts detailing its allegedly mysterious attributes. The latter derive, in part, from regional histories and folklore but more fundamentally relate to recent New Age/counter-cultural perceptions of the various "energies" that have been perceived to flow around parts of Ibiza and the enfolding of Es Vedrà, in particular, within a set of generic associations of mystical spatiality. Following a discussion of the latter, this article identifies the development of the area around Es Vedrà and the rocky island's representation as a specially "charged" location. Drawing on these aspects, the article identifies the manner in which the rarely visited island is, simultaneously, highly visible and overlaid by cultural associations that effectively "cloud" its materiality. In view of these aspects, the island is characterised as a distinct entity within international secular traveller pilgrimage circuits.

Keywords: Es Vedrà, Ibiza, media-lore, New Age, tourism

Introduction

Es Vedrà and its smaller companion Es Vedranell (Figure 1) are uninhabited and sparsely vegetated limestone islands located between 1.5 and 2.5 kilometres off the south-western tip of Ibiza, close to the small beachside settlement of Cala D'Hort (Figure 2). Es Vedrà rises steeply from the sea to a height of 420 metres while Es Vedranell is a flatter outcrop that only reaches 128 metres. While Es Vedrà has been used by humans for various purposes at different historical junctures there is no evidence of any settlements having

been established there or on Es Vedranell and both islands are currently uninhabited. Over the last fifty years Es Vedrà (or, rather, shoreline and/or adjacent marine areas that provide views of it) have become a popular site for tourist/New Age traveller visitation, cued by their prior perceptions of its attributes.

Our approach to characterising and analysing Es Vedrà with regard to New Ageism and related media-lore draws on two perspectives. The first concerns locales of various types that have been interpreted and enfolded within folkloric and/or New Age discourses as worthy of visitation. Comparative research on this topic has provided insights into the complex ascriptions of mythic and ideological significance to a range of global sites by individuals and communities involved in forms of modern-day pilgrimage. As Kedzior has asserted:

Traditionally, pilgrimage has been defined as a physical journey in search of truth, pursuit of what is sacred or holy ... More recently however, researchers have identified that the distinction between pilgrimage and other forms of travel is increasingly fuzzy, as the separation of the spiritual from the religious in contemporary Western societies leaves individuals with choices of what they want to consider sacred ... some scholars suggest that for New Agers, journeys to sites of unique natural beauty containing the vestiges of ancient civilizations have the elevated status of pilgrimage. (2012: 181)



Figure 1: Location of Es Vedrà (pinned), off the south-western tip of Ibiza

media. Glastonbury Tor provides a useful point of comparison for Es Vedrà in several ways. The first concerns its relationship to the surrounding region. While major international recreational pilgrimage sites that combine unique natural beauty and “the vestiges of ancient civilizations,” such as Macchu Pichu, Uluru (Ayers Rock) and Mount Fuji, are located in continental interiors, Glastonbury Tor has an unusual attribute in that it is often perceived as a “land island” by virtue of its elevation above a flat, marshy, flood-prone plain¹ and on account of it forming the pinnacle of an area that was surrounded by shallow, coastal waters within historical memory (as the much mythologised “Isle of Avalon” of Arthurian legend) (Rahtz, 2002). The second aspect concerns visibility. As Wylie (2002) has identified, lines of sight and visitor perceptions of the elevated area from afar, as they approach and seek ideal perspectives, and the view from its peak, as visitors ascend via various routes, are key to recreational pilgrims’ senses of space and visitor experience at the Tor. But while the former aspect is key to recreational pilgrimage to the coast and waters adjacent of Es Vedrà, the latter is entirely absent as Es Vedrà is a restricted access site that is explicitly prohibited to recreational pilgrimages (and/or any other form of unauthorised visitation).² Indeed, the former aspect — i.e. the importance of vistas from nearby vantage points — and the aggregation of media-lore around the unvisitable island can be seen to *compensate* for its very inaccessibility.

While interdisciplinary Island Studies has not developed a concentrated focus on recreational pilgrimage to island sites, Suwa (2018) has recently provided a detailed case study of how the uninhabited Japanese island of Chikubushima, in Honshu island’s Lake Biwa (Biwako, in Japanese), has been imbued with spiritual and social significance through the erection of temples and monuments that have become religious and touristic pilgrimage sites. In his discussions of the location, Suwa has developed his earlier concept of islands as “small but densely cultured territory” (2007: 6) to consider how sacred places such as Chikubushima involve a “networking of representable beliefs and substantive materiality” that “connect” visitors to them (2018: 79). While he does not specifically develop a discussion around visibility, it is worth noting that as an uninhabited island, all visitors to Chikubushima approach it on ferries from the mainland in journeys that move progressively towards it (in an effective “slow zoom”) and subsequently depart (visually/associatively “pulling out” from it). These gentle, phasings-in and out of contact with the island provide suitably measured points of connection with the spirituality of its buildings, pathways, external monuments and the broader island space that can be perceived to be imbued with spirituality.

