



A first dig at the new Sant Francesc Xavier cemetery is programmed as part of the Balearic government's 2021-2022 Civil War Graves Action Plan — a plan approved 19 November by the regional technical commission on graves and disappeared persons, of which the Eivissa-Formentera Forum for Memory is a member. Local application of the CWGAP was at the centre of a presentation today by the island's heritage chief, Raquel Guasch, and regional secretary of democratic heritage and good governance Jesús Jurado. The gathering also saw the attendance of Consell de Formentera deputy chair Ana Juan and historian Antoni Ferrer.

The potential number of victims and area of disinterment mean efforts at the new Sant Francesc cemetery are among the most sizeable of those currently envisioned. The plans were added to the third programme of exhumations after research by Antoni Ferrer determined 58 deaths had occurred between 1941 and 1942 at the local prison and highlighted three zones of the Sant Francesc cemetery where victims' remains may lie.

Based on research and witness accounts, Ferrer's report describes inhumane conditions at the insalubrious and overcrowded Formentera camp, where lack of food was widespread and frequently gave way to death by starvation.

Ferrer used previously overlooked documentary sources to calculate the exact number of deaths at the Formentera prison. Where peers had relied on archives from the civil registry and death records in the Sant Francesc Xavier parish, Ferrer enlisted the Consell de Formentera's own files from the administrative office of the courts and local census documents, ultimately corroborating the deaths of 58 individuals.

Councillor Guasch praised the Balearic government for its "clear efforts to recover this chapter of our history and restore the dignity of victims", adding that to do so was "a matter of basic importance if we aspire to be an advanced, civilised society and to heal long open wounds". She also applauded the historical research of Mr Ferrer. The councillor asserted a similar undertaking was in order at the former prison, where it would be necessary to "restore dignity to the site and come to terms with this chapter of our past".

Burial site

Ferrer explains that the new municipal cemetery's 1940 opening came just months before the first documented death at the Formentera prison in April the following year. If direct accounts of prisoner burials remain elusive, Ferrer did uncover two corresponding secondary accounts pointing to two quadrants in the western part of the cemetery which were completed in 1938. Based on the documents consulted, Ferrer concludes that Catholic rites were observed for the burials, but says the historical record doesn't permit knowledge of whether the graves were marked.

New details about the deceased aren't the study's only novelty: transcripts of the local census and processing data have made it possible for Ferrer to substantiate the presence of approximately 1,500 prisoners at the local prison.

Recent digs

Seventeen graves have been excavated across the Balearic Islands since 2014. Following efforts in Sant Joan (2014), Porreres (2016, 2020) and Sant Ferran (Formentera, 2017), the 2018 action plan dictated excavations at Alaró, Marratxí, Sencelles, Calvià, Ses Figueretes, Lluçmajor, Santa Maria, Montuïri, Pou de s'Àguila (Lluçmajor) and Pou de Son Lluís (Porreres). A subsequent 2019-2020 action plan brought additional operations at Son Coletes, Manacor, Bunyola, Coll d'Artà and Valldemossa. Follow-up efforts have been carried out at Sencelles, Porreres, Ses Figueretes, Pou de Son Lluís and Santa Maria.

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