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# Trails of death

*The common graves  
of the Civil War*

**A trail is a vestige, something remaining of what was once, basically, physical: ancient fortresses, walls, buildings... But they can also be footprints, of espadrilles or of animals, signs that continually become clues, marks to follow, trails that may not lead anywhere, may be lost or may lead to the desired place. With the common graves of the Civil War, strangely, the two meanings converge: they are trails due to the fact that they are vestiges, and at the same time they are trails due to the fact that they are signs.**

**They are vestiges** insofar as they are trails of our past. Trails of the most extreme kind: with the graves, death in the war becomes obvious. The victims, all of them, cease to be numbers, statistics, comparative figures, names written in books. The graves, open and with the bones in them visible to all, become clues, signs, with which we can get a glimpse, seventy years after the war and without having lived through it, of what that conflict must have been like. Their trail suddenly takes us back seventy years.

Everything concerning the common graves can be approached from many different angles given that it is a wholly interdisciplinary subject. From the field of archaeology, because when a grave is opened and the remains are taken from it, this has to be done with archaeological methodology; from the field of forensic anthropology, as it is not enough to take out the remains: they have to be studied in order to determine if they were men or women, if they suffered fractures before or after they died, if death was caused by firearms, blows or bleeding<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, the subject is now beginning to be studied from the psychological point of view<sup>2</sup> and it is not necessary to remember all the legal implications concerning the graves and the demands being made in the nationalities, regions, autonomous communities, the State and at an international level for the issue to be dealt with from the point of view of criminal justice, in the sense that they be considered as proof of crimes against humanity<sup>3</sup> or the request made to the State for the Attorney General to intervene and look into the forced disappearances. In this article, however, the aim is to deal with the issue of the common graves from the historical point of view.

In Spain the common graves of the war began to be opened up in 2000, with the exhumation of thirteen sets of human remains, of thirteen men who were murdered on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1936 by Falangists who took advantage of the war to act with impunity<sup>4</sup>. They lived in the region of El Bierzo (León) and were summoned to go to the town hall in Villafranca del Bierzo, where they were kept for a couple of days, before being taken to their deaths in lorries, not without first stopping at two houses to pick up more men, who were also murdered. The Falangists shot them just outside Priaranza del Bierzo, where they left the lifeless bodies without burying them, a job they made the people of Priaranza do.

■ <sup>1</sup> ETXEBERRIA, F., "Panorama organizativo sobre Antropología y Patología Forense en España. Algunas propuestas para el estudio de fosas con restos humanos de la Guerra Civil española de 1936", in *La memoria de los olvidados. Un debate sobre el silencio de la represión franquista*, Ámbito, Valladolid, 2004, pp. 183-219.

<sup>2</sup> FOUCE, J. G., "Recuperación de la memoria histórica desde la psicología", *Psicología sin fronteras. Revista Electrónica de Psicología y Comunitaria*, 2 (2006); you can consult the webpage [http://www.psicologossinfronteras.net/revistal \(2\) 7.htm](http://www.psicologossinfronteras.net/revistal (2) 7.htm). The group that up to now has

got most involved in the psychological care of the relatives of those buried in graves is Psicólogos sin Fronteras in Madrid.

<sup>3</sup> See the information published by the Equipo Nizkor signed and subscribed by many of the state associations concerned with historical memory. *La cuestión de la impunidad en España y los crímenes franquistas, Equipo Nizkor* (14-IV-2004), can be consulted on the webpage <http://www.derechos.org/nizkor/>.

<sup>4</sup> See [www.memoriahistorica.org](http://www.memoriahistorica.org), and SILVA, E. and MACÍAS, S., *Las fosas de Franco*, Temas de Hoy, Madrid, 2003.

This is the situation, with slight differences, that arose on the whole in the parts of Spain where the coup d'état succeeded right from the start or after a few months, and also in the territory the troops took control of as the war progressed, although courts martial, with no legal guarantees of any kind, and shootings by firing squad soon began to be imposed, without, a priori, the secret murders and burials being necessary.

These graves are what most people think of and imagine when the issue of common graves crops up. And it is with regard to these graves that the movement to recover the historical memory has come into being or emerged: the grandson of one of the victims buried in the common grave of Priaranza del Bierzo was the person behind digging it up, the exhumation, the anthropological and genetic analyses of the remains, and he was the creator of the Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica (ARMH).