As an island without any buildings, ruins or other visible traces of human presence and/or engineering,³ Es Vedrà lacks the combination of distinct natural beauty and traces of ancient civilisations that Kedzior (2012) identifies as prime assets for international recreational pilgrimage sites. But while the island may not possess the material assets and/or archaeological records that can provide such “vestiges”, since the 1960s it has been ascribed a set of (often tenuous and/or tendentious) associations that have become institutionalised within New Age/recreational pilgrimage discourse, forming a media-loric mass that has come to serve a similar function for Es Vedrà as (more empirically verifiable) ancient vestiges have for locations such as Manchu Picchu or Glastonbury Tor. While unusual in comparison to other established inland recreational pilgrimage sites, Es Vedrà’s merits comparison to other island sites. In their profile of the sparsely-populated

Takarajima island in southern Japan, for instance, Hayward and Kuwahara (2014) detail the manner in which historical folklore has become entangled with 19th century fiction, 20th century popular culture and late 20th and early 21st century digital media-lore to produce a highly speculative swirl of discourses that have been variously embraced and refracted as elements available to the island community in its attempts to create a brand identity to attract tourists. Similarly, Hayward (2013) has contended that Catalina Island off the coast of southern California, has been “englamoured” by imported cultural figures (and, particularly, that of the mermaid), that have been prominently featured in the visual iconography of the island’s main town, Avalon, and in online audiovisual media. The principal difference between Es Vedrà and the Japanese and Californian islands is that the latter have populations that inhabit the space that such fanciful discourse adheres to, providing a grounded everyday reality that throws their artifice into stark relief. Unpopulated and rarely-visited Es Vedrà, by contrast, provides what might be regarded as a blanker scenic backdrop upon which all manner of imaginative association can be projected.

Our study of Es Vedrà draws on the research perspectives identified above with particular regard to the relationship between media-lore, touristic experience and representation of locale and we also contextualise these aspects with regard to the organisation and articulation of space around Es Vedrà and related experiences of it. Our discussion identifies the centrality of a coastal vista⁴ — and specifically, the vista of Es Vedrà — to tourist development and visitation around the south-western tip of Ibiza. These discussions provide the context of the related imagination and representation of Es Vedrà within medialoric discourses we explicate. Subsequent sections of this article provide accounts of the history and development of the region, its early associations with spirituality, the development of New Age culture and sensibilities on Ibiza and the nature of medialoric inscriptions of the island that have developed. Reflecting on these, the conclusion identifies Es Vedrà’s position within the modern phenomenon of recreational pilgrimage.

I. Locale and Context

While various dates for the earliest human settlement on Ibiza have been posited, Dawson has identified that the earliest settlement of Ibiza would appear to have been around the third millennium BCE (2013: 81). While the historical record of the early inhabitants of Ibiza is meagre, the island became a Phoenician colony in 654 BCE following the construction of a fortified port city (present-day Ibiza town), and in 5th century BCE the island became part of the Carthaginians’ western Mediterranean empire. The port developed as a thriving centre for trade and ceramic manufacture that supported several temples devoted to Carthaginian deities. Carthaginian control over the island continued until around 150 BCE, when Ibiza came under control of the Roman Empire for a 600-year period. After brief periods of domination by the Vandals and the Byzantine Empire, the island first fell under Moorish influence and was then occupied by the Moors until they were ousted by Aragonese forces in 1235. Despite the subsequent absorption of Aragon into the Spanish Monarchy, the island was subject to occasional raids by corsairs

based in North Africa until the early 19th century when Western European powers moved to erase their bases in Algiers and Tunis.

The origin of Es Vedrà's name is unclear. While it is Catalan, some theories posit Latin words such as *vitrum* ("glass"), possibly referring to the water around the island's shores, or *veteranus*, meaning "uncultivated" and/or "abandoned", if referring to a plot of land, as its source. Another hypothesis suggests a Galician–Celtic origin, since *vedra* is the term for "horse" in that language, and the islet, seen from a certain position, resembles the animal.⁵ But the most commonly accepted theory is that the name is a phonetic modification of the initial syllables of the ancient Latin adjective *petranu*, meaning "rocky" or "cliffy" (Coromines, 1989–1997). The name Es Vedranell is a diminutive, simply meaning "little Vedrà".

