

# The Enlightenment in Catalonia

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## ABSTRACT

This article sketches out a historiographic picture of the Enlightenment in Catalonia: first it analyses the qualities of the concept, how it was adapted to the reality of Catalonia and how it has been interpreted from different vantage points, and secondly it summarises the milestones achieved by this movement according to the most recent literature.

**Keywords:** Enlightenment, historiography, Catalonia, 18th century

## A LUMINOUS CONCEPT FULL OF AMBIGUITIES

In the 18th century, the words “Enlightenment” or “to enlighten” were associated with shedding light on something to clarify it, giving rise to understanding as well as to new trends in thinking. Despite this metaphorical clarity, in recent years the field of Catalan philology,<sup>1</sup> which regarded the word “Ilustración” (Enlightenment) as more characteristic of the Spanish historiographic tradition, has instead advocated the term “Il·luminisme” as it considers this new term more comparable with the other European names: the Italian *Illuminismo*, the Portuguese *Iluminismo*, the English Enlightenment and the German *Aufklärung*. The new coinage has been hesitantly accepted, but the problem lies not in the choice of word but in its definition, which has been labelled “difficult” by the leading scholars who have analysed how this concept has been applied in Catalonia.

Three avenues of study can be encompassed under the term Enlightenment: first, the cultural and philosophical movement that developed in Europe in the late 17th and entire 18th centuries; secondly, the description of the historical and cultural deeds of the 18th century; and thirdly, the dynamic assessment, still today, of the project of modernity proposed by some authors throughout the 18th century which made universal use of reason.

The concept of the Enlightenment becomes banalised when it is used in some historical studies on widely divergent topics simply to outline the chronology of their analysis. The expression “Age of the Enlightenment”, similar to the way “the Age of the Renaissance”, “the Age of the Reformation” and “the Age of the Baroque” are used, often acts as a catch-all where issues with little relation to

the spirit of the philosophy of the century are jumbled together, including demographic evolution, the price of wheat, forest management and attitudes towards death. It is as if all the individuals and all the social actions during the 18th century were in possession of enlightened principles.

The essentialist debate on the Enlightenment derives from its close ties with the notion of modernity. On the one hand, after the injustice and barbarism wrought by the Holocaust and World War II, the enlightened project was harshly questioned by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*. According to this theory, enlightened reason, pursuing the mastery of nature, became instrumental reason, that is, one subjugated to scientific and technical principles. The mastery of instrumental reason can lead to perverse consequences (totalitarianism, fanaticism), prompting the alienation of the subject.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, a more positive vein of interpretation – proffered by German philosopher Jürgen Habermas – believes that the Enlightenment is a language or procedure that formulates a rational hope of self-improvement, an unfinished yet still valid moral project, despite its failures and the crisis of the idea of progress.<sup>3</sup>

Since these two derivatives of the concept shall not be explicitly explored in this article, we must establish the defining features of the Enlightenment movement of the 18th century. The features of this “ideal Enlightenment” come from the experiences that blossomed in France, the Germanic lands and the Anglo-Saxon world.

The Enlightenment placed its trust in human reason, which acts independently and critically against prejudices, rejecting dogmas, principles of authority and tradition in general. This axiom at first pitted the Enlightenment against the Church; however, outside of France, where the *philosophes* showed themselves to be combative with this institution and even anti-Christian, there were numerous points of contact between churchmen and the ideals of the

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new culture. The principle of tolerance toward religious intransigence and civil liberty as opposed to despotism guarantee the application of the critical spirit and trust in mankind's ability to master nature. The main mechanism for executing this mastery over nature stemmed from the useful, pragmatic discoveries yielded from the progress of science. Observation and experimentation were the cornerstones of a scientific methodology that signalled a break with the Scholastic system. To effect this transformation, the spread of education and a reform of teaching methods were considered necessary. The ultimate purpose of this entire procedure was the quest for wellbeing and individual and collective happiness.