After the opening up of this grave and the creation of the association, people all over the country began to come out as witnesses to the existence of a common grave or claiming that one of their relatives was buried in a common grave. It was not the first time that graves had been dug up in Spain: during the years of the Transition graves had been opened and remains taken out that relatives took to the cemeteries, above all in the area of La Rioja<sup>5</sup>, but these actions were brought to a sudden halt by the attempted coup d'état of 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1981. Between then and the year 2000, the fact of the existence of common graves did not re-emerge into the public domain, and when it did it was with the support of a most important tool of unforeseeable scope: the Internet.

After the news appeared in the press hundreds of families got in touch with the ARMH, especially via the Internet, given that it had set up a web page, asking for help with digging up a grave or locating a relative. On 19<sup>th</sup> March 2003 the ARMH gave the number of 35,000 people buried in graves all over Spain<sup>6</sup>. Between then and 2006 a hundred and four were opened, from which a total of nine hundred and five sets of human remains were taken<sup>7</sup>. Of these 104 graves, two were found in Catalonia, one in the old cemetery of Olesa de Montserrat (El Baix Llobregat), where the remains of the people they were looking for were not found<sup>8</sup>, and another in Prats de Lluçanès (Osona), an exhumation carried out by the Generalitat de Catalunya, where seven sets of remains were dug up, six republican soldiers and a civilian<sup>9</sup>. For the moment, in the rest of the Catalan Countries no other graves have been opened up.

However, with regard to this entire movement in Spain (the news of the opening of the grave in Priaranza del Bierzo, the emergence of the movement for the recovery of the historical memory, the common graves of civilians who were victims of reprisals by Falangists, the Guardia Civil or the Francoist army, their location and opening up), the intention has been to extrapolate the whole situation to the Catalan Countries, when

■ <sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 122.

<sup>6</sup> "Agujeros en el silencio", *La Vanguardia* (19-III-2003), p. 48.

<sup>7</sup> Information provided by Francisco Etxeberria Gabilondo, titular lecturer of Legal and Forensic Medicine at the University of the Basque Country, who has taken part in many of these studies on graves.

<sup>8</sup> GASSIOT, E., OLTRA, J. and SINTES, E., *Recuperació de la memòria dels afusellaments de febrer de 1939 a Olesa*

*de Montserrat. Informe preliminar de la intervenció al Cementiri Vell (novembre 2004)*, Departament de Prehistòria de la UAB/Associació per la memòria històrica de Catalunya (ARMHC), Bellaterra, 2005; you can consult <http://www.memoriacatalunya.org/reportatges.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> You can consult information on the opening of this grave on the webpage <http://www.osona.com/arxiuspdf/FossaDossier.pdf>.

the situation here was quite different: neither in Catalonia nor in Valencia did the coup d'état of 18<sup>th</sup> July succeed, while the situation in the Balearic Isles was also idiosyncratic. Nor could the void denounced by the associations that from 2000 were being created all over Spain in relation to the historical memory be extrapolated: the fact that the war, Francoism and the repression had not been studied; the fact that there was a deliberate information vacuum, because the Transition had meant the victory of oblivion.

Yet this is not quite the situation. In Spain and especially in the Catalan Countries this period has been studied for years and books have been published that analyse the violence during the war and the post-war period although, truth be told, these studies have not reached the public domain. The books were written, the specialists knew about them, but not the people. A lack of interest? The inability of the historians to reach the people? Perhaps the time was not right and it was necessary to wait for the grandchildren to mobilise? Because what we have seen with the passage of time, since 2000, is that it is the grandchildren of those who lived through the war who have mobilised, who are leading the tributes to their grandparents, leading the movement to “recover the memory” and the actions being carried out in the different sectors concerning this “memory”. In Spain, since the 1980s there have been notable books studying the war and analysing the repression<sup>10</sup>, and also in the Catalan Countries, where the studies by Josep Maria Solé i Sabaté and Joan Villarroya<sup>11</sup> stand out in Catalonia, Josep Massot<sup>12</sup> and Llorenç Capellà<sup>13</sup> in Majorca and Vicent Gavarda<sup>14</sup> in the Valencian Country, studies made in depth, thoroughly, free of political apriorisms.