Es Vedrà is located in the present-day municipality of Sant Josep de sa Talaia, a sparsely populated area whose communities have traditionally devoted themselves to agricultural work (in farms and vineyards) rather than fishing or maritime commerce. This is due, in part, to the geography of the south-western tip of Ibiza, which lacks a suitable port site, but also to the presence of piracy in the Western Mediterranean until the early 19th century, which made living on the shore dangerous. After the pacification of the region, Ibiza experienced a general population growth and increasing settlement around the coastline. Fishermen subsequently began to use Cala d'Hort Bay, on the shore directly opposite Es Vedrà, as an occasional anchorage and locals took to using Es Vedrà to graze their goats. In this period, the small village of Es Cubells was established, 6 km to the east of the bay, around a church founded in 1864 by Catalan friar Francesc Palau, who was a significant figure in the development of the phenomena discussed in this article. Palau played an important role in the history of 19th century Spain on account of his efforts to reform the Spanish church and to spread Christian devotion throughout Catalonia (leading to his beatification in 1988). Born in 1811 in rural Catalonia, he decided to become a priest at the age of 17 and moved to Barcelona in 1832, where he entered the order of the Discalced Carmelites. Three years after, in 1835, the friary where he studied and lived was destroyed by working class insurgents in one of the many violent uprisings that occurred in early 19th century Barcelona.⁶ Palau was galvanised by the political situation and actively participated in the first Carlist War, fought between conservatives and liberal factions (Casal i Bergés, 2017). After a period of exile in France between 1840 and 1851 he was allowed to return to Spain and spent some years in Barcelona, where he gained fame as a proselytiser. In 1854, after being accused of having inspired another uprising, he was forced to relocate to Ibiza, where he assumed the task of re-asserting Christianity in the island, which he perceived to be lacking in piety and morality. As one way of attempting to achieve his goals he oversaw the building of a church dedicated to the Holy Virgin on the south-western tip of Ibiza with direct sightlines to Es Vedrà, which he took to visiting for periods of quiet contemplation. During long periods of the summer he lived in a cove on the otherwise uninhabited island, climbing to its peak for intense sessions of meditation.⁷ In his letters, which gave details of the months he spent in solitude, Palau attests to having met a mysterious white woman on several occasions who he identified as the personification of the Church (Palau, no date). She revealed to the friar that his duty was to promote a reform that would involve not just Ibiza or the Balearic Islands more generally, but the whole Catholic world (ibid). Palau

died in 1872 and his engagement with Es Vedrà is commemorated by a metal cross erected there in 1959.

While notable as an aspect of local history, Palau's sojourns and mystic experiences on Es Vedrà and its subsequent perception as a place of holiness and mystery were not activated in broader discourse until the mid-late 20th century. The context for this activation was their incorporation as aspects of local place mythology promoted and elaborated with the rise of tourism and with visitation by counter-cultural westerners, who began to frequent the island, attracted by its unspoiled beaches, under-developed interior and perceptions of its traditional Mediterranean lifestyle.⁸

Since Spain opened to external tourism in late 1950s, the Balearic Islands have become one of the most visited places in the country and Ibiza has been associated with various types of counter-cultural tourists and longer-term visitors, starting with hippies in the 1960s and more recently with New Age travellers and dance party enthusiasts flocking to the island's giant "mega-clubs" during the summer season.

Ibiza's development as a centre for international/Western lifestyle "dissidents" from the 1960s on appears to have derived from two complementary elements. The first was the island's remoteness from the repressive conservatism that dominated Spain during the period of General Franco's rule (between 1939 and 1975). At a safe remove from the mainland, the rural island offered quiet places where opponents of Franco's values and policies could reside relatively undisturbed. This situation made the island (and other Balearic locations such as Majorca's north shore and Formentera) appealing to the first waves of Western European and North American hippies who sought to escape the restrictions of their own home cultures in the mid-late 1960s in search of freedom, authenticity and a relaxed lifestyle. Called *barbuts* by the locals (a Catalan word meaning "hairy"), the hippies were initially welcomed by locals, who were receptive to the economic opportunities their visitation offered. But the sartorial style, sexual openness and drug use associated with the newcomers soon came to be seen as a threat to the island community's traditional values. Acting on these concerns, local authorities made complaints to the national government in Madrid, which responded in 1968 by moving to expel the *barbuts* under the terms of a 1933 law designed to crack down on homeless people, prostitutes, junkies and alcoholics (Rodríguez and Cerdà, 1999). Despite this decision, the limited number of police based in Ibiza made the policy difficult to enforce. While some foreigners were expelled in the late 1960s, leading to a diminution of hippy presence across the island, others remained and many took up residence in the 1970s, when the initiative was relaxed. The charms of Ibiza as a sun-soaked island populated with relaxed hippies (and its darker side as a place where hard drugs are readily available) were vividly represented in Barbet Schroeder's 1969 film *More*, scored by Pink Floyd (then close to their apex as an iconic counter-cultural ensemble). The band's involvement with the film followed visits by band members Syd Barrett and Roger Waters in 1967, at a time when other British and American rock musicians were also visiting Ibiza and nearby Formentera.⁹ While precise data is unavailable, anecdotal accounts suggest the film served to publicise the island as a counter-cultural mecca, particularly in Western Europe, and an influx of alternative life-stylers and older, more affluent tourists visited the island in the 1970s and subsequent decades.

