

ANNUAL REPORT: SPAIN - MODERN WARFARE 2017 FIELD SCHOOL

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An unexploded (but inert) British mortar shell during excavation.

The Modern Warfare archaeology project in Spain seeks to understand the experience of violence in urban contexts. How does war change and shape cities? How do these changes affect the lives of civilians? How do soldiers cope with combat and daily life amid the ruins of a metropolis? Also, how do cities materially and socially recover after total war? For that, we excavate the traces of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) in Madrid, the first capital to be besieged by a modern army.

The 2017 field season of the project exposed the remains of several late 19th-century buildings—part of an asylum—that were used as a frontline military headquarters by the Nationalist army besieging the capital. They were heavily bombed during the war and later demolished and buried under a park. Through excavations and surveys we documented the entire sequence of occupation of the area from the Bronze Age (four thousand years ago) to the 1980s. The remains related to the war period were plentiful and allowed us to take a glimpse at one of the first cases of urban fighting of the twentieth century. Fragments of hand grenades, pistol bullets and trench mortar shells gave eloquent testimony of the dynamics of close quarters combat at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War. Most of the many sources that describe the fight (newspaper articles, memoirs, archival documents) focus on the few weeks of the Battle of

Madrid (November 1936). Our research, instead, was able to explore the long-term war of attrition that followed. This lasted two and a half years and is much less known.

Students excavated two of the asylum buildings (a collective dormitory and a laundry), which were radically transformed during the war with air-raid shelters, dugouts, trenches and a canteen. They also surveyed the area around the buildings using a metal detector. In both the excavation and the survey, students made many important finds that provide insights into life at the frontlines. Thus, a large amount of unexploded ordnance, shrapnel and ammunition was found, but also hundreds of wine and liquor bottles, bones of lamb and beef, and even clams and fish bones, which inform us of the (relatively rich) diet of the soldiers deployed in the asylum, and which contrast starkly with the starving rations of civilians on the other side of the trenches. Several insignia were also found that testify to the political allegiances of the army that was besieging Madrid, including an extremely rare hand-made swastika—a reminder of the besiegers sympathies for the Nazi regime.

Students had also the opportunity to learn about the social conditions at the turn of the twentieth century in Spain through the remains of the asylum. This was an institution for elderly people, abandoned women and orphans about which little is known. The remains that they found among the ruins of the building provide insights into the modernization of Madrid, which was then endowed with new infrastructures, such as a modern sewage system, running water and electricity. Archaeology here has been crucial in providing evidence about the organization of charity in the city: hundreds of fragments of fine crockery and trinkets were found, but many of them were decades older than the context in which they appeared, thus showing that inmates were receiving discarded materials from well-off families.

The icing on the cake was a perfectly preserved dump in one of the dugouts, where thousands of artefacts were discarded at the end of the hostilities. These include unexploded ordnance, complete bottles, ammunition, clothing and many other artifacts, which provide a unique snapshot of the war in Madrid.

Results from the 2017 excavation will be published in articles covering the last four field seasons of the project to be submitted to the *Journal of Field Archaeology* and the *Journal of Conflict Archaeology*. The results will be also presented at the 5th Conflict in Contact Conference in Ghent, Belgium (December 2017), at the 24th Annual Meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists in Barcelona (September 2018) and at several Spanish conferences. The research also figures prominently in the book *The Age of Destruction. An Archaeology of the Contemporary Era* by the director of the project that will be soon published.

Students participated in all research activities, including excavation and survey of the different contexts, documentation of the remains using Total Station, GPS and digital recording sheets, and laboratory work. In the lab students sorted, photographed and drew finds, and learnt the basics of field data processing using AutoCad, GIS and photogrammetry software. The students also had the opportunity to see complete artefacts, similar to those recovered during fieldwork, and learn about their history and technology from specialists. The appearance of several unexploded ordnance was also an opportunity to learn about the safety protocols that are implemented in these cases and see the bomb disposal unit at work. The diversity of materials found at the site enabled students to get acquainted with the international matériel of modern warfare—a large part of the finds were First World War surplus—but also with 19th century and early 20th century civilian material culture (including porcelain, whitewares, glass and trinkets) and medieval and early modern pottery. During the field season, students attended lectures covering different aspects of conflict archaeology, and visited key historical sites in and around

Madrid, including the Valley of the Fallen, a mausoleum for the war dead and a monument to the dictatorship—the only large fascist monument in Europe retaining its original use.