Modern ideas were spread through new venues of sociability – academies, societies, salons, clubs, cafés, discussion groups – devoted to intelligent conversation and the captivating pens of the “men of letters” or *philosophes* who mastered several different fields of knowledge. With a desire for cosmopolitanism, the enlightened men tended to their literary interests and the epistolary correspondence with their counterparts in other regions or countries.<sup>4</sup>

Beyond these descriptive features and the idiosyncrasy of its most characteristic representatives, Immanuel Kant managed to condense the spirit of the Enlightenment in a discreet proposition that promoted individual effort and courage to achieve public autonomy of one's own understanding and emancipating maturity: “*sapere aude!*” or “dare to be wise”. Since the individuals participating in this premise were still a minority in Germany at the end of the 18th century, Kant believed that his age was not an enlightened age but an age of Enlightenment. Therefore, the eminent philosopher situated the Enlightenment in a process aimed at perfecting oneself and growing with the adherence of those who managed to achieve “maturity”.

## A CATALAN ENLIGHTENMENT?

Despite the sort of philosophical disrepute that the Enlightenment suffered from in the 1950s, no national historiography from Europe or America has wanted to eliminate it, even if it has been “low-intensity” or *sui generis*, as it has been described in Catalonia.<sup>5</sup> Avoiding the Enlightenment meant questioning the idea of progress and denying the foundations of modernity, an unrenounceable agenda for progressive historiography in many countries, including Spain under the Franco upheaval.

Research on the Enlightenment experienced renewed interest in the 1930s, with the studies by Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*; Carl Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*; Daniel Mornet, *Les origines intellectuelles de la Révolution française*; and Paul Hazard, *The European Mind, 1680-1715*. Generally speaking, these contributions drew from an idealistic conception of history and culture and fol-

lowed the methodology of the traditional history of ideas, which is highly dependent upon philosophy and places a premium on certain authors and works by elevating them to the status of classics. The textualist criterion they apply fosters the enshrinement of certain figures – especially French ones – who act as a synthesis of the spirit of their time or as the advanced minds of their day.<sup>6</sup>

Gradually, but especially after the 1960s, this unitary vision associated with the Enlightenment, constructed based on the French pattern, witnessed claims of “national Enlightenments”. Despite the fact that he followed Cassirer's conception, Peter Gay forged bonds between the English colonies in North America and the Enlightenment through figures like Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson.<sup>7</sup> Later, in his monumental *Settecento riformatore* (1969-1987), Franco Venturi spotlighted the singularities and difficulties that the Enlightenment movement experienced in “peripheral” regions like Italy, Poland, Greece, Hungary, Russia and Spain.

However, since 1954 the Spanish Enlightenment has had an overview written by Jean Sarrailh, *L'Espagne éclairée de la seconde moitié du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (1954), which continued in the same vein started by some Hispanists in the 1930s – such as Paul Mérimée, Lois Frances Strong and Luigi Sorrento – who stressed the decisive French influence on the enlightened minority in Spain in the second half of the 18th century. Sarrailh's work, according to a “Jesuit” critique that Miquel Batllori devoted to it in 1965, was “fundamental” but did not take into account the Spanish literature after 1936, meaning that the works by Jaume Vicens Vives, Luis Sánchez Agesta, Vicente Rodríguez Casado, Vicente Palacio Atard<sup>8</sup> and Batllori himself were ignored. Despite the fact that he was not cited, Batllori had conducted studies on several 18th century scholars, such as Francesc Gustà and Esteban de Arteaga. The Jesuit historian situated the “birth” of interest in the 18th century in Spain sometime after 1945.

In the late 1950s, under the aegis of Sarrailh's work and the book by Richard Herr, *The Eighteenth Century Revolution in Spain* (1958), the first studies were published that drew from the concept of the Enlightenment to refer to the 18th century philosophical and cultural movement in Catalonia and the Catalan-speaking regions. In 1959, Miquel Batllori appealed to the need to have a “comprehensive vision of the philosophical culture of the century of the Enlightenment”.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, in the 1960s the term began to be used more frequently by historians, philologists and intellectuals in general.

