

Changes to the grave of Francisco Sabaté Llopart aka Quico, plus other anarchist fighters

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One of the events laid on in 2010 to mark the death in action of Francisco Sabaté Llopart in Sant Celoni on 5 January 1960 was meant to be a make-over for his grave, what some described as “restoring its dignity”.

As we shall see anon, just such a tidy-up of the location, adopted as part of the planned tribute, was a demand that had been cropping up at the 5 January get-togethers in memory of the anarchist guerrilla.

Francisco Sabaté Llopart, the legendary urban *maquis* was to perish at the hands of the *Sometent* and Civil Guard in the main street leading into the town of Sant Celoni at 08.45 a.m., albeit that the death certificate mistakenly records the time of death as 7.30 a.m. Nobody showed up to claim the body and the historian Eduardo Pons Prades claimed that neither his father nor his sister made any identification of their family member. That claim is not quite accurate; the relatives were not informed of what had occurred and the Civil Guard records detailing all the proceedings make no mention of the fact.

Nor is it the case that, as Carlos Pérez de Rozas from *La Gaceta Ilustrada* claimed, the town’s photographer, Santiago March, was called upon to make a record of the tragic event. Together with his son, Santiago took two photographs of the corpse, the Civil Guard escorted him to his home and, with a member of the Civil Guard on hand in the dark room, the negatives were developed and commandeered on the spot. Among the personal items found on Sabaté were some family snapshots, some cash ... and a CNT membership card, the CNT being the organization of which he had consistently been a member despite its opposition and bloody-mindedness regarding his activities and behaviour.

When the Civil Guard from the “mini-barracks” in Sant Celoni reported Sabaté’s death, Captain Román Arribas Álvarez from the Vich command was promptly dispatched by the Manresa command to act as examining magistrate in the investigation. The Civil Guard’s high command moved into the Hotel Suis and set about a whole series of administrative procedures (taking statements, on-the-spot inspections, looking for witnesses, etc.)

Since no one had claimed the body the town’s monsignor was asked to bury the guerrilla but declined:

“Having, given his antecedents and record, broached the matter of Francisco Sabaté Llopart’s interment with the illustrious vicar-general of the Barcelona Diocese, for a ruling as to whether the corpse of said Sabater Llopart [sic] should receive a church burial, the latter has seen fit to find that there is every reason for a church burial to be refused...”

Sabaté’s body was wrapped in a sheet and removed to the morgue at the cemetery using the sole vehicle available to the town council, a tanker truck. Once there, one of the town’s physicians, serviceman Fermín Ibáñez, carried out the autopsy. Francisco Sabaté was to be interred in the civil plot at 18.00 hours on 5 January 1960. Sant Celoni residents Joan Vila Riera and Antonio Ripoll Carreras signed as witnesses to this.

In 1960, the civil section of the Sant Celoni cemetery was an area bounded by a wall, access being gained via a locked iron gate.



[Sant Celoni cemetery in 1978]

Cementiri de Sant Celoni a l'any 1978. (foto Josep Terrades)

In 1964, Sabaté's daughter, Paquita, wished to pay her first visit to her father's grave, and she was advised to have a word with the grave-digger; he left, only to return in the company of the Civil Guard and another two people. Paquita and her partner were "invited" to leave on the grounds that they were "disturbing the peace."

In 1978, three years after the death of the dictator, the Socialist Party of National Liberation (PSAN) in Arenys de Munt organized an act of homage at the cemetery; among them was the Arenys de Munt's first ever democratic mayor. The organizers found the gate locked and without asking for leave they climbed over it and read out a declaration denouncing the poor maintenance of the place. According to Xavier Mitjà, the reader of the statement, they intended to put it up wherever they pleased since there was nothing marking Sabaté's burial site. They placed a sign and a wooden plaque reading "*Francisco Sabaté. Antifascist fighter. In memory*". This fact was recorded by the journalist Teresa Carreras (Chair of the Catalanian Association of European Journalists – APEC – 2008-2015) and published in *Mundo Diario* of 4 July 1978.



Cementiri de Sant Celoni, acte del PSAN d'Areny de Munt, 1978. Foto: Josep Quintana-Arxiu Xavier Cateura

[The ceremony carried out by the Areny de Munt chapter of the PSAN in Sant Celoni cemetery in 1978]

In his book *El duende del maquis*, Jaume Serra Fontelles, director and producer of the pioneering *Maquis a Catalunya* series, writes about the life experiences of Jesús Martínez Maluende, better known as *el Maño*, who operated as a guide during the busiest years of the action groups in Barcelona. In the chapter entitled "The Documentary", Jesús explains how he spent a couple of years helping Stephan Gatti (son of the French director and scriptwriter Armand Gatti) filming in the Cerdanya, in Barcelona, the Berguedà area ... In Sant Celoni, *el Maño* visited the street where Sabaté was gunned down and later the graveyard where they sought out the manager, only to be told that if they wished to set foot inside they would need to apply for permission. As he tells it:

"Gatti's son got up and jumped down inside, had a look around and scanned the entire area but ... Dear me, how would anybody know where he was buried, given that the entire area was overrun with grass and shrubbery!!! There was nothing to be seen. Who knows where Quico is, with all this brush ..."

