

## THE OLIVE MONOCULTURE OF JAEN: HISTORICAL STRUCTURE, HERITAGE VALUES AND CULTURAL-TOURISTIC IMPORTANCE

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1. A combination of powerful physiographic and economic reasons explains the extraordinary scale that olive cultivation has reached in Southern Spain. It is currently 1.5 million hectares (30% of the agricultural area). This is why it has been described as the principal landscape of this Autonomous Community (Guzman and Zoido, 2013). The reality that appears after a careful analysis of this vast tapestry of great continuity in the centre of the region is that of high heterogeneity owing to reasons such as the age and the setting of the plantation, the destination of the fruit (table/oil mill), the dominant agricultural labour, the slopes on which they are installed or the cultivation regime that is practiced (rain-fed/irrigated). Thus, the appearance and functionality of olive plantations differ markedly. A confirmation of this diversity is the existence of very contrasting operations in terms of production and profitability (Sanchez and Gallego, 2011).

The olive plantation has, moreover, an immense capacity for generating assets. Its potential is derived from the emblematic nature that the tree has acquired throughout history due to its longevity, hardiness and aesthetic appearance, as well as the prestigious and varied uses (alimentary, cosmetic and therapeutic) of its products (Angles, 2009). And, of course, it also has to do with the peculiar social and economic organization that has allowed for its creation, exploitation and maintenance. Nowadays, the prevailing economic logic imposes an overwhelming homogenization on the agrarian landscape, profoundly alters its natural bases, transforms the farming systems and causes the loss of certain cultural expressions. The fact of the matter is that, from the pure logic of the market, a large number of traditional olive plantations produce little or no profit and, in any case, are very dependent on aid from the Common Agricultural Policy. Within this framework, in addition to having sensible strategies such as product certification or trying to capture a greater share of the value added within the producing territories, interest is deepening in recovering the heritage values related to the olive plantation, both as elements capable

of generating identity but also as potential resources to promote the touristic importance of the territories specialized in olive cultivation. To illustrate the point, we will use the province of Jaen as a geographic space of reference, where the olive plantation area exceeds 570,000 *ha*, 86% of the total cultivated area, which translates into 41.29% of Andalusian olive plantations and 34.07% of Spanish ones.

2. While olive plantations are present in the majority of Spanish regions, it is most characteristic of dry climates, especially in the most thermophilic areas. In the province of Jaen are found some exceptional edaphoclimatic conditions, which explain, therefore, why the highest average yields in the country are enjoyed in this area. The current situation is, however, contrary to what one might think, the result of relatively recent processes that are derived from very favourable circumstances that occur cyclically. In the mid-eighteenth century, the presence of olive groves was very modest; by the late-nineteenth century they were already ubiquitous and occupied one-third of the cultivated land; this grew to two-thirds by the eighth decade of the twentieth century and reached almost 90% a few years later (Garrido, 2005).

3. In any case, this interval of time has led to the coexistence of olive farms that emerged within contexts that may be characterized as pre-productivist, productivist, post-productivist and neo-productivist (Silva Perez, 2009). Until the nineteenth century, the Jiennense olive plantation, like the majority in Andalusia, formed part of a polyculture typical of a subsistence economy with little surplus. By mid-century it barely reached 39,000 *ha* on lands that were unirrigated, very spread out and certainly not the best quality (Sanchez Salazar, 1989). The current reality is quite different and is related to the productivist/protectionist logic of the CAP in force at the time of Spain's entry into the European Common Market (1986). After this, there was a phase of increasing surface area, but especially there was a growth in the harvest thanks to the massive penetration of irrigation for this crop, reaching an estimated 220,000 *ha* at present. In any event, the stimuli were reduced during subsequent years within a context of limited EU budgets that inaugurated a period of progressive deregulation (Araque, Gallego and Sanchez, 2002). Today we can distinguish, however, very disparate plantations according to their management of the natural resources or their social and economic effects. Briefly, they fall into two broad categories: firstly, the traditional olive plantations with low yields, especially in the mountainous areas; secondly, the high-density irrigated olive plantations with high yields and located exclusively on lands with shallow slopes (Sanchez, Gallego and Araque, 2011).