Joan Fuster claimed that the contributions of the “Enlightenment” were important in the formation of the uniqueness of the region of Valencia in his famous essay *Nosaltres, el valencians* (1962); Manuel Sanchis Guarner devoted the third part of his book *Els valencians i la llengua autòctona durant els segles XVI, XVII i XVIII* (1963) to examining the “emergence” of Catalan during the “Enlightened” period; and in the anthology of texts in his *Ideari d'Antoni de Capmany* (1965), Emili Giralt described

the prominent historian Antoni de Capmany as a “man of the Enlightenment”.

In 1966, Enric Moreu-Rey contributed to consolidating the term with the publication of *El pensament il·lustrat a Catalunya*. Also relying on a compilation of the most important texts from the Enlightenment in Catalonia and Valencia during the 1800s, he aimed to highlight the significance of this cultural and philosophical movement in the peripheral regions of the Iberian Peninsula and to question the presumed monopoly of the court of Madrid. From then on, there was a series of contributions of limited scope, such as the ones by Jordi Berrio (1966) on philosophy,<sup>10</sup> Joan Mercader (1966) on historians and scholars<sup>11</sup> and Ernest Lluch (1967) on the Enlightenment institutions in Girona.<sup>12</sup> However, the most important of all were the studies by Antoni Mestre on Gregori Maians (or Mayans): in 1968 he published *Ilustración y reforma de la iglesia. Pensamiento político-religioso de don Gregorio Mayans y Siscar (1699-1781)*, and two years later he came out with *Historia, fueros y actitudes políticas. Mayans y la historiografía del XVIII*.<sup>13</sup>

Antoni Mestre situated Maians at the core of the Enlightenment movement in Spain, which, contrary to Sarrailh's thesis, shifted the beginnings of the Enlightenment back to the first half of the 18th century. The rich, extensive documentation on Maians not only reinforces Valencia as the focal point of the Enlightenment in Spain but also allowed Mestre to sketch a web of varied, extensive cultural contacts, including most prominently the ones that this scholar maintained with Catalonia. These ties and relations were exploited by Catalan historiography during the ensuing decades. Thus, in 1971 Batllori delivered a lecture at the *Primer Congreso de Historia del País Valenciano* (First History Congress of the Region of Valencia) on “Valencia and Catalonia in the 18th Century: The Catalan Friends of Gregori Maians i Siscar”, in which he traced the scholarly contacts – almost always through letters – with the “men from Cervera”, including the Finestres brothers, Francesc Blanquet, Miquel Gonsler, Francesc de Sabater, Francesc Xavier Dorca, Ramon Llätzer de Dou, Josep de Vega i Sentmenat, Ignasi Ferrer and Antoni Codorniu.<sup>14</sup> During the past 40 years, the exhaustive mining of the documentary sources on Maians has enabled us to learn more about many facets of the scholar from Oliva, an undertaking spearheaded by Vicent Peset<sup>15</sup> and especially by Mestre,<sup>16</sup> which has contributed to creating an image of the Enlightenment in Catalonia with close ties to its counterpart in Valencia.

#### THE HISTORIOGRAPHIC CONTROVERSIES OVER THE ENLIGHTENMENT

During the 1970s and 1980s, studies on the Catalan Enlightenment experienced an interpretative bifurcation. First, the research inspired by the scholarship of Miquel Batllori and the open perspective of Antoni Mestre con-



Figure 1. Antoni de Capmany (Barcelona, 1742–Cádiz, 1813), historian, philologist and politician. Author of the *Memorias históricas sobre la marina, comercio y artes de la antigua ciudad de Barcelona* (1779-1792). Portrait by Manuel Ferran (1871).

tinued, mainly developed by men of the Church who upheld the controversial formula of the “Christian Enlightenment”. Secondly, the studies on the Catalan economy in the 18th century from a Marxist perspective got underway, which focused on economic thinking and especially on the historiographic contributions of Antoni de Capmany. The economic vantage point and the study of the Austriacist signs during that century – “rational”, and using “universalising” principles – spurred a nationalistic interpretation of the Catalan Enlightenment.



Figure 2. Gregori Maians (Oliva, Valencia, 1699–Valencia, 1781), a man of letters and early representative of the Enlightenment in Spain. He exerted significant influence over certain cultural initiatives in Catalonia. Portrait by Joaquim Giner (1755) based on a drawing by Josep Vergara.