The substantial rise in tourism impacted the coastal area adjacent to Es Vedrà, formerly a mosaic of farms, vineyards and untamed maquis shrubland, through its development as a tourism area, with restaurants, villas, hotels and ancillary businesses, the majority of which were established and positioned to access vistas of Es Vedrà. Today Cala d'Hort is one of the most popular beaches in Ibiza, and some of the improvised slipways and boatsheds once used by fishermen have been converted to loft spaces rented out or used as beachside “weekenders”. The impact of the touristic economy on the environment began to cause concern in the 1980s and 1990s. The hilly areas of the Serra de Ses Roques Altes that rise beyond the beach provide clear — albeit more distant — vantage points to view Es Vedrà. Given this aspect, it is unsurprising that the slopes above the bay have attracted the attention of developers keen to capitalise on their vistas. This impulse first manifested itself in the 1980s as a wave of tourism development applications and approved developments occurred across the island. Concern over the rapid transformation of the Ibizan shoreline led to the formation of the local Green organisation GEN-GOB, in 1982. From 1992 on GEN-GOB campaigned against a proposal from a Madrid-based company to create resort facilities, a golf course, a residential estate and a desalination plant to service them on the slopes. Despite widespread antipathy to the development proposal, and a series of legal actions initiated by GEN-GOB to prevent it proceeding, the Ibizan Government approved the development in 1998, prompting GEN-GOB to organise a major protest march in January 1999 that attracted around 12,000 demonstrators. The unprecedented scale of the event undermined support for the ruling Peoples Party and allowed the Opposition to make it a key issue in their successful contest of the elections in August of that year. The new government reversed the approval soon after its election and set up the 2700-hectare Cala D'Hort National Park in 2002 to impede any future development proposals in the area. While the park included Es Vedrà, Vedranell, their fringing islets and the waters surrounding them, together with the adjacent coastal slopes, the latter (comprising an area of 2466 hectares) was excised from the park in 2007, following pressure from pro-development lobbyists, rendering it vulnerable to future development proposals and their potential acceptance by future governments (Ibiza Preservation Foundation, nd).

As part of a national park area since 2002, Es Vedrà, Vedranell and their fringing islets have been restricted access areas requiring visitors to obtain permits to visit them. As such, their socio-cultural significance resides in their scenic aspects (as seen from shore sites and the decks of visiting boats), their environmental value (as wilderness sites) and the cultural associations that have accrued to them. These aspects attract visitors to Cala D'Hort and adjacent areas, generating income for tour companies and for restaurants and hotels that cater for visitors. The latter aspects are not simply *incidental* to the settlements and businesses located around Cala D'Hort; the vistas can be understood to have effectively *generated* the shore sites and enterprises that serve the views. The high, rocky coast of the south-western tip of Ibiza provides several vantage points from which Es Vedrà can be perceived. At various points along the coast nearest to the island there are vehicle pull-ins and short trails that lead to viewing spots. The popularity of these with tourists can be gauged by the variety of photos posted on social media which show landscape shots (such as Figure 3), selfies and posed photos with Es Vedrà in the background. Several other photos posted online show activities enacted on the cliffs exploiting the scenic backdrop — including weddings, musical performances, dances and meditations.¹⁰



Figure 3: Es Vedrà (right) and Es Vedranell (left) viewed from cliffs on adjacent shoreline of south-western Ibiza. (Photograph by Philip Hayward, September 2018)

The geographical alignment of the coastline and Es Vedrà allows viewers the experience of watching the sun set behind the island, an aspect that is frequently remarked upon by visitors and tourism promoters, e.g.:

Undoubtedly, the most anticipated moment for everyone in this lovely beach is its famous sunset, a true spectacle for the senses that becomes even more amazing when it is accompanied by the mythical island of Es Vedrà, situated just off the coast. There is no more beautiful view to enjoy than watching the dim silhouette of the island while the warm colors of the sunset fade on the horizon. (Sant Josep, 2016: online)

While there are areas of rocky foreshore from which Es Vedrà can be clearly perceived, the only sandy beach with such a vista is located at Cala D'Hort. Combined with the allure of its narrow beach strip and a ramp that allows boats to be put into the bay, its low-angle perspective on Es Vedrà is a key attraction that is, similarly, evident in social media photos and is exploited by two restaurants located just above the main beach area (the El Carmen and Cala D'Hort) and one slightly higher up the coastal slope on the north side of the bay (The Mediterranean). All three have seating areas that grant patrons clear views of the scenic bay (see Figure 4, for instance), an aspect that the El Carmen represents in its logo (Figure 5).



