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The Enlightenment and Jaén

In the western world the most decisive contributions to human progress, in the opinion of most historians, were the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and for many one is really the continuation of the other. To put it another way, according to Domínguez Ortíz, the true roots of the Enlightenment are in the Renaissance. In the 16th century the Renaissance brought advances in secularisation, customs, and education, the power play between church and state, and scientific and technological progress spurred by new discoveries, which laid the foundations for modern science while also affecting other areas of thought and action.

In Jaén the greatest expression of the Renaissance, which has come down to us through the centuries, is the Cathedral, a wonderful example of the artistic milieu of the new times, and undoubtedly highly influential, especially in the Americas, where it was regarded as the prototype of harmony and beauty, and taken as a model for the most important churches of the New World.

This continuity, not only in art, would be prolonged in the Enlightenment, when the new giant leaps in thought would be completed with



innovations affecting all the fields of human endeavour, and the repercussions of the 18th century are still being felt today.

While in the Renaissance the effects of the movement were compartmentalised, so that we can talk of a Spanish, French, Italian or Flemish Renaissance, the Enlightenment is more globalising. It would soon be considered a movement associated with enlightened absolutism, or in German terms, benevolent despotism, because the common aspirations of the sovereigns of the century coincided in rationalising State governance, restricting the powers of the privileged classes, driving the economy (with concrete interests, as the saying



was that there could be no rich king without rich subjects), improving education, changing laws, etc. But this is not the only reading. The European Enlightenment, in its intellectual manifestations, had a great capacity for expansion and its ideas materialised in political, economic and social realities, triumphing only where they found fertile soil and favourable structures.

The privileged classes, mainly the liberal aristocracy of western Europe and the Church, at first put up resistance, if less so in the case of science, where its practical applications soon attracted the attention of governments, facilitating state initiatives and support, with pragmatic effects which have lasted until our era, and whose legacy in Jaén, even now in the 21st century, is the persistence of two products of the Enlightenment: the Real Sociedad Económica de

Amigos del País (Economic Societies of Friends of the Country) and the new colonies which at the regional level took effect in the Nuevas Poblaciones (New Villages) of Sierra Morena and Andalucía, creating many new villages which are still thriving today.

In Jaén there were two Reales Sociedades Económicas de Amigos del País: in Baeza and the city of Jaén. The former was created in 1774 and the latter in 1786, and officially approved in 1790. Their goals were to cultivate literature, improve the education of the young, promote agriculture, manufacturing, art and industry and according to their statutes, "other objectives of benefit to the public, establishing awards and creating factories and events of technical instruction". One of these was the creation of an esparto grass factory which in 1790 employed more than six thousand people



and provided a free thread spinning school. The Baeza society survived until 1833, and the Jaén society still officially exists, focusing on the cultural enrichment of the city with craft workshops and other activities relating to education.

The Enlightenment also brought to Jaén an attempt at agricultural reform and bringing the population back to the countryside, as well as work in favour of public safety and order. The model was the rural repopulation which had been carried out in the most depressed areas of Prussia. In Spain, one of these depressed areas was Sierra Morena, strategically located in the only route into the south, where in the words of Antonio Ponz “nothing could be harvested, all was brush and scrubland, the shelter of wolves

and brigands.” There and in the abandoned territories of the provinces of Córdoba and Sevilla, the Enlightenment experiment would be played out, trying to create a new society without any of the scourges the Enlightened had been vainly fighting.

Repopulation began in 1767, with a special legal dispensation, in a settlement area between the villages of Bailén, Santa Cruz de Mudela and Baeza, distributing indivisible and inalienable plots of land of 28 *fanegas* (180,000 square metres) and creating small population centres of 15 to 30 houses around each estate. The economic base would be agriculture and livestock farming, with cereals, olives, grape vines and fruit trees, complemented by industry,

preferably textile. The villages to be founded would be free, without the servitude of the old regime, and would therefore have a municipal organisation where the positions would be held for limited periods and elected by all the residents. Primary education would be universal, obligatory, and free of charge.

The fruit of this colonisation would be the New Villages of Andalucía and the New Villages of Sierra Morena. The first group would have their capital in La Carlota and the second, and for both areas, in La Carolina. The colonies still exist in the form of the villages of La Carolina, Carboneros, Santa Elena, Navas de Tolosa, Guarromán, Rumbiar, Aldeaquemada, Arquillos and Montizón, in the Province of Jaén, and in the New Villages of Andalucía, Fuente Palmera, La Luisiana, La Carlota, San Sebastián de los Ballesteros and Cañada del Rosal. These new villages with their geometrical layouts are still flourishing today. Their creator was the Intendant Pablo de Olavide, an enthusiast of the Enlightenment, who overcame all the obstacles and problems he encountered with the touch of humour so typical of that movement. An example of that humour is the church which by Royal decree had to be set in the centre of each village. This was done in all the New Villages, except for La Carolina, where the Intendant's Palace was placed in the centre, and the church next to it. With this Olavide was sending the message that in those new times, civil power was more important than the power of the church. This and some other deviations from ecclesiastical orthodoxy would eventually bring him before the Inquisition.

Thus, in Jaén, the creations remain of the two most transcendent movements in human thought.

Recommended Bibliography

On the age of Enlightenment

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About the Enlightenment in Jaén

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On the Real Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País

Arias de Saavedra, J., "Las Sociedades Económicas de Amigos del País del Reino de Jaén", Granada (1984)

On the New Villages of Sierra Morena and Andalucía

We recommend the abundant information recollected by:

Sanchez-Batalla Martínez, C.: "La Carolina en el entorno de sus colonias gemelas y sus antiguas poblaciones de Sierra Morena". Five volumes dedicated to the colonization in all its aspects: founding, colonization, economy, legislation, daily life, ... Edited by Caja Rural de Jaén (since 1998)

We must also emphasize the contributions in:

The New Villages of Sierra Morena Conference Proceedings

Here we can find monographic works made by historians and experts in different subjects.

About the Intendant Pablo de Olavide

The more comprehensive analysis was made by:

Perdices de Blas, L. "Pablo de Olavide. El Ilustrado (1725-1803)", Madrid, 1992.