### The “Christian Enlightenment”

To Batllori, the relations between the Enlightenment and the Church were one of the core issues in the matter. In Catalonia, just as in the rest of Spain, along with Italy and Germany, the Enlightenment manifested itself through a synthesis of reason and faith, between the critical spirit and respect for the Christian tradition. Unlike the French philosophers, many of whom were atheists or deists, in Spain the men of letters neither openly questioned the absolutism of the Church and its objectives nor ever went beyond a moderate reformism. The reality that Batllori stated revealed that “if we had to exclude from the history of the Enlightenment all the figures who were not radically rationalist, materialist and at least deist, the history of the *Aufklärung* would be reduced to very little or limited to the history of the reforms of society and the churches”.<sup>17</sup> This statement indicated that in Catalonia the Enlightenment either had to be Christian or could not exist.

For this reason, one of the main avenues of the reformist Catholic Enlightenment during the second half of the 18th century was expressed through the actions of the bishops,<sup>18</sup> many of whom have been the subject of monographic studies, including the archbishops of Tarragona Francesc Armanyà,<sup>19</sup> Romualdo Mon i Velarde<sup>20</sup> and Fèlix Amat;<sup>21</sup> the bishops of Barcelona Pedro Díaz Valdés<sup>22</sup> and Josep Climent;<sup>23</sup> the bishop of Vic Francesc de Veyan;<sup>24</sup> and the bishop of Girona Tomàs de Lorenzana.<sup>25</sup> These “official” figures were accompanied by a select group of scholarly men of the Church, including Jaume Caresmar,<sup>26</sup> Mateu Aimeric, Lluçia Gallissà,<sup>27</sup> Francesc Xavier Dorca i Parra,<sup>28</sup> Jaume Pasqual<sup>29</sup> and Fèlix Torres Amat,<sup>30</sup> among many others, along with several scholars with profound Catholic convictions, including Maians,<sup>31</sup> the source of the bulk of Catalonia’s contributions to the Enlightenment movement.

### The Enlightenment, liberal and bourgeois

The concept of the “Christian Enlightenment” has been radically questioned from a wide range of ideological positions. Within the field of philosophy, Francisco Sánchez-Blanco has refuted the existence of an “Enlightenment” – either Christian or secular – in Spain during the reign of Charles III. Sánchez-Blanco believes that trying to counterbalance the denial of progress and the social and political immobility of Spain during Charles’ reign by mentioning a handful of superstitious, apologetic argumentations from Church history – one of Maians’ priority objectives – does not suffice to attain the category of Enlightenment.<sup>32</sup> Since this position has openly clashed with the conclusions upheld by Antoni Mestre, overall it has not been very widely accepted by Catalan historiography.

On the other hand, from a Marxist vantage point, Josep Fontana, with the vehemence that characterises his discourse, believes that attributing a sign of “modernity” and “Enlightenment” to figures like Armanyà and Climent, so distant from Kant’s *sapere aude*, is absurd. He wonders:

“What kind of ‘Enlightenment’ is this?” and goes on to add ironically that “if these are our Enlightened men, where would our reactionaries be?”<sup>33</sup>

With the “Catholic Enlightenment” thus impugned, and all the personalities linked with this sensibility therefore excluded, few representatives remained, which was paradoxical in a place like Catalonia, which seemed to harbour the most important factors – economic and social – to make it the vanguard of the Enlightenment in Spain. Fontana claims that “in the last few decades of the 18th century Catalan society was brimming with ‘Enlightened’ ideas and modernising concerns”.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, even though there were only a few participants in the Catalan Enlightenment, they must be sought because they did indeed exist.