Figure 4: Es Vedranell and Es Vedrà viewed from inside the terrace area at El Carmen restaurant, Cala D'Hort (Photograph by Philip Hayward, September 2018)



Figure 5: El Carmen restaurant sign, Cala D'Hort (Photograph by Philip Hayward, September 2018)

New Age

Insofar as they have connection to pre-existent mythologies and associations of place, the contemporary New Age/mystical mythology around Es Vedrà appears to derive from two strands. The first concerns the association of Ibiza with the Phoenician/Carthaginian goddess Tanit. While Tanit is prominent in the archaeological record across the western Mediterranean, her attributes and associations are unclear (Stuckley, 2015). She appears to share generic aspects with other goddesses, in that she is associated with (human and agricultural) fertility, but she also has another potential aspect in that her name has been interpreted as suggesting an association with Canaanite Sea-Dragon Tannin (Hyidberg-Hansen, 2012). While usually depicted in fully human form, Ibiza's Es Culleram temple cave site, at the far north eastern end of the island, contains a number of winged figurines that are unique to the site and, as described by López-Bertran:

depict females usually seated on a throne wearing a kalathos (headdress). The wings, the herald's wand (caduceus) and the solar disc or lotus flowers that the figure wears identify her as representing the Carthaginian goddess Tanit. The plain figurines are characterized by obvious iconographic references to Demeter such as a kalathos, a veil, torches, piglets and babies. The 17 incense burners (thymiateria) are in the shape of a female head habitually associated with the cult of Demeter and Persephone. (2011: 89)

The latter image — of a woman with a circular container on her head — is one that has been promulgated throughout the island as a visual motif associated with Tanit (rather than, more correctly, with Demeter/Persephone) particularly in logos and merchandise aimed at tourists (with the name and visual branding of the Tanit Beach resort, which opened in 2015, being the most notable example). While various of the accounts discussed below associate Tanit with Es Vedrà, this appears to be a modern — and highly speculative — linkage and there is no evidence of any association between Tanit, Es Vedrà and/or the Seas Paisses archaeological site near Cala D'Hort.

During the mid-late 20th century, the association of Tannit with Ibiza and of Es Vedrà with the mystical experiences of Fr Palau formed twin poles around which a set of modern folklore circulated, largely generated by resident, non-Ibizan counter-culturalists, travellers and those who sought to represent those tales at second hand. These poles were “powered” by another aspect, the perception of Ibiza and of Es Vedrà as having “energy vortices”. As Ivakhiv has characterised, places of natural wonder such as Mount Fuji in Japan and Sedona in the southwest USA “are believed by many to harbour ‘Earth energies’ of some sort — energies that are thought to be beneficial and health-promoting in their effects and catalytic to spiritual growth” (1997: 266). Similarly, other sites, such as Macchu Pichu in Peru and the Great Pyramid in Egypt, are valued for their ancient cultural value and are also often perceived as having enhanced value through some New Agers' belief that they “have been constructed in coordination with the natural energies represented by the former” and are similarly “charged” (ibid). As in the case of Glastonbury, such sites are also believed by some to attract UFOs and a variety of other paranormal phenomena.

As D'Andrea detailed in a study of techno music, New Age sensibilities and transnational counter-cultures:

Many expatriates, particularly those of a more mystical proclivity, described their presence on the island as a blessed mystery. Those into astrology claimed that Ibiza is ruled by Scorpio, a zodiacal sign that represents intense sensuality (and materialism), mysticism (and selfishness) and radical change (and betrayal). In the same vein, the sea rock of Es Vedrà has been an object of fantastic stories due to its peculiar standing shape and luminosity, its 'powerful energies.' And, while some residents jocosely commented on alleged predictions by Nostradamus that Ibiza would survive a nuclear war, others recalled rumors about geo-magnetic streams that could account for the 'special nature' of the island. (2007: 124)