**The movement concerning the historical memory** has been very positive for many reasons, above all for bringing history to the people: there is no longer a fear of this knowledge (of the contemporary age) and many people are daring to gather oral testimonies, to go through archives, to carry out very diverse studies to make documentaries. The initial criticism in the universities over the lack of investigations has stopped and has been transferred to the institutions. Slowly the work of historians over the years is coming to light, even though it was not excessively well known outside academic circles, and the criticism is transferred to the different governments, from the municipalities to the State, in a situation that is becoming paradoxical: the “memorialist

■ <sup>10</sup> Without wishing to exhaust the subject, see, from the 1980s, NADAL, A., *La guerra civil en Málaga*, Arguval, Málaga, 1984; MORENO GÓMEZ, F., *La guerra civil en Córdoba (1936-1939)*, Alpuerto, Madrid, 1985; and ID.: *Córdoba en la posguerra (la represión y la guerrilla, 1939-1950)*, Francisco Baena, ed., Córdoba, 1987; HERNÁNDEZ GARCÍA, A., *La represión en La Rioja durante la guerra civil*, ed. by author, Logroño, 1984; HERRERO BALSÀ, G. and HERNÁNDEZ GARCÍA, A., *La represión en Soria durante la guerra civil*, ed. by the authors, Almazán, 1982; and CABRERA ACOSTA, M. Á., *La represión en Hierro (1936-1944)*, Tagoron, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 1985. Studies of the war and the repression continued to be made in the 1990s and are still being made.

<sup>11</sup> Among others, SOLÉ I SABATÉ, J. M., *La represió franquista a Catalunya 1938-1953*, Edicions 62, Barcelona, 1985; SOLÉ I SABATÉ, J. M. and VILLARROYA I

FONT, J., *La represió a la guerra i a la postguerra a la comarca del Maresme (1936-1945)*, Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat (PAM), Barcelona, 1983; and SOLÉ I SABATÉ, J. M. and VILLARROYA I FONT, J., *La represió a la reraguarda de Catalunya. 1936-1939*, PAM, Barcelona, 1989.

<sup>12</sup> MASSOT I MUNTANER, J., *Guerra civil i represió a Mallorca*, PAM, Barcelona, 1979; and ID.: *Vida i miracles del “Conde Rossi”. Mallorca, agost-setembre 1936. Màlaga, gener-febrer 1937*, PAM, Barcelona, 1988.

<sup>13</sup> CAPELLÀ, L., *Diccionari vermell*, Moll, Mallorca, 1989.

<sup>14</sup> GABARDA CEBELLÀ, V., *Els afusellaments al País Valencià (1938-1956)*, Alfons el Magnànim, Valencia, 1993 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Publicacions de la Universitat de València, Valencia, 2007), and ID.: *La represión en la retaguardia republicana: País Valenciano, 1936-1939*, Alfons el Magnànim, Valencia, 1996.

groups” are demanding more and more from the institutions. Yet at the same time these groups concerned with the historical memory are never satisfied and, what is more, as time goes by, the differences within them are increasingly accentuated and the disagreements are leading to open confrontation. Reaching agreement on the treatment that everything making up the “memory”<sup>15</sup> should be given, such as the archives, the data in them, the statues, the symbolic monuments like El Valle de los Caídos, the street names, the victims of the war, of Francoist repression, everything to do with the representation of the events of the war and Francoism seventy years later, in this situation, seems rather unlikely.

**What we have seen since 2000 is that it is the grandchildren who are leading the tributes to their grandparents, leading the movement to “recover the memory”**

As I was saying, almost certainly due to ignorance of the work of historians on the period of the war and Francoism, at least in Catalonia, the extrapolation that I mentioned of the situation existing in Spain with regard to the common graves occurred. And not only was it extrapolated from Spain, but the situations of people who had disappeared and were secretly buried in Argentina, Chile and Guatemala were also taken as examples. When, in 2003, the subject came to light, in Catalonia only the murders and the covering up of crimes perpetrated by

people supporting the regime through secret interment in graves by Francoist troops, the Guardia Civil and Falangists were mentioned. These graves of course do exist in Catalonia, the territory we will be looking at here, but it must be pointed out that they are not the majority and that there has often been a certain degree of demagoguery when talking about those who disappeared, meaning people from the Republican side who the soldiers went looking for in their homes, kidnapped, murdered and wanted to cover up the crime, as happened in other parts of Spain or in many South American dictatorships. In Catalonia, and quite possibly the situation varies little from what happened in the Valencian Country, the graves are mainly of soldiers. In fact, the graves in Catalonia can be divided into seven types according to the reason why they came about, which at the same time coincides in good measure with the development of the war and Franco’s subsequent dictatorship.