4. The rural areas, previously perceived as backward or uncivilized, have, in recent decades, been considered for their heritage importance. The recognition comes about by considering productive agrarian activity as a generator of displays of interest, whether architectural, utilitarian, landscape, historical, ethnological etc. Probably, it is the concept of landscape that has been most and best employed for this purpose. Specifically, the role of "cultural landscape" is the one that has had the greatest regulatory development, referring to a series of natural and cultural assets that constitute a territorial unit that

is capable of being orderly managed, a matter that has led to milestones such as its recognition by UNESCO and its inclusion on the World Heritage List (Silva Perez, 2008). However, the heritage value of agrarian activity has been tentatively recognized and the danger of its destruction and alteration is very high in many areas containing historical or traditional agrarian assets, which intensifies the urgency to create a protection system based on its cultural characteristics, linking and interrelating all the aspects of heritage that converge on agrarian assets. An attempt to promote these actions is the statement made in the *Charter of Baeza on Agricultural Heritage*, which states that “it consists of the set of natural and cultural assets, tangible and intangible, generated by or employed in agrarian activities throughout history” (Castillo Ruiz, 2013).

5. For its part, the persistent presence of the olive plantation has continued to generate cultural expressions of all kinds, gradually being adopted as a hallmark that goes far beyond its original value. In fact, the olive plantation of Jaen has become over the centuries an economic and social universe capable of building a defined cultural space, and thus olives, olive oil, and olive harvesters have become symbols of the province. These cultural characteristics, logically, are now struggling for survival against the radical changes introduced by the market-oriented model under which the olive industry now operates. The results of these transformations are seen in the overwhelming homogenization of the agrarian landscape, the profound alteration of the natural environment, the transformation of the farming processes, the loss of the family nature of farms and the gradual disappearance of certain cultural expressions. At the present moment, we are witnessing an economic, social and cultural conflict between tradition and modernity, between change and custom, which pose different challenges and dangers to be considered from the perspective of heritage.

Until recently, the multiple heritage assets associated with the olive plantation have rarely been integrated into cultural or explanatory actions specifically for this crop. In line with the trends that have dominated the field of heritage, the assets related to the olive plantation that have been recognized earliest are architectural. This is the case for the historic oil mills (Rojas Garcia Solas and Horn, 2007). With regard to the implements and tools related to the process of growing and harvesting olives, the dizzying changes produced in recent years have led to the abandonment and near oblivion of most of the assets making up that material world: baskets, sticks for knocking down the olives, *capachas*, sieves, shawls, millstones, different types of presses etc. In the best cases, they have become part of ethnographic exhibitions or in *museums of popular arts and customs* (Ortega Ruiz, 2010). As with everything, there are many examples of museums specialized in the olive theme. This is the case for the *Museum of the Culture of the Olive Tree in the Farm House la Laguna* in Puente del Obispo (Baeza), located in an large old olive farm equipped with a mill from the nineteenth century of great historical and architectural value. This museum, from our point of view, gets quite close to the concept of representation of the *traditional culture* of the olive plantation. Examples of other approaches include the *Interpretation Centre of the Organic Olive Farm* in Genave and the *Interpretation Centre of Olive Plantations and Olive Oil - Loma Region*. Finally, the *Terra Oleum Interactive Museum of Olive Oil and Sustainability* located in the Geolit Business Park of Mengibar

(Science and Technology Park of Olive Oil and Olive Plantations) is defined as an area of multidisciplinary outreach (scientific, technological, socioeconomic and environmental) that is aimed at broad sectors of the population. It is the most extensive and best-equipped space that we have described so far, because the purpose is to become a national reference space for these themes.

6. The set of resources available to the olive territory in Jaen is being employed as the basis for promoting multifunctionality on the part of the public institutions. In this regard, it is worth highlighting the role being played by the Andalusian government and the Provincial Council of Jaen. From our point of view, the common denominator and the key that is allowing the transformation of the current reality is the acquisition of a new culture of quality olive oil (the so-called high end oils, the best of which acquire the denomination of extra virgin), which awakens interest in knowing the richness and complexity of the processes, territories and landscapes that are behind its production, as previously happened with the culture of the vineyard and wine. In this context, the adoption of the *Law of the Olive Plantations of Andalusia* (2011) acquires special importance. The purpose of the law is multiple and covers many aspects including increasing production efficiency, boosting research, promoting the efficient use of resources and encouraging consumption; it also includes the purpose of “preserving and enhancing the landscape and the historical and cultural heritage of the olive plantation and its products.”

For now, however, the most prominent example of a tourism strategy linked to the olive plantation is that being carried out by the Jaen Provincial Council. In its role as an agent of territorial development, this institution has had numerous previous experiences, but its most ambitious project to date is the so-called *Oleotur Project Jaen*, which aims to disseminate the multiple resources that the province has in relation to olive oil and the olive plantation in order to allow visitors to learn the process of oil production in the mills, participate in the fruit-gathering phase, contemplate a landscape that asserts its originality and uniqueness in the world, enjoy gastronomy based on the use