As this quotation suggests, one element common within counter-cultural communities on Ibiza is a belief in healing and/or otherwise positive energies that can be nurtured and channelled by mediation, yoga, other spiritual practices, music, dance and/or the consumption of mind-altering substances. Es Vedrà — and, to varying extents, some other places on the island — have been regarded as possessing natural energies and as functioning (effectively) as “spiritual batteries” that both have their own impact on spiritually attuned individuals and are able to deliver a special “charge” to meditation (etc.) conducted in their vicinity. This belief is ably represented in a video uploaded to YouTube by long-term Ibiza resident Mark Bajerski that shows him approaching a cliff top overlooking Es Vedrà, arriving at a vista point and announcing his intention to meditate there. He memorably conveys the impact that the island's “charge” has on him as “like a thousand tons of feathers smashing you right in your heart” and refers to “the spiritual alignment of getting what can only be described as ... the perfect energy in certain places”. While the latter statement is in accord with a commonly perceived sensibility on and of Ibiza within the counter-culture, the “amplitude” of the spiritual charge attributed to Es Vedrà marks it as a particularly powerful location. In a surprising attempt to connect traditional religious beliefs with current perceptions of Es Vedrà as “spiritually charged”, the European Carmelite Mission has recently revived the special status of Es Vedrà — with regard to its significance for Francesc Palau in the 1850–60s — by featuring an image of the island at sunset on its official webpage that strongly resembles those used in various New Age social media contexts (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Image from main page of Carmelitas de Europa website (2019), showing Ibiza coast (far left) and Es Vedrà (centre left)

Medialoric Es Vedrà

Within the international counter-cultural community, its Ibiza participants, tourism entrepreneurs and, to some extent, elements of the Ibiza community more generally, a process of “co-mythologising” has occurred, not only with regard to Es Vedrà, as discussed in detail below, but also to a location on the coast directly opposite the island that merits reference. The site in question is a former coastal quarry at Sa Pedrera from which rectangular and circular blocks of various sizes were hewn, principally in the 16th century, to construct walls and buildings in Ibiza’s Old Town. The extraction of these blocks left geometric formations, forming natural, tidally replenished rock “baths” in some areas and leaving smooth surfaces that generations of visitors have adorned with carvings and inscriptions. Hippies and other travelers visiting the site in the 1960s–70s appear to have given it the name of “Atlantis/Lost Kingdom of Atlantis”, with the term persisting in tourist promotions as an attractive moniker and conceptual “hook” for subsequent tourists. This element has been cross-associated with Es Vedrà in recent media-lore, and particularly on the internet, in the manner characterised by Hallerton:

The Internet is a wonderfully sprawling repository of arcane fictions and crypto-everything. Its fragmentary and often inter-generative texts thrive and gain momentum with the slightest (and often most erroneous) of pretexts, generating threads of online mythology that variously intersect with older folkloric and mythological stories or else develop independently. (2016: 112)

The material referred to by Hallerton is that generated by a sprawling community of internet users who have various motivations for posting material and whose contributions towards the topics they address are rarely (if ever) externally assessed with regard to any kind of veracity to traditional forms of knowledge and/or research. A survey of website, blog and social media postings, visual artworks of various kinds and audio-visual media texts conducted by the authors in early 2019 identified the following clusters of elements associated with Es Vedrà:

a. New Age/Extraterrestrial Aspects and Energies

1. Its mysterious and/or spiritual energy — an aspect that appears to derive from the writings of Josep Palau;
2. Its (literal) magnetism — Heavey, for example, states:

According to experts, the rock of Es Vedrà is one of the strongest centres of magnetic forces in the world ... What does appear certain is that the magnetic fields around Es Vedrà disorientate birds' flight patterns ... (2017: online)

(NB this claim is somewhat peculiar given that Es Vedrà is a limestone outcrop with no magnetic attributes);

3. Its position as one of the boundary points of a mysterious zone akin to the Atlantic's Bermuda Triangle, sometimes referred to as a narrow "triangle of silence" between Alicante, Mallorca and Es Vedrà where "sailors and airplanes have noticed strange energies that affected their equipment" (San Josep, 2016: online);
4. Strange lights and/or objects rising from or descending into the sea in the area and odds sounds heard in and above the waters;
5. Es Vedrà's status as a UFO visitation "hot-spot" (an aspect that may be related to the famous "Manises" incident over the western Mediterranean in 1979 when an airliner diverted from its flightpath when its pilots perceived it to be intercepted by UFOs (Admin, 2012) (also see Figure 7); and
6. Its status as a remnant of the lost island of Atlantis. This association appears substantially aligned with/derived from the modern appellation and associations given to coastal quarry site at Sa Pedrera discussed above.

b. Mythic/Folkloric Femininity

1. An association with Tanit (deriving from the broader association of Ibiza with the Carthaginian goddess); and
2. An association with mermaids (apparently loosely aligned to 1. [above] and suggested by associations of other western Mediterranean islands with sirens in ancient mythology¹¹).



Figure 7: Digital image showing an artist's impression of UFOs flying around Es Vedrà (source: Heavey, 2016: online)

The two clusters of female imagery are often cross-associated, as in the following blog post, which places the island at the centre of two classical myths in a manner not suggested in any mainstream reference source:

It is said of Es Vedra that it is the birthplace of the Phoenician goddess Tanit, it has also been mentioned that this ancient island was the home of the sea nymphs and mermaids who tried to decoy the great Ulysses in Homer's Odyssey of his ship. (Hang Loose Ibiza, 2016: online)

The visual design of the mermaid in Cristina Prieto's artwork 'Sirena en Es Vedrà' (Figure 8) neatly draws together the above associations by virtue of depicting its eponymous, fish-tailed *sirena* with small wings, like those on the Tanit figurines discovered at Es Culleram.¹²



Figure 8: ‘Sirena en Es Vedrà,’ Cristina Prieto (2015?)