**The first type is the product of the revolutionary situation** that overwhelmed the authorities of the Generalitat between July and December 1938. They are the graves that were created due to the need to bury, in secret, the victims of the so-called “uncontrolled elements”, people who, due to a revolution wrongly understood, who were mostly members of the CNT-FAI but also of the other parties and trade unions of the time, perpetrated murders with impunity all over Catalonia, in which the chief victims were religious people, wealthy people, churchgoers, or those considered to be against the revolution<sup>16</sup>. The bodies of their victims met various fates: abandoned on the spot where they were killed (there are many places in Catalonia known for this), cremated or buried

inside or outside cemeteries, in common graves. However, there are not many of these graves left now seeing as almost all of them were dug up or dignified by the Francoist authorities once the war had finished and the new dictatorial regime had been installed. They were also dug up and the people who had been responsible for the killings were prosecuted by the Republican authorities in order to incriminate them. On 21<sup>st</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> April 1937 the special court for the investigation of the excesses of the first months of the war was set up and three special judges were appointed to carry out this task, with the wholehearted support of Josep Andreu i Abelló, president of the Audiència de Barcelona and the Tribunal de Cassació de Catalunya<sup>17</sup>: Josep Bertran de Quintana, Josep Vidal Lletche and Fernández Ros. They were charged with making the necessary enquiries in order to discover where these graves, known as secret cemeteries, were dig them up and identify the victims. Legal proceedings were instituted for each of the secret cemeteries discovered and dug up, and the circumstances of the deaths were investigated: possible killers, dates of death and the arrest of those accused. On 18<sup>th</sup> November 1937 a summary of the actions carried out in Catalonia was made: it produced 2,073 victims, 175 defendants, 32 absentees, 128 prisoners and 15 people freed on bail. From this summary we know the towns where action was taken and the exhumations carried out: in Molins de Llobregat (de Rei) 18 exhumations; Montcada about 1,600; Les Corts 120; El Prat de Llobregat 2; Terrassa 183; Sitges 56; Figueres 6; Boadella 1; in the garage of Carrer Casanova, 29, in Barcelona, 4; Calonge 14; Olot 9; Balenyà 1; Farners de la Selva (Santa Coloma de Farners) 8; Palau-solità 3; Vallirana and Cervelló 32; Pobla de Lillet 6, and Vilafranca del Penedès 10<sup>18</sup>.

As has been said already, despite these exhumations and those carried out by the Francoist authorities, graves still remain of people who suffered reprisals in the rearguard, and therefore many people do not know where their relative or close friend is, who one day went out of the house and did not return, or was arrested at home and taken away even in his underwear to one of the many places all over Catalonia where killings and secret burials were carried out. There are not many of these graves and, most importantly: with all the work done on them, by both the Republican and Francoist authorities, if they were not located then, it will be very difficult to do so now.

■ <sup>15</sup> JULIÀ, S., “Bajo el imperio de la Memoria”, *Revista de Occidente*, 302-303 (2006), pp. 7-19, describes the situation concerning memory and the use made of it: “For some years, not just in Spain, we have been living under the sign of memory. In the past, about thirty years ago, we were interested in what had happened during the Republic and the Civil War: establishing the facts, interpreting the texts, analysing the situations. Today, when a new generation of historians, scholars, cultural critics born around the time of the Transition has come to the fore, what actually happened does not interest as much as the memory of it; not the facts but their representations, which take on a sort of autonomous existence, independent of the facts represented”.

<sup>16</sup> See principally the books mentioned above by Josep Maria Solé i Sabaté and Joan Villarroya. Since these

works appeared other studies of the repression in both the Republican and Francoist rearguards have appeared, basically at a local level, which have complemented or qualified the data, but always from the basis of these studies.

<sup>17</sup> To study in depth the administration of justice in Catalonia during this period, see BALCELLS, A., *Justícia i presons després de maig de 1937 a Catalunya. Intents regularitzadors del conseller Bosch Gimpera*, Rafael Dalmau, Barcelona, 1989, and VÁZQUEZ OSUNA, F., *La rebel·lió dels tribunals. L'administració de justícia a Catalunya (1931-1953). La judicatura i el ministeri fiscal*, Afers, Catarroja-Barcelona, 2005.

<sup>18</sup> SOLÉ I SABATÉ, J. M., and VILLARROYA I FONT, J., *La repressió a la rera guarda...*, op. cit., p. 227.

The graves of the next type came into being from 1937 onwards, with the establishment by the Servicio de Investigación Militar (SIM) of the work camps in Catalonia<sup>19</sup>. On 28<sup>th</sup> December 1936, Reus-born Joan Garcia Oliver, an important member of the FAI and minister of Justice in the Republican government, created them by decree under the direction and administration of the Servicio de Investigación Militar (SIM). Initially the people going to the camps were those accused of acting against the revolution or the Republic: priests, traders, shopkeepers, men known for their support of the Falange or the military coup, people who had joined the fifth column to erode the republican rearguard from within, students or ordinary men sympathizing with the Lliga. After the Events of May, ironically for the man who had created them, anarchists or POUM militants or sympathisers also ended up there.