In 1984, the town council in Sant Celoni drew up plans to build a brand-new morgue and extend the cemetery; the area given over to civil interments was left unaffected and the outer stone wall was refurbished, leaving the area just as it stands at present.

The year after that, Antonio Téllez and three comrades, whose names we do not know, made an effort to mark out Sabaté's grave from among the other three unnamed graves, but there was no municipal register to help identify the occupants. All they could do was set down some bricks in mortar and, on top, add some pebbles to form a capital A (for anarchy). To all intents and purposes, that is how things were left until 2010.

It would be interesting to know how Téllez was able to trace Sabaté's burial site since, as we have seen, previously there were no external indications of the precise location.

On 5 January 1991, there was a gathering of militants around the grave again, with his daughters in attendance on that occasion, and a marble plaque was placed as a marker. The local police were present in order to “ensure” their safety.

Rafael Pérez Mur read out a statement commemorating Sabaté and some of his collaborators, including Carles Vidal Pasanau aka *Carlitos*, who was shot together with José López Penedo on 4 February 1950.



Cementir de Sant Celoni, any 1991-Foto: Arxiu Alba Sabaté

[Above: Sant Celoni cemetery, 1991. Right, Placement of the plaque and wreath in the Carrer Santa Tecla, from *El País* (January 2000)]

At the gathering in 1994, Rafael Pérez Mur urged that the get-together be repeated on 5 January each year and the location was set as a gathering-point for commemoration of the man who fought against fascism. Yet again there was some debate about improving the appearance of the area and people were invited to help with what he termed “a tidy-up of the place” by placing a marble stone on the grave.

2000 marked the 40th anniversary of Sabaté’s death. The meetings that were organized were very well received by the folk from Sant Celoni and for the first time there were lectures offering a rigorous outline of the man’s trajectory, which was not known in the town, as well as the armed struggle against Francoism. Sabaté’s nephews, the sons of María Sabaté, would actively participate in whatever was organized.

The organizing group did not come up with any proposed action regarding the actual grave.

At the 2005 meeting, the ‘Marxa del Maquis’ collective erected a mural and a variety of daubed demands that were promptly removed by the town government, made up at that point of the ERC, the PSC and the IC. Very timidly, and with hardly any “to-do”, in casual conversations, those in local government considered taking some action. There was no serious plan beyond the retrieval of Historical Memory, acknowledgement and the



Col·locació de la placa i ofrena floral al carrer Santa Tecla El País (gener de 2000).

intention was very straightforward, not to say simple; they arranged with those convening the get-togethers that concrete actions would be taken and thereby ensured that there was no further daubing of the cemetery.

To mark the 50th anniversary of Sabaté's death, a commission was set up by a number of bodies (the CUP, the Casal Popular Independentista Quico Sabaté, the Assemblea Libertaria del Vallès Oriental) and some persons acting in an individual capacity. A proposed list of the main aims of the gatherings was drawn up. On 11 October 2009, a delegation from the collective travelled up to Toulouse to put the proposals to Alba and Paquita, Sabaté's daughters. During the meeting the matter of the improvement of the grave site was broached, as well as of the disinterment of the remains and a DNA examination such as had been carried out in the case of Ramón Vila Capdevila aka *Caracremada*, in an effort to obtain verified information and, at the same time, confirm that the remains were in the location where flowers were being placed each year. His daughters were against this and they insisted upon a document from the mayor's office recording an undertaking given by the council that their father's grave would not be disturbed.

Our stance vis à vis the 'dignification of Sabaté's grave' is clear cut. We agree with the site of the 4 graves being left as it is.

We agree that that site be neither disturbed nor reduced. So, as far as we are concerned, there is no need for any DNA examination.

Both Paquita and Alba always expressed a particular interest in the inclusion of their father's "comrades" in the scheme.

Once the scheme had been agreed between the members of the organizing collective, it was put to the town council run by the CiU minority. Initially the council agreed to pass the proposal: the quibbles came later when it came time to carry out the planned actions.

There were two intentions behind this support and they had nothing to do with any of the Memory retrieval aims being pursued by the organizing group. Namely, the council was not organizing anything and therefore was not entering into any sort of ideological commitment; but on the other hand, there was electoral capital to be made here since, after 18 years of a "left-wing" party's being in government, it took a CiU administration to honour the grave of an anarchist.

The various suggestions for upgrading the grave were posted up in the cemetery on 5 January 2010. By 5 June, the work was completed, everything having been carried out by the town council at a cost of 14,940 euro – 3,552 euro coming in the shape of a subsidy paid by the Generalitat's Memorial Democràtic. The commission was opposed to the advertisement of any institutional logo.

In addition to the improvements to the grave site, the scheme considered other things such as: the erection of an iron statue just where Sabaté alighted from Train 1104, the placement of a large-scale mural on a bridge near the cemetery, a lecture to be delivered in the presence of Sabaté's daughter, Alba and of Lucio Urtubia and the publication of an explanatory triptych setting out Sabaté's trajectory and his final itinerary.