Exemplifying Hallerton’s comments about the “fragmentary and often inter-generative texts” that occur on social media, an online commentator on mystic matters named Lisa provides a verbal summary of the various threads of legends and media-lore referred to above in a talk-to-camera entitled *Es Vedra Ibiza: Mysteries, Legends, UFO sightings?* (2018). While she introduces her talk as collating material she has found on the topic, it also illustrates the “Chinese whispers” element of serial re-telling by embellishing and inflecting her material. (At one point, for example, she states that she will commence by giving the “facts” about the island first and then mentions that Fr. Palau claimed to have seen “extra-terrestrials” during his visits to the island — which he did not.) Her spoken word explication is also notable for being one of the few that references an actual Ibizan folkloric tale that is omitted from the melange of elements usually associated with Es Vedrà. Lisa provides a summary of an Ibizan tale known as *Es Gegant des Vedrà* (“The Giant of Es Vedrà”), which was collected by the folklorist Joan Castelló Guasch sometime in the late 1940s or early 1950s and was published in 1952. The story concerns an ailing Ibizan fisherman’s wife and her two sons who visit Es Vedrà to gather a special type of rock samphire (*Crithmum maritimum*) growing on the island in order to heal him. Their mission was particularly fraught in that they had to overcome an inhospitable giant to obtain the plant, which they managed through presenting the giant with an octopus stuffed with sea urchins, which incapacitated him after he ate it, allowing them to gather their crop and escape. The reason for the lack of incorporation of this story into the modern media-lore around the island is open to conjecture, but one notable element is that the giant (and his aggression and negativity) are antithetical to the positive “vibes”

associated with Es Vedrà in contemporary media-lore and therefore resist easy assimilation into contemporary place mythology.

Musical Visions

In addition to website material and social media postings, the associative elements detailed above have been frequently represented in musical contexts. There are a wide variety of tracks (or mixes of other tracks) that are entitled Es Vedrà; a music ensemble named Es Vedrà; a YouTube music channel named Es Vedrà; and a variety of live music performances filmed on the cliffs overlooking Es Vedrà. The majority of these are in various combinations of the digital, mid-tempo groove “chill-out” style associated with the island (exemplified by music releases on the Café del Mar label) or the more up-tempo style of dance music associated with Ibizan “mega-clubs” such as Amnesia and Ushuaïa. The variously relaxed and/or meditative mid-tempo grooves of the former and progressions of slow-paced sections, “builds” and climaxes in the latter support New Age sensibilities and senses of spiritual energy that are widely associated with the Ibizan scene. Through the names of the material and the visual images that accompany the tracks in their YouTube uploads, which frequently show the island as perceived from shoreline vantage points, Es Vedrà is imbued with associations that complement the affective significance of the music. Examples of the latter include the B-Tribe’s 2008 track ‘Es Vedrà’¹³ and Aly & Fila vs The Thrillseekers’ identically named 2015 track.¹⁴ There are also a number of musical performances in clifftop locations overlooking Es Vedrà available online, ranging from amateur ones that have received few views through to Giorgia Angiuli’s late afternoon 86-minute long, digital keyboard-based piece (filmed in 2018) which has been watched by 1.34 million viewers to date.¹⁵ Angiuli’s track builds its dynamic pattern in real-time synchronisation with the movement of the sun as sets behind Es Vedrà, the changes in light enhancing the musical experience and providing a strong evocation of space and prompting 1,156 almost uniformly positive viewer comments (as of 20 March 2019). A different vantage point is provided in the video of DJ Don Diablo performing a set onboard a cruise boat moored off the island.¹⁶ There are also a number of hybrid audio-visual texts available online, such as *How to get to ATLANTIS IBIZA, next to Es Vedra* (2015)¹⁷ that combine travelogue-style representations of the Sa Pedrera site with shots of Es Vedrà from nearby cliffs and “chill-out” music. Cross-associating music of a different kind, the practice of yoga (which is widespread on the island) and Es Vedrà’s spiritual mystique, a local yoga teacher named Dagmar also filmed a “Vinyasa Flow” video promoting her business in which she performs various yoga moves to the accompaniment of a *hang* (standing bell) played by a male accompanist with the island as a visual backdrop.¹⁸ These tracks, and many similar audio-visual texts available on YouTube, serve to perpetuate Es Vedrà (or, rather, the island viewed from nearby vantage points) as a spectacular, spiritually imbued and special place and provided a strong contemporary association of it with Ibizan electronic music styles (as a form of meta-textual soundtrack).

