

L'ESTENDARD DE L'ORFEÓ FELIUÀ

©Ramon Casalé i Francesc Garriga
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SUMMARY IN ENGLISH

This work, *L'Estendard de l'Orfeó Feliuà* (The Sant Feliu Choral Society Banner) is the result of an investigation undertaken in order to publicise the existence of the banner designed by the architect *Antoni Gaudí i Cornet* that is to be found in the Sant Feliu Municipal Museum *Can Xifreda* (Barcelona, Spain).

Introduction

An *Orfeó* (choral society) is an assembly of singers who form a chorus, normally without instrumental accompaniment. These groups appeared in the latter part of the 19th Century.

A banner is a flag used by religious or civil groups made of canvas and hung from a horizontal bar which in turn is attached to a flag pole in such a way as to form a cross.

Over the years these choral societies developed their own particular choreographic style, with the choir forming a semicircle grouped around the director and overhung by the banner, which came to act as the reference point for each choral society.

In Sant Feliu de Codines there was a choral society called the *Orfeó Feliuà* at two times in its history. The former, at the turn of the last Century, and the latter, from 1926 to 1929.

In the first stage, the *Orfeó Feliuà* was proud to have a banner designed by Antoni Gaudí, although there is no official document that certifies the paternity of the design, nor when it was made or ordered. However it has been handed down by word of mouth that the author was indeed Gaudí; the truth of which can be verified beyond a shadow of a doubt by the style, the elements, the materials and the strongly personal artistic conception of the work.

The 'Modernist' movement and Gaudí

It is in Catalonia and especially in Barcelona where the finest examples of the modernist style in architecture, painting, sculpture, posters, jewellery and decorative arts are to be found with a mixture of the different styles that made up European modernism but with a highly personal touch unique to the local creators.

This banner was designed in the most original and innovative stage of Gaudí's artistic career, after having evolved artistically, freely investigating and experimenting with the forms and volumes existing in nature. The design of the banner – roundabout 1900- is the work of a mature Gaudí in his late forties, that has already experimented with Art and the possibilities of different materials at the service of one idea controlled by the creator of the work. It also reflects an adventure where message, technique and creative excitement are welded together.

Sant Feliu as a summer resort

The parish of Sant Feliu is first mentioned as a village in the year 986. The community grew when a main road was built through it which changed its agricultural economic base to that of an incipient textile industry which in turn led to a migratory influx from the sixteenth century onwards.

At the beginning of the 19th century new roads and railways were built in the surrounding areas which improved the communications of other towns and villages with Barcelona. This coincided with the upsurge of industrialisation and Sant



Feliu lost its position as leader even though some more textile industries were installed.

As a result some of the more enterprising families left the village for the more important and more rapidly growing nearby towns and cities of Granollers, Sabadell and Barcelona. However, at the end of the 18th Century, partly as a result of the modernist movement and in reaction to industrialisation, the richer families rediscovered Nature and many families decided to come back to Sant Feliu to spend the summer in order to relax and live more healthily. Sant Feliu became synonymous with fresh, pure air and as a refuge for people suffering from lung diseases.

The summer visitors discovered the joys of hill walking, visiting local fountains, the Sun and Nature and started their own cultural and sportive clubs. The more well-off families brought along their circle of friends from Barcelona and they got together in associations that organised recitals of poetry, music and street festivals that revived old customs.

It was through a summer stay that Gaudi got to know Sant Feliu.

The Symbols of Sant Feliu

Sant Feliu de Codines has been represented by various symbols over the years: The martyr 'San Feliu the African' and the 'codines'. According to the popular tradition, the pine cones have been part of an intangible shared patrimony and have been authentic virtual icons, even though they have never appeared on any official stamp.

San Feliu the African landed in Empúries (Costa Brava) on his way to Girona. In this city he worked as a doctor, apostle and prophet. His martyrdom took place in the year 304 ad. He was said to have been thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck. His being a martyr means that his image is normally represented alongside the martyr's palm leaf and the laurel leaf as a symbol of his eternal triumph.

The 'codines' are what makes this parish different to others who share the same saints name. The 'codines' are outcrops of reddish rocks that are a common feature of the Sant Feliu landscape which overlooks the coastal plain of the Vallès.

The symbols of the patron saint and the 'codines' have long formed part of the sigillography associated to the village. The parish and municipal stamps have always incorporated the millstone, the palm leaf, the laurel and the rocks.

Popularly, whilst not officially, Sant Feliu de Codines has been known as 'Sant Feliu of the Pine Nut'. This name originates from the local people's fame for pinenuts and cones which have become secondary reference points in the symbology of the village.

The Orfeo Feliuà

The origins of the chorus can be found at the beginning of the last Century. We only know that its seat was in the *Ateneu Feliuà* and it had the banner designed by Gaudi. Unfortunately the society did not leave any document regarding its foundation, records of meetings or programmes.

Indirectly we have been able to ascertain that the choral society

had two stages. The first one, which we have dated as from the turn of the century – which is when the banner was made – and a second stage, which was from 1926 to 1929.

The Banner

According to various sources the design of the banner of the *Orfeo Feliuà* is the work of Antoni Gaudi and was done roundabout the year 1900. There are written references to the date 1926 but this is due to a confusion arising with the second stage of the *Orfeo Feliuà*, before it finally disappeared as a choral society.

We have to recognise that no document, letter, contract or invoice has been found that certifies that Gaudi was the author. Therefore we are also unable to certify the exact age of the Banner. However the existence of a metal plaque on the back of the mast with the trade name *Hoyos Esteva y Cia* indicates it must have been made before 1905, because Claudio Hoyos, one of the owners of the workshop, died in 1905 and the company then became registered as *Esteva Figueras y Sucesores de Hoyos*.

We know quite a lot about the relationship between Gaudi and Sant Feliu de Codines. He is said to have visited the village on several occasions and his friendship with Francesc Ullar, one of the big landowners in the village, is well-known. It seems that Gaudi, as did many people from Barcelona, took refuge in Sant Feliu de Codines during an outbreak of cholera in Barcelona. He spent long periods of time at Francesc Ullar's house and, according to Cèsar Martinell, it was Ullar himself who asked Gaudi to design the banner.

It was also Francesc Ullar who contacted with the textile magnate Emili Carles Tolrà and got him to pay for it. Nevertheless, the idea of making a present of the banner to the choral society was his aunt's, Emilia Carles-Tolrà, the Marquess of Sant Esteve de Castellar and the widow of Josep Tolrà Avellà.

It can be safely claimed that the banner of the *Orfeo Feliuà* is the one that best represents Gaudi's art in this genre because it combines many of the important aspects of modernism, which is logical since it was done in the heyday of this artistic movement. Moreover, it combines all the symbology of the village with the author's own personal artistic language.

We should also like to point out that it is the only fully conserved banner made by Gaudi. It is an object of considerable dimensions so that it can be well seen during performances. It is 2.91 metres tall. It is made up of several elements: the cross at the top, the millstone, the palm leaf and the laurel in the centre, and the mast that holds it up. The elements are united by some leather strips in the colour of the Catalan flag. The cross is 60 cm high and 53 cm wide. The diameter of the disc with the inscription "*Orfeo Feliuà*" is 50cm.

Exhibitions

The banner has been exhibited around the world in exhibitions related to Catalan culture in countries such as the USA or Japan. The banner has also been exhibited in several Spanish cities and recently has been on show in Barcelona.

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