The studies on scientific initiatives and economic thinking, with Ernest Lluch at the fore, reassessed figures like Francesc Romà i Rossell, Jaume Caresmar and especially Antoni de Capmany.<sup>35</sup> As an economic historian, Capmany has become the most visible icon of the aspirations of the bourgeois Enlightenment closest to liberalism. Nonetheless, the critics have had to be flexible with the contradictions that permeate his oeuvre and his political attitudes.<sup>36</sup>

### The Enlightenment in a nationalistic vein

As Maties Ramisa has claimed, the 18th century has traditionally be assessed – by Ferran Soldevila and Pierre Vilar – as a century of “denationalisation” and thus as an uncomfortable period for a certain vein of historiography which noticed how the elites of the Principality had preferred to collaborate with the Bourbon projects, had adopted Spanish as their language and had emigrated to the Court to secure posts and honours. However, in recent years the studies that have focused on the economy, politics and culture have noticed a century with many positive directions.<sup>37</sup>

The acknowledged economic growth in Catalonia during the 18th century, more or less supported by the Bourbon despotism, clashed with the traditional interpretation which enmeshed the Principality in cultural and political stagnation. This stereotypical vision began to shift with the late works by Ernest Lluch,<sup>38</sup> who compiled and interpreted a series of texts (obviously written in Spain) which, with all the caution required by that centralist, uniformising context, defined a country which linked up with the vanquished Austriacism in 1714 and which would become crucial to ushering in the 19th century *Renaixença*. Lluch’s thesis has been carried on by subsequent historians – like Joaquim Albareda<sup>39</sup> – but it was generally received with scepticism, given that it seemed to present a view that was excessively optimistic in favour of the national cause.

### The socio-cultural history of the Enlightenment

Since the last decade of the 20th century, the Enlightenment has also benefitted from the shifting perspective

brought about by the social history of culture. The studies that analyse education (school networks, learning systems), literacy levels, the people's degree of familiarity with reading and writing (memoirs and letters) and the production and dissemination of printed materials (books, the press) have served to frame the Enlightenment as a less elitist, more widespread movement encompassing a broader swath of society.<sup>40</sup> In fact, back in 1783, the German philosopher Moses Mendelssohn stated that "the Enlightenment of a nation consisted of the total mass of knowledge" and depended upon "its spread through all social echelons".<sup>41</sup> This new range of cultural activities which had previously barely been considered has eliminated the possibility of positing the existence of uncultured social groups and has helped to question the stigma of decline that traditionally affected the modern centuries, including the Enlightenment.

## THE MILESTONES IN THE ENLIGHTENMENT

### History

The theoretical model of enlightened historiography was characterised by the application of rational criticism, the banishment of the recourse to providentialism, an interest in the social and cultural factors that stimulated the material and spiritual progress of a nation, the intention to explain the past for educational purposes, the desire to forge a synthesis between erudition and historical philosophy and the attainment of a polished, appealing narrative model. The paradigmatic historians of this way of viewing and writing about history are David Hume, Edward Gibbon and Voltaire, although the latter applied himself more in philosophical discourse than in scholarship.

The influence of these historians served to temper the harshness of the scholarly, antiquated method that prevailed in Catalonia and to simulate the historiographic methodology of the two most representative authors in the historiography of the Catalan Enlightenment, Joan Francesc de Masd eu and his *Historia cr tica de Espa a y de la cultura espa ola* (1784-1805), and especially Antoni de Capmany and his *Memorias hist ricas sobre la marina, comercio y artes de la ciudad de Barcelona* (1779-1792).

While Masd eu addressed new topics, such as the climate, trade, customs, temperament, culture, population, government, agriculture and crafts, that is, civil history, Capmany placed himself at the service of the Barcelona Town Hall and the Board of Trade to uphold the interests of the emerging bourgeois society through the historical-economic analysis of the Middle Ages in Catalonia.

However, the shaping of the history of the Enlightenment in Catalonia is closely tied to the genealogy of criticism. Criticism was the response to the passion of Baroque historiography, which had gotten accustomed to swallowing up the fantasies that adulated peoples' religious devotion and national vanity. The root of the critical impulse can be found in Church history, particularly