All of them had been arrested, most of them tried or awaiting trial, and moved to these camps with the aim of using them as a workforce. They were put to work building above all fortifications: trenches and machine gun nests, the defensive lines that would have to halt the Francoist troops if they ever penetrated Catalonia. In Catalonia they were created after April 1938, once Lleida had fallen (on the 3<sup>rd</sup>). They were sited in the Poble Espanyol of Barcelona, on Montjuïc (camp no. 1); at Vandellós and L'Hospitalet de l'Infant (El Baix Camp) with an accessory in Tivissa (La Ribera d'Ebre) (camp no. 2); at Omells de Na Gaia (L'Urgell, camp no. 3), which was later moved to Vila-sana (El Pla d'Urgell) and Cabó (L'Alt Urgell); at Concabella (Segarra, camp no. 4), later moved to Barbens (El Pla d'Urgell); at Ogern de Bassellà (L'Alt Urgell), moved later to Anglesola (L'Urgell, camp no. 5); and camp no. 6, the last one, which initially was in Falset (El Priorat) and which had accessory camps in the same *comarca* at Cabassers, Gratallops, La Figuera and Porrera, and was eventually moved to Arbeca (Les Garrigues) and subsequently annexed to camp no. 3, where most of the prisoners were finally moved.

**All the witnesses who were in the work camps** tell of mistreatment by the guards, men who instead of being at the front with the conscripted soldiers who were laying down their lives, preferred to be in the rearguard, guarding defenceless prisoners and (some of them) at times physically mistreating them until they died. Several graves arose from these camps, especially from work camp n<sup>o</sup> 3, in Omells de Na Gaia (L'Urgell), where the locals still remember how the whole village was turned into a work camp and how a lot of prisoners were killed and buried round about. Many of the graves arising from the work camps of the SIM were also dug up and the remains moved to cemeteries, but others are still in the same place they were dug and the bodies interred in 1938.

The third type of graves are those that resulted from the repression carried out by the rebel troops when they occupied new territory. In Catalonia, the most paradigmatic case, well known and studied, are the graves of El Pallars Sobirà, studied and documented by Manuel Gimeno<sup>20</sup>. They are graves that arose from the killing by the Francoist troops of the 62<sup>nd</sup> Division, commanded by General Sagardía Ramos, of old people, women and children who suffered the reprisals instead of their parents, husbands or sons. The troops, upon going to search the respective houses of their victims and not finding them, took the closest relatives, who before they reached Tremp were already dead and in the ground. The troops went in search of the incriminated men in their houses but the soldiers did not know the people of the area. They must have been given these names by local people in the *comarca*, one of the largest and most sparsely populated in Catalonia:

“It was people from the villages that suffered reprisals who handed over the victims to their military executioners. Why did they do it? For reasons of political rivalry? Not necessarily. As revenge for the wrong done them during the revolutionary period? Not likely either, as in El Pallars Sobirà there had not been as much violence or as many right-wing people imprisoned as in other parts. No; the most immediate causes of the tragic betrayals were envy and financial interests. This is the reason for so much moral wretchedness and so many denunciations”<sup>21</sup>.

What triggered off the deaths were above all reprisals for the military infiltrations, between April and December 1938, by the republicans in the *comarca*, trying to block the road that crosses it, and cut off communications between the Valleys of Àneu and Sort. Between 15<sup>th</sup> April and 5<sup>th</sup>

November sixty-nine men and women from the *comarca* were killed, most of them buried secretly outside the cemeteries. Some of these graves were dug up during the dictatorship; others, however, are still there where the Francoist troops had them dug and buried their victims.

Those of El Pallars are known thanks to the studies done by Manuel Gimeno, but between April and December 1938 there were other parts of Catalonia

occupied by the Francoist troops in which they were able to act with absolute impunity: the Francoist rearguard in the Vall d’Aran, L’Alta Ribagorça, El Pallars Jussà, La Noguera, El Segrià, El Montsià and El Baix Ebre are likely to have witnessed events just as tragic as those in El Pallars Sobirà.