[Lucio Urtubia by the grave of his comrade Sabaté before it was refurbished, 2010]

It is my belief that, regardless of the distances involved, this example can be followed in the case of the remains of anarchist guerrillas buried all over Catalonia; the precise burial location would need to be established, the relatives informed, the grave roped off and a plaque explaining who is buried there put in position.

Sabaté's grave is not an isolated instance of deliberate forgetfulness and failure to remember. On 10 November 2010, Joan Boada, the Generalitat's secretary for the Interior, Institutional Relations and Participation presided in Gerona cemetery over improvements to and upgrading of the common grave into which upwards of 500 people shot by Francoism had been placed. In his address, Boada stated:

“The Democratic Memory pursued by this government makes no distinctions between the victims, because whereas the fascist violence may have been harsher and more drawn out, the victims are all deserving of dignity and honour and every one of them deserves our consideration.”

Could things be any further from the facts? If all the victims are treated the same, how come Sabaté's comrades have been overlooked? Francisco Conesa Alcaraz, Martín Ruiz Montoya, Antonio Miracle Guitart and Rogeli Madrigal Torres were to perish at the hands of the Civil Guard in Mas Clarà on the night of 3-4 January [1960] and were buried the same day, together, three metres from those shot in Gerona during and after the Civil War.

The Memorial failed to include their names and at best they are to be considered second-class victims of Francoism.

Out of the events to mark the 50th anniversary of Sabaté's death emerged, at the suggestion of Francisco Conesa's niece Contxita Capdevila, a working group charged with organizing what would be the very first act of homage to Sabaté's last companions, in an attempt to break through 50 years of forgetting and deliberate oblivion. Months ahead of time, permission was sought from Gerona town council and authority was granted three days before the date scheduled for the ceremony: but permission for the placement of a marble plaque was refused, although it was installed anyway. It lasted three days before council workers were ordered to take it down. Exploiting the elections and the government change-over, the plaque was put back in place and remains there still – and long may it remain.



Primer acte al cementiri de Girona en record als morts en combat al Mas Clarà l'any 1960 amb la presència d'Alba Sabaté i els familiar de les víctimes (novembre de 2011).

[First meeting in Gerona cemetery to commemorate those killed in action in Mas Clarà in 1960; present were Alba Sabaté and relatives of the victims (November 2011)]

More cases: in one of the death registers to the Castellar del Vallès civil registry we came upon the death records of two combatants. Both are recorded as “Persons unknown” because back in 1949 nothing was known about them. They were buried in the local civil cemetery. One was the Italian Elio Ziglioli, part of the ‘Los Primos’ action group made up of 8 fighters who set off from the Mas Tartas base in Osseja. They included Manuel

Sabaté (shot on 24 February 1950), Ramón Vila aka *Caracremada* and Joan Busquets, the only member of the group still living.

Thank to the field-work carried out by Jordi Guillemot and set out on his website, Elio's final moments have been reconstructed. His relatives had had no news of him since 1947 and since then had been searching for him, sending out letters to embassies half way round the world.



Detall de la placa que van posar els familiar d'Elio Ziglioli al cementiri de Castellar del Vallès l'any 2010.

[A detail of the plaque placed by Elio Ziglioli's relatives in the Castellar del Vallès cemetery in 2010]

In 1949, Guillermo Ganuza entered Catalonia in the company of Josep Lluís Facerías, Jesús Martínez aka *el maño* and José Serrano. On 14 May the group was located by the Civil Guard and Guillermo was wounded, dying a few hours later in Can Salvi in the townland of Sant Llorenç Savall (Vallès Occidental). Ganuza was to be buried in the cemetery in San Feliu de Codines, but there is no indication as to precisely where.

By way of conclusion, we can identify a number of common features, characteristics repeated in the locations where the anarchist guerrillas rest:

- They were buried outside of the cemetery proper, in the unconsecrated ground.
- In most instances, it is very hard to identify the precise location of the remains as there are no external indications (no headstones).
- The families have no knowledge of where their fighters are buried.
- Acknowledgement has been belated and in some cases, non-existent.

Without a doubt, we must carry on with our efforts to combat the rabble-rousing and lies that have for so long been peddled regarding the trajectory of these fighters against the dictatorship and historical research is vital. Furthermore, it must be encouraged and welcomed by the agencies and organizations in which this body of men and women were active since, as we have seen for ourselves, there is little or nothing of the sort to be expected of the administration.

Argimiro Ferrero Delgado, October 2015. Translated by Paul Sharkey [Copyright of the article remains with Argimiro Ferrero. We can put you in touch if you would like to – for example – reprint it. Kate Sharpley Library July 2020.]

Glossary of political groups not explained in the text

ERC (Republican Left of Catalonia aka Esquerra)

IC (Initiative for Catalonia, pro-independence greens)

PSC (Party of the Socialists of Catalonia)

CUP (Popular Unity Candidacy, a left-wing/far-left pro-Catalan independence alliance)

CiU (Convergence and Union, a centre-right/Christian Democrat alliance)