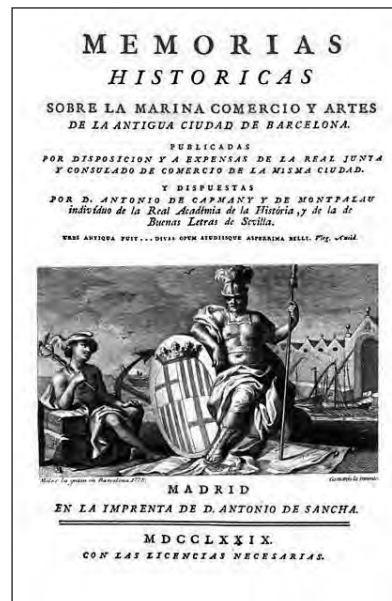


Figure 3. Cover of the *Memorias hist ricas sobre la marina, comercio y artes de la antigua ciudad de Barcelona*, published in four volumes between 1779 and 1792. This work is the leading exponent of 18th century Catalan historiography and was commissioned to Capmany by the Barcelona Board of Trade. It is a study of the ancient trade and ancient marina of Catalonia.

in the hagiographic revisions that some religious communities, such as the Bollandists and the Maurists, started performing in the 1640s. The spirit that animated these historians was the systematic revision of the claims upheld until then, validating only the ones that could be proven with accredited documents. On the other hand, bibliographic criticism took root in Valencia thanks to the commitment of Manuel Mart  and Gregori Maians, who applied a kind of criticism that sought the truth, even if it might harm the sensibilities of the Church or the monarchy. Maians exerted a decisive intellectual influence on the bishops of Barcelona Ascensi Sales and Josep Climent, and on Josep Finestres and the Cervera circle.

In Catalonia, apart from the contribution of the Valencia School, what stood out is the link to the French Archivist School. The application of new documentary techniques to their wealth of archives took shape in a painstaking compilation of diplomas, a vetting of the texts and the publication of the most important documents. The activities of the intellectuals from the Acad mia dels Desconfiats (Academy of the Untrusting) fall within this vein of action, including Daniel Finestres, Francesc Xavier de Garma and Jaume Caresmar, the Premonstratensian canon and founder of the school of archivists of Bellpuig de les Avellanes. Later, the synthesis between the bibliographic criticism of the Valencia School and the documentary criticism developed in Catalonia in the late 17th century took shape in the "Observaciones sobre los principios elementales de la Historia" (1756) by Josep Francesc de M ra i Cat , Marquis of Llo,



Figure 4. The building housing the Board of Trade of Barcelona, which created technical schools and chairs aimed at sharing European scientific advances. The outside is neoclassical in style and was built in the last third of the 18th century, while the interior, which is Gothic and dates from the 14th century, is the sea exchange.

the soul behind the Reial Acadèmia de Bones Lletres (Royal Academy of Belles Lettres) of Barcelona.<sup>42</sup>

### Science

Research into the history of science and technology dating from the Enlightenment has undergone significant development since the 1980s through the creation of the field of knowledge of the History of Science and the institutionalisation of the subject.<sup>43</sup> Generally speaking, there has been no dialogue between research in “the humanities” (history, philosophy and literature) and research in “the sciences” (medicine, physics and chemistry). These independent analyses are the outcome of the bifurcation

that knowledge experienced after 1800, and they tend to impoverish the complexity of “men of letters” who were interested in the sciences and almost always had “amphibious” careers.

One of the characteristics of the Catalan Enlightenment is its strict ties with utilitarianism and with the new experimental science. Since the Universitat de Cervera was weak in the sciences and the *Sociedades Económicas de Amigos del País* (Economic Societies of Friends of the Country) never gained much ground in Catalonia – during the 18th century, only the ones in Tàrrrega (1776) and Tarragona (1786) showed some degree of continuity – the economic dynamism of Catalan society and the initiatives



Figure 5. Gimbernat Hall. Former anatomy amphitheatre of the Royal College of Surgeons of Barcelona.



Figure 6. Facade of the Universitat de Cervera. This centre was created by Philip V in 1717 when he decreed the suppression of all the existing universities in Catalonia.

promoted by the Bourbon army fostered the creation of new institutions related to science and technology.<sup>44</sup>

Military needs prompted the creation of the *Acadèmia Militar de Matemàtiques* (Military Academy of Mathematics, 1720)<sup>45</sup> and the *Col·legi de Cirurgia* (College of Surgery, 1760).<sup>46</sup>

The *Acadèmia Militar de Matemàtiques*, spearheaded by Próspero de Verboom, became the leading training ground of military engineers in Spain, and the *Col·legi de Cirurgia*, promoted by Pere Virgili, a surgeon trained in Paris and Montpellier, offered students, soldiers and civilians eminently practical training which enabled them to treat the patients at Barcelona's Hospital de la Santa Creu and to perform dissections. The *Col·legi de Cirurgia* became a breeding ground for prestigious specialists like Antoni de Gimbernat, who forged close ties with surgeons and anatomists in Europe.