The graves of soldiers, the fourth type, are, as I have already said, the majority in Catalonia. Within this type there are different sorts: at the front, at the Ebro and in the retreat. In Catalonia the front was more or less fixed for nine months along the rivers flowing from north to south in the west of the Principality —the Noguera Pallaresa, the Segre and the Ebro. These were months of constant fighting, although the Republican offensives of May and November stand out, above all around the bridgeheads that the Francoist army managed to establish at Tremp, La Baronia de Sant Oïsmè, Balaguer and Seròs and which resulted in great loss of life, soldiers who were buried in big graves near the front itself and, therefore, outside the cemeteries. Some of these graves were moved to the basilica of El Valle de los Caídos at the end of the 1950s, where Franco and his

Graves still remain of people who suffered reprisals in the rearguard, and therefore many people do not know where their relative or close friend is

■ <sup>19</sup> BADIA, F., *Els camps de treball a Catalunya durant la guerra civil (1936-1939)*, PAM, Barcelona, 2001.

<sup>20</sup> GIMENO, M., *Revolució, guerra i repressió al Pallars (1936-1939)*, PAM, Barcelona, 1987.

<sup>21</sup> GIMENO, M., “La repressió durant l’ocupació franquista del Pallars”, in SOLÉ I SABATÉ, J. M. and VILLARROYA I FONT, J. (eds.), *La guerra civil a Catalunya. Vol. 3: Catalunya, centre neuràlgic de la guerra*, Edicions 62, Barcelona, 2004, pp. 152-154.



government wanted the remains of soldiers and “martyrs” killed all over Spain to be laid to rest. Initially designed only for soldiers from the rebel army, in the end Republican soldiers were also taken there<sup>22</sup>.

In the south of Catalonia it was also a river that marked the line between the two armies. In this case, from the confluence in Mequinensa of the rivers Segre and Ebro to where the latter flows into the sea, the river divided the Catalonia occupied by the Francoist army from still-Republican Catalonia. On this occasion, however, unlike the rivers Segre and Noguera Pallaresa, there was no point anywhere in the four *comarques* the river flows through (La Terra Alta, La Ribera d’Ebre, El Baix Ebre and El Montsià) at which Franco’s army could cross the river and set up a bridgehead on the other side. In April 1938, then, the frontline in the south of the country was the river Ebro, and it stayed this way until July, when the Republican army launched a major offensive: on 25<sup>th</sup> July the Republican troops crossed the Ebro at various places, beginning the great battle of the Spanish Civil War: the Battle of the Ebro<sup>23</sup>.

A great many died in the battle —it is impossible to give an exact figure<sup>24</sup>— and just a few days after it began it became a battle of trenches, of attrition, of holding positions won in the first few days and retreating very slowly. Logically, these dead were buried, almost always in large common graves, if not cremated for reasons basically of health. On the rebel side they were moved to graves prepared mostly in cemeteries in the villages just behind the lines (Gandesa, Bot, Batea, Horta de Sant Joan); very seldom was the Republican army able to pick up and bury its soldiers, seeing as basically in the first few days it held the territory it had won and until November 1938 it only retreated, without being able to recover the bodies of comrades left lying in enemy territory. Apart from the large graves mentioned, there may also have been some around Corbera d’Ebre or Vilalba dels Arcs, where heavy fighting took place. Most of these graves, however, were moved to El Valle de los Caídos<sup>25</sup>. The thousands of soldiers who died in the Pàndols or Cavalls mountains were not moved and were buried, out of necessity, in bomb craters or trenches.

■ <sup>22</sup> SUEIRO, D., *El Valle de los Caídos. Los secretos de la cripta franquista*, Argos Vergara, Barcelona, 1983; and SOLÉ, Queralt: “Banys, hospital i cementiri”, *Cadi-Pedraforca*, 1 (2006).

<sup>23</sup> One of the latest publications about the Battle of the Ebro is the book by SÁNCHEZ CERVELLÓ, J. and CLUA, P., *La Batalla de l’Ebre: un riu de sang*, Espais de la Batalla de l’Ebre, Gandesa, 2005. There are many works, however, focusing on this important episode; see, for example, BLANCO, C., *La incompetencia militar de Franco*, Alianza, Madrid, 2000, CARDONA, G. and LOSADA, J. C., *Aunque me tires del puente*, Aguilar, Madrid, 2004, Dd. Aa.: *La Batalla de l’Ebre, Història, paisatge i patrimoni*, Pòrtic, Barcelona, 1999, GALÍ, R., *L’Ebre i la caiguda de Catalunya*, Barcelonasa d’Edicions, Barcelona, 1996, MARTÍNEZ BANDE, J. M., *La batalla del Ebro*, Servicio Histórico Militar/Editorial San Martín, Madrid, 1978, MEZQUIDA, L. M., *La batalla del Ebro. Asedio de Tortosa y combates de Amposta*, Diputació de Tarragona, Tarragona, 2001, IDEM: *La batalla del Ebro. Asedio y defensa de Gandesa*, Diputació de Tarragona, Tarragona,

1977, and IDEM.: *La batalla del Ebro. Asedio y defensa de Vilalba de los Arcos*, Diputació de Tarragona, Tarragona, 1974, P. PAGÈS: *La guerra civil espanyola a Catalunya (1936-1939)*, Llibres de la frontera, Barcelona, 1997, and TORRES, E., *La Batalla de l’Ebre i la caiguda de Barcelona*, Pagès, Lleida, 1999.