Conclusion

This article has primarily addressed Es Vedrà as an island perceived from nearby vantage points and imaginatively interpreted by modern-day recreational pilgrims, media producers and creative artists, almost none of whom appear to have ventured on to its slopes. In these regards, the island primarily exists in socio-cultural discourse as an *imagined entity*. As an immaterial object of this type, the various — and often fanciful — narratives and characterisations that have been affixed to it operate within their own logic systems and rationales that “snowball” as they progress chronologically, adding fresh layers. The materiality of the island is simultaneously a premise for them and a largely redundant aspect of their elaboration. One of the few audio-visual texts to actually document the island provides a very different vision. Although Es Vedrà is introduced by the documentary’s participants in familiar terms — “no question this island inspires people” — a *National Geographic* sponsored team that obtained a permit to visit the island and photograph its endemic lizards produced a short video entitled *The Symbol #3 Es Vedra* (2012)¹⁹ that showed its vertical landscapes, slippery scree slopes, minimal vegetation and occasional lizards in a manner that emphasised the physical rawness of the island (rather than its embellishment with mystic associations). The video thereby performed a useful historical “looping” function. By representing the difficult and exposed slopes that Fr. Palau had to negotiate in order to traverse the island and reach the points of the summit on which he experienced visions of a mystic female presence, the video both returns the viewer to the origins of the contemporary myth of “mystic Es Vedrà” and asserts the material character of the island in a manner lacking in other contemporary representations. But despite this re-assertion of the essential materiality of Es Vedrà, the island remains a key location on an international recreational pilgrimage circuit and one that forms a new sub-category within the formation initially suggested by Kedzior (2012) whereby such sites are required to possess distinct natural beauty and vestiges of ancient civilisations. As a thoroughly modern addition to the “A List” of iconic New Age places, Es Vedrà’s status is strongly predicated on its medialoric elaboration and is, thus, as much an *invention* of recreational pilgrim sensibilities as it is the recipient of them.

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Endnotes

¹ In this regard it resembles the elevated five salt-domes of south west Louisiana that have been perceived as “land islands” by successive population groups (see Hayward, 2016 for discussion).

² Our research has failed to uncover a single claim of illicit visitation to Es Vedrà by visitors. This is in striking contrast to the number of tourists and/or recreational pilgrims who climb Uluru during visits to Central Australia despite explicit requests that such visitations should not occur since the site is regarded as a holy (and thereby restricted access) one by the indigenous people of the region.

³ Such as, for example, the spiralling, ancient pathways that mark the recreational pilgrim’s ascent to Glastonbury Tor.

⁴ *Vista*, an Italian term meaning “sight” or “view”, was adopted into English language in the mid-1650s and has come to refer to a sightline onto a pleasing landscape (Online Etymological Dictionary: nd).

⁵ Similar place names existed in the northern Iberian Peninsula, the most famous examples of which are the town of Pontevedra and the village of Vedra, in Galicia.

⁶ Barcelona was, at those times, one of the most important industrial cities of southern Europe, with the highest concentration of working-class population, and uprisings were frequent and often involved the burning and looting of religious buildings.

⁷ As illustrated in the video *The Symbol #3 Es Vedra* (2012), discussed in the conclusion to this article, such climbs were arduous and risky.

⁸ They were not the first to find in the island an oasis of liberty. Since the beginning of the 20th century Catalan artists visited Ibiza in search for inspiration, and in the 1930s a group of German intellectuals moved there to escape Nazism, among them the philosopher Walter Benjamin and the artist Raoul Hausman.

⁹ King Crimson’s 1969 song ‘Formentera Lady’ is one memento of such sojourns.

¹⁰ See, for instance, the range accessed by a Google Image search for “Es Vedra photos”.

¹¹ Such as the Sirenas archipelago, off Italy’s Amalfi Coast, which is reputed by have been the home of sirens in the pre-Christian era.

¹² The association of Es Vedrà with the Odyssey is also explored by French artist Chloé Poirier Sauvé in a sequentially evolving, seven-minute duration sand drawing performed in 2015 and uploaded to YouTube, set to music by Debussy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFkP9joZAv0> — accessed 20 March 2019

¹³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETKIP4IImiA> — accessed 20 March 2019.

¹⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XQ3PjJqc6qs> — accessed 20 March 2019.

¹⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MpOG56E0VaQ> — accessed 20 March 2019.

¹⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ikRwLOK5IX0> — accessed 20 March 2019.

¹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tqCoksZhpE> — accessed 20 March 2019.

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=obLEZDOrRRk> — accessed 20 March 2019.

¹⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Wj67ZMjLzk> — accessed 20 March 2019.