The *Junta de Comerç de Barcelona* (Barcelona Board of Trade) developed an ambitious programme to spur the economy, which among other initiatives took shape in the creation of schools and chairs aimed at improving technical training and sharing the scientific advances coming from abroad. By the time of the Peninsular War, the Board had launched the *Escola de Nàutica* (Sailing School, 1769), the *Escola de Nobles Arts* (School of Fine Arts, 1775), the *Escola de Comerç* (School of Trade, 1787), the *Gabinet de Màquines* (Bureau of Machines, 1804), the *Escola de Química* (School of Chemistry), the *Escola de Taquigrafia* (School of Stenography, 1805), the *Escola de Botànica i Agricultura* (School of Botany and Agriculture, 1807) and the *Escola de Mecànica* (School of Mechanics, 1808).

The *Acadèmia de Ciències Naturals i Arts* (Academy of Natural Sciences and Arts) of Barcelona (1770) emerged from the *Conferència Fisicomatemàtica Experimental* (Experimental Physics-Mathematics Conference, 1764),



Figure 7. Antoni Gimbernat i Arbós (Cambrils, Tarragona, 1734 - Madrid, 1816). Surgeon and professor of anatomy at the Royal College of Surgeons of Barcelona.

which was the outcome of the formalisation of a series of informal talks heavily influenced by the Jesuit Tomàs Cerdà, a professor of mathematics and physics at the *Seminari de Nobles* in Cordelles and master teacher of the Jesuits until he was expelled in 1767.<sup>47</sup> The academy organised lectures in algebra and geometry, statistics and hydrostatics, electricity and magnetism, optics, pneumatics and acoustics, natural history, botany, chemistry and agriculture.<sup>48</sup>

### The spread of the spirit of the Enlightenment

During the 18th century, the population's literacy levels matched the utilitarian spirit of the century, and therefore despite the shortcomings of the school system, education was determined by the profit that could be yielded from the skill. For this reason, writing depended heavily on the social structure or professional groups that were the most likely to write on a regular basis, including farmers and craftsmen in guilds. In the city of Girona, around 75% of the latter knew how to write. This means that it does not make much sense to apply literacy parameters that reflect the projects of the 19th century liberal governments to 18th century society.

Nonetheless, the latest studies reveal that more than half the men who lived in the cities were able to read and write, while the levels among women – more uneven – ranged between five and twenty percent. The evolution that can be glimpsed throughout the century of the Enlightenment reflects many individuals' interest in and desire to become educated.<sup>49</sup>

In Catalonia, the stigma of illiteracy had rendered an Age of Enlightenment that was not very educational, with little interest in formally educating children when knowledge could be acquired outside the educational structures in a society in which education was not always officially regu-

lated. This somewhat uncultured scene has also been the perfect framework for justifying the sluggishness of typography in the Principality, ultimately a kind of industry that lived off not muses but sales. Around mid-century, the production costs were clearly higher in Catalonia than in Venice or Lyon, so books were imported and commercialised with dispatch. Bookshops were fairly well-stocked, but care was clearly taken not to stock books banned by the Inquisition, which, however, did not mean that they did not circulate. We have to assume that the cases opened by the Holy Office against certain daring readers represent a small percentage of the actual numbers.<sup>50</sup>

Culture, of course, was promoted at the Universitat de Cervera and the Acadèmia de Bones Lletres. The Cervera institution, which was burdened with unpopular patronage but which more importantly had to cope with a severe lack of means, offered modest results, perhaps more than it could but less than was expected of it. Historiography has only interpreted the disappearance of the Universitat de Barcelona and the other universities in Catalonia as punishment from the Bourbon dynasty without considering the decline of these institutions already underway when they were eliminated, and especially without taking into account the fact that this paved the way for the promotion of other institutions more sensitive to the modern sciences and organised with more rational, dynamic structures.