<sup>24</sup> The various existing studies speak of between 100,000 and 130,000 losses by both armies, including dead, wounded, prisoners and deserters. Ramón Salas Larrazábal considers that the losses were shared equally and that they numbered 50,000 on each side; see SALAS LARRAZÁBAL, R., *Historia del Ejército Popular de la República*, Editora Nacional, Madrid, 1973, vol. II; to be precise, he considers the material and human losses in the battle on pages 2,019-2,022. Whereas Martínez Bande considers that the Republicans lost more men and raises the figure to 70,000 Republicans and 60,000 from the rebel army lost; MARTÍNEZ BANDE, J. M., *La Batalla del Ebro*, “Monografías de la Guerra de España/3”, San Martín, Madrid, 1978, p. 303.

<sup>25</sup> As remembered by the local people in the area.

Of these burials, there may be thousands that have withstood the passage of time, in a place where the landscape has not undergone building development, although they are now difficult to locate and find.

The graves of the retreat were created between December 1938, when the rebel army began its final offensive to occupy Catalonia, and 10<sup>th</sup> February 1939, when it reached the French border. All over the country, and above all coinciding with the defensive lines set up by General Vicente Rojo, we can find graves of Republican soldiers who, one, two or three days after the occupation of the village by the rebels, the people of the village went to look for with carts and moved the remains to the cemetery, where a grave was dug and the soldiers killed in combat were placed. In the great majority of cases they have no documentation of any

kind, or any personal effects, as the enemies had already stripped them of anything of any value they may have been carrying. In many other cases, especially if the places where the soldiers had died were difficult to reach, the locals buried the bodies on the very spot where they found the remains, grouping together a few soldiers, as the nearest cemetery was still too far away to move the bodies. There are a lot of these graves because, although for years Francoist propaganda told the story that the

occupation of Catalonia had been a stroll, the graves dotted all over the country show that, despite being an army of young men and fathers aware of their defeat (of the *lleves del biberó* and *del sac* respectively), it fought to the last. One example is the grave dug up by the Generalitat de Catalunya at Puigvistós farm, in Prats de Lluçanès (Osona). On 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1939, seventy kilometres from the frontier, which they would have reached in no more than seven days, they created a holding line in front of the village that stopped the Francoist troops for two days, a stoppage that entailed the deaths of many men who if they had carried on walking to France would have been saved, but which at the same time probably meant that a lot of other people, on their way into exile, *were* able to reach the border.

However, this retreating army, especially its more politicised units, like those commanded by Líster (5<sup>th</sup> Army Corps), frustrated by the imminence of defeat, also committed abuses in the villages they passed through, abducting men and youths who were taken and in some cases later killed, like those in the woods that they encountered on their way to the border. It is another type of grave, the fifth, that, although few in number, also have to be taken into account when making a classification of them.

The sixth type are those that arose from the need to bury the soldiers who died in the field or military hospitals. Throughout the war, all over Catalonia a large number of hospitals were fitted out for the purpose of looking after those wounded at the front. These included the ones just behind the army lines, providing immediate attention,

**The thousands of soldiers who died in the Pàndols or Cavalls mountains were not moved and were buried, out of necessity, in bomb craters or trenches**

and those far more stabilised set up in large buildings like spas or schools. Unfortunately, in many cases the number of dead was high, and often the mortal remains of the soldiers who had not recovered from their injuries were buried in common graves, inside and outside the cemeteries. Although while the Republic and the Generalitat lasted the families received the official notification of the soldier's death in a particular hospital, by late 1938 and early 1939 it became very difficult to send these notifications, and in most cases they stopped being sent.

