

# The New York Times

---

SEVILLE JOURNAL

## *In Seville, Burial of Civil War Commander Reopens Decades-Old Wounds*

By Raphael Minder

March 19, 2018

SEVILLE, Spain — Depending on whom you ask, Gonzalo Queipo de Llano was either a fascist criminal of the Spanish Civil War or a national hero who protected both Catholicism and his country from the threat of Communism.

The answer is central to whether the military commander's body should now be exhumed and removed from the basilica he helped build in the heart of the southern city of Seville.

The dispute is one of several such controversies across Spain, reflecting the ideological fissures that continue to linger decades after the civil war of the 1930s, and the ensuing dictatorship of its victor, Gen. Francisco Franco.

The basilica is one of Seville's popular landmarks, standing behind a mustard-yellow archway and a fortified wall that was used by firing squads during the war, after Queipo de Llano took charge in the city. He was buried there in 1951, and lies alongside his wife, on the left side of the vast basilica under an easy-to-miss white slab stone whose simplicity contrasts with the basilica's otherwise ornate decorations.



The tomb of Queipo de Llano inside the Basilica of La Macarena.

Samuel Aranda for The New York Times

In Andalusia, of which Seville is the capital, the authorities want to exhume his body after passing a regional law designed to reinvigorate Spain's 2007 "law of historical memory." That measure offered state support for families wanting to unearth bodies of relatives killed during the civil war or who suffered as a political consequence of Franco's regime.

---

**You have 3 free articles remaining.**  
**Subscribe to The Times**

---

The law also ordered the removal of all public symbols of Franco's regime.

The Socialist government of the time offered financing to excavate mass war graves and commemorate Franco's victims. But the conservative government of Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, who was elected in late 2011, removed state support for such projects, warning against reopening old wounds in Spanish society.

As a result, enforcement of the law has been erratic, shelved by Mr. Rajoy's government but applied vigorously in parts of the country, particularly those where left-wing politicians won office in local elections in 2015.

Queipo de Llano, who was among the military leaders of the July 1936 coup that set off the civil war, swiftly took control over Seville and then conquered the rest of southern Spain, while making radio broadcasts urging civilians to wipe out left-wing opponents. After the war,

however, he was sidelined by Franco as a possible rival.



Gen. Francisco Franco, center, and Gonzalo Queipo de Llano, right, during the Spanish Civil War.  
Universal History Archive, via Getty Images

Paul Preston, a leading British expert on the civil war, is among the historians who estimate that over 45,000 people were killed in southern Spain under Queipo de Llano's jurisdiction. In a book on the war's mass killings, he debunked some accounts of Queipo de Llano as "a noble Spaniard" and "the archetype of the Spanish soldier."

Instead, he was "erratic, unreliable, unstable and volatile, irascible and always ready to resort to violence," Mr. Preston wrote.

Still, after the war, Queipo de Llano helped built a basilica for the Virgin of the Macarena — with a sculpture that is perhaps Seville's most venerated religious relic — which was saved in 1936 when left-wing militants burned down a nearby church.

José Antonio Fernández Cabrero, the head of the Brothers of the Macarena, the 14,000-member group that owns the basilica, said he did not know how Queipo de Llano had acquired the land on which the basilica was inaugurated in 1949.





A memorial in Seville to the civil war victims who were executed at the old fortified wall, in the background, near the basilica. Samuel Aranda for The New York Times

Juan Miguel Baquero, a local journalist who specializes in civil war issues, also said he had tried without success to establish what properties and farmlands a foundation now run by Queipo de Llano's family had inherited from him.

Mr. Fernández Cabrero called Queipo de Llano "a protector of the movement of the Catholic Church." Noting that the brotherhood had already removed the original fascist symbols from Queipo de Llano's tomb in the basilica, as well as its references to the 1936 coup and his military rank, he called Andalusia's new law invigorating the 2007 measure nonsense.

"If politicians who had played an active part in the civil war managed to negotiate and close this chapter," Mr. Fernández Cabrero said, referring to a 1977 law granting amnesty for crimes committed during the war and under Franco's regime, "it surprises me that politicians now tell us we need to reopen all of this."

The tomb's inscription now identifies Queipo de Llano only as an "honorary senior brother." But Cecilio Gordillo, the president of a local association that assists the families of Franco's victims and that is demanding Queipo de Llano's exhumation, said, "The problem is not what's written on the tomb, but the personality of the man inside it."





Members of the Macarena brotherhood carrying a heavy iron structure last month to simulate the weight of the religious image they will carry during the city's Easter procession.

Samuel Aranda for The New York Times

Politicians in Madrid have long argued over whether to exhume Franco himself from the Valley of the Fallen, the huge underground basilica near Madrid that he built to honor those who died securing his victory.

And in 2016, the city of Pamplona exhumed Emilio Mola and José Sanjurjo, two other leaders of the 1936 coup. But they had been buried inside a memorial building managed by Pamplona's authorities, while Seville's basilica is owned by its brotherhood.

In January, Manuel Jiménez Barrios, the deputy head of Andalusia's government, pledged that Queipo de Llano would be exhumed, in line with a decision last year by Seville's City Hall. Although some small protests have taken place to demand his removal, the issue has stirred politicians more than citizens.

The Roman Catholic Church in Spain has turned a deaf ear to such political initiatives, including the push to exhume Queipo de Llano. Pablo F. Enríquez Amado, a spokesman for the archdiocese of Seville, said it would "respect the decision of the family's relatives and the brotherhood."



The Macarena Basilica reflected in a nearby cafe window. Samuel Aranda for The New York Times

But Francisco Espinosa, a Seville-based historian, criticized the church for its long-held practice of “promoting Queipo as the leader of a great Catholic crusade.”

In fact, Mr. Espinosa noted, the basilica also houses the remains of Francisco Bohórquez Vecina, who alongside Queipo de Llano signed numerous execution orders of left-wing opponents. And Queipo de Llano is an “emblematic figure” for two other brotherhoods in Seville.

The religious brotherhoods lead the city’s world-famous Easter processions, when hooded penitents walk alongside richly decorated floats with religious sculptures on them. The processions bring Seville to a standstill over the Easter week, and the 60 or so brotherhoods start preparing for them months in advance.

The brotherhoods also help maintain their churches year-round and operate a significant charity network. Relatives of Queipo de Llano also run a charitable foundation that looks after children but provides no breakdown of its activities or accounts; the foundation did not respond to requests for comment.

On a recent evening in the basilica, a group of brothers and other devotees responded to questions about Queipo de Llano with bemusement and irritation.

“If politicians now think we should remove everything linked to Franco,” said Manuel Villalba, a member of the Macarena’s choir, “why don’t they also dry up the water reservoirs that he built?”



A version of this article appears in print on March 20, 2018, on Page A6 of the New York edition with the headline: Burial of a Civil War Commander Reopens Old Wounds

