

Shoes

We are archaeologists and historians, that is, scientific researchers. But we are mainly a group of autonomous individuals who study the world in order to have some sort of effect on it. We are very concerned with how the past is seen in our societies. The way in which it is usually considered, as something detached and separated from the present, deprives us from the ability of understanding and deciding who we are and who we want to be in the future. The same result is arrived at whenever the task of writing history is devoted only to specialists. We are all part of History and we all may write about it, keeping as close to the truth and meticulous as possible, without fakes and with honesty.

Regarding ourselves, we study and pay tribute both to people repressed by Franco's regime and to the history and remembrances of their experience. At the same time, we analyze the different ways in which a state or a group in power imposes rules and subdues opponents. Here, we would like to share some insights in connection with our research with these various militant groups as a contribution to their activities. We would be pleased if they could tell us, in turn, what they think about what we send them and the subject matter it concerns.

Paradoxically, we have recovered shoes in several places where those who fought the rebel or 'national' (i.e. fascist) side and suffered its repression in the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath lived. Shoes become one of the most usual and common items in all those places. The same is perhaps true about sites on the other side, although the (probably important) differences are yet to be defined.

We thus have recovered several shoes from the study and archaeological digging of the trench system in Madrid University campus, known as Ciudad Universitaria. This was one of the main places where the republican and antifascist side defended the city during the entire civil war (1936-1939).

In a similar way, we have found many shoes and shoe-soles in the archaeological digging of the Bustarviejo (Madrid) *penal detachment*, a kind of prisoners' camp. As in other places of the kind, thousands of people were confined there overtime –from 1944 to 1952– and exploited by enterprises and the new state who shared the benefits of their workforce. This was especially the case in those 2 meter wide houses or “huts”. These were built by and for the prisoners' wives and children who flocked round their husbands and fathers imprisonment facilities living side by side this camp while they completed their sentences.

We have heard about several groups, as Women in Black from all around the world, employing shoes that used to belong to different victims from past (either remote or recent) conflicts, in order to remember and pay tribute to them. Auschwitz Museum displays photographs showing millions of shoes recovered after the liberation and exhibits thousands of them.

Auschwitz Museum



Shoes and clothing of prisoners found at
Auschwitz-Birkenau



Shoes on display case in Block 5

<http://www.scrapbookpages.com/auschwitzscrapbook/tour/Auschwitz1/Auschwitz11.html>



Shoes recovered from the soil inside a trench in sector 1A (to the left) and from the Shelter number 3 (to the right –the shoe *in situ*, to the top, and restored, to the bottom), coming from the area dug in the 2008 campaign, corresponding to the republican trenches system in this front line

González Ruibal, A. y otros (2010): “Guerra en la universidad. Arqueología del conflicto en la Ciudad Universitaria de Madrid”, Ebre 38 (Barcelona), 4: 123-43
<http://guerraenlauniversidad.blogspot.com/2008/11/zapato-republicano.html>
http://digital.csic.es/handle/10261/23104?mode=full&submit_simple=Mostrar+el+registro+completo

What we have observed in our research is that what remains in those places where many people suffered as the consequence of a cruel conflict are, mainly, shoes. We are talking about abandoned places, landscapes where activity ceased to exist, where both life and people who lived there are missing. The repressors’ heirs, those who have not broken with Franco’s dictatorship, as well as with its repressive means and its dirty profits, have pretended that the abandonment of these places –or even the destruction of their very remains and ruins– would mean an effective way of erasing what took place there from memory and history. This is something to which the entire Spanish society has contributed whether voluntarily or not. However, shoes, alongside other items and structures, remain there. They stand as the witness and evidence of the people who lived there and therefore of the conflict. Their recovery, through archaeological practice in particular, is a tribute, similar to that offered by thousands of women and men in many parts of the world, including Spain, in order to let people know that the hidden, neglected, silenced past is here, very much alive.

Shoes are one of the items which best evoke someone’s absence. In so many cases we use them to show that although someone is missing s/he still lives in our memory, so to speak, among us. In Spain it is a Christmas tradition to use shoes as a marker so that, when they bring gifts to children every January 6th the three Wise Kings will know where to leave gifts for each child. In a more general way, shoes relate to one of the more intrinsic characteristics of human beings: bipedalism.



Soles and shoes recovered from one of the prisoners’ family members’ homes (estratigraphic unit 023) set up side by side the Bustarviejo (Madrid) penal detachment (to the left) and this very same shoe after being restored (to the right)

<http://guerraenlauniversidad.blogspot.com/2010/06/suelos-y-suclas.html>

Dedicated to all the antifascist fighters (men and women) against Franco’s regime in Spain and to all those who were caught in the net once knitted against the Republic and used to repress the society as a whole and to impose a new model for the state, economy and culture which is the very base of today’s Spain.

<http://www.guerraenlauniversidad.blogspot.com>