## The whole movement to recover the historical memory has led to many families resuming or initiating the search for a relative who disappeared

The whole movement to recover the historical memory, the desire to know, the fact that lately the war and the post-war period have been discussed continually in the media, has led to many families resuming or initiating the search for a relative who disappeared. And this quest, all too often fruitless, has resulted in the appearance on the Internet of a host of web pages publishing the names of the people, soldiers and also the victims of reprisals by Francoism, who died in military hospitals or succumbed

in the post-war period. At the present time, the most important are the web pages of the Fòrum per la Memòria del País Valencià, which includes the names of all those buried in the common graves in Valencia cemetery<sup>26</sup>; in Majorca, the web page of the Associació per la Recuperació de la Memòria Històrica de Mallorca<sup>27</sup>; and in Catalonia the web page of the cemetery in Manresa<sup>28</sup>, done by the historian Quim Aloy and pioneering in Catalonia, which brought to light the soldiers who died in Manresa and were buried in the cemetery; also in Catalonia, that of the hospitals and the concentration camp in Cervera<sup>29</sup> (done by the historian Jordi Oliva), that of the cemetery in Alpicat<sup>30</sup>, the hospital in Cambrils<sup>31</sup> and, including in this case those shot by the regime, the page of the Centre d'Estudis d'Investigació Històrica Baix Maestrat/Montsià<sup>32</sup>. There are also many of these graves all over the country and, unlike the others, at times documents have been conserved

■ <sup>26</sup> <http://www.nodo50.org/forumperlamemoria/spip.php?sommaire>.

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.memoriadelesilles.org/>.

<sup>28</sup> <http://guiamanresa.com/fossa/>.

<sup>29</sup> <http://mailxixi.com/guerracivil/index.htm>.

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.alpicat.cat/historiaguerracivil/>.

<sup>31</sup> [http://cambrils.org/nivell3.php?id\\_cont\\_area=942&id\\_area=3&id\\_sub\\_area=60](http://cambrils.org/nivell3.php?id_cont_area=942&id_area=3&id_sub_area=60).

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.ceibm.org/fechas002.htm>.

<sup>33</sup> The State has also published many lists of names of people who disappeared or were buried in common graves. Among others, there are pages such as: [http://www.nodo50.org/despaje/\(of%20exiles\)](http://www.nodo50.org/despaje/(of%20exiles)); <http://www.todoslosnombres.es/> and <http://www.fosacomun.com/>

(Asturias); <http://www.todoslosnombres.org/> (Andalusia); and <http://www.terra.es/personal/suarxm/> (Galicia).

<sup>34</sup> Montserrat FOSALBA I DOMÈNECH, *La guerra civil a Abrera*, Ajuntament d'Abrera, Abrera, 2001.

<sup>35</sup> DUEÑAS, O., *La violència dels uns i dels altres. La repressió de guerra i postguerra 1936-1945: el cas d'Olesa de Montserrat*, PAM, Barcelona (at press).

<sup>36</sup> FÀBREGA, A., *Mort a les cunetes (1939)*, Angle, Barcelona, 2005.

<sup>37</sup> LARDÍN, A. and CORBALÁN GIL, J., "La repressió franquista al Baix Llobregat: el cas de Collbató", in *Actes de les Jornades sobre la fi de la Guerra Civil*, Patronat d'Estudis Històrics d'Olot i comarca, Olot, 2001.

referring to the people buried in them, which, as we have seen, are increasingly being made public via the Internet<sup>33</sup>.

Lastly, the seventh type are the graves resulting from the burials of civilian victims who suffered reprisals by the Francoist forces, people killed and buried without having been tried or court-martialed. These events resulted in graves being created like those in Abrera<sup>34</sup>, Olesa de Montserrat<sup>35</sup> and Can Maçana, in El Bruc<sup>36</sup>, where nine residents of Súria and Valls de Torroella were buried. The other secret grave in Catalonia of premeditated killings and burials without any previous trial is the one of villagers of Collbató<sup>37</sup>, killed and buried in Castellbell i el Vilar. They were nine people killed in circumstances similar to the residents of Olesa de Montserrat and Súria; the soldiers went to look for them in their houses or they were summoned to the town hall, they were kept under arrest for a few days and, when everything indicated that they would be taken to prison, the lorry they were being transported in stopped, and the men were ordered out and shot. This grave, however, was dug up years later and the remains were taken to the cemetery in their village, Collbató.

These are the secret graves, unknown graves that were intended to conceal crimes by the Francoist army or the Guardia Civil. And these are the graves most numerous in Spain and which the people generally think about when the subject of graves and people who disappeared crops up. But as we have seen, they are not in the majority in Catalonia. In this respect, there has been a lot of demagogy in Catalonia, with regard to the common graves in existence and the debate surrounding them and whether to dig them up or not. One may argue about the study, the exhumation, the dignifying, but the idea of common graves resulting from murders by the Francoist troops or sympathetic groups cannot be spread around in an incorrect, poorly documented or ignorant manner when there are so few of them, shameful though they may be. ||