On the other hand, during the entire century the Acadèmia de Bones Lletres pursued the goals of preparing a history of Catalonia and writing a dictionary of the Catalan language, neither of which ultimately materialised. In the second half of the century, the institution languished, with a slow, sputtering pace of work.<sup>51</sup>

However, the cultural forms of expression were not reduced to finely-bound books published by scholars. Leaflets and newspapers achieved broader social dissemination because they were read or listened to in the squares, cafés and informal discussions. This printed material, which was often more permeable to the arguments of the new philosophy and to new developments, made a decisive contribution to consolidating a state of public opinion. The Enlightenment stretched further in these spheres.

### Language

If, as Mendelssohn claimed, “the language of a people is the best indicator of their education, both their culture and their enlightenment”, given that “a language acquires *enlightenment* through the sciences and *culture* through social use, poetry and rhetoric”,<sup>52</sup> 18th century Catalonia was a largely uneducated nation, perhaps with some culture, but with no enlightenment.

In fact, the bureaucrats and military officers of the Bourbon monarchy, the upper Church hierarchy, the aristocracy and the mercantile bourgeoisie used Spanish in their public, official, literary and scientific relations, even though family and private relations with fellow natives tended to be conducted in Catalan. To the contrary, the illiterate or barely

literate swaths of the population used Catalan in their oral communication. Therefore, the Enlightenment was expressed in Spanish. During the 18th century, the legislation prescribed this and the educated classes generally accepted it. Catalan was discredited as it was considered the vulgar language, remote from high culture.

Despite this reality, or perhaps because of it, criticisms of the status of the language continued over the course of the century, yet at the same time the first solid instruments that would help to strengthen the position of Catalan in the 19th century were also put into place. The apologies of Antoni de Bastero, Ignasi Ferreres, Baldiri Reixac, Agustí Eura, Bonaventura Serra and Carles Ros were accompanied by tools of memory and linguistic construction, such as the *Grammàtica Cathalana, embellida ab dos ortografias* (1743) by Josep Ullastre; the *Gramàtica catalana predispositiva per a la més fàcil intel·ligència de l'espanyola i la llatina* (ca. 1796) by Joan Petit; the two-volume *Diccionario catalán-castellano-latino* (1803-1805) by Joaquim Esteve, Josep Bellvitges and Antoni Juglà; and the *Gramàtica i apologia de la llengua catalana* (1813-1815) by Josep Pau Ballot.<sup>53</sup>

### CONCLUSIONS

After taking stock of the 18th century, Ernest Lluch believed that the century “had not been in vain, and the language survived and headed towards the following century with better prospects. Knowledge of the history and specificity of Catalonia had advanced considerably.”<sup>54</sup> This is a rather optimistic deduction, given that more is usually expected of the Age of Enlightenment.

Until the 1960s, the Age of Enlightenment was quite dark. Many shadows were the result of the interpretation of the 18th century ossified by Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo in his *Historia de los heterodoxos españoles* (1880-1882). This polygraph scholar from Santander became the reference and the authoritative voice of the anti-Enlightenment, a current whose roots went back to the very age of the philosophers which largely aimed to act to safeguard the most purist, traditional Catholic spirit. Menéndez Pelayo believed that the 18th century was the “most perverse, mutinous century against God that has ever existed in history”; similarly, Jaume Pontí i Vilaró, a 19th century Dominican specialising in the dialogued literature between priests and peasants, preached to his parishioners against “men of light and Enlightenment”, that is, against the “Voltaires, Rousseaus, Diderots, Condorcets, etc.” who, in his opinion, were individuals living scandalous lives who left writings brimming with lies.<sup>55</sup>

Alongside this stigma, the lights from the 18th century remained yet to be uncovered. Thanks to rigorous research, in recent decades individuals, institutions, associations, actions and projects have come to light which have revealed the many sparks of a Catalan Enlightenment built upon the genius of a society in unique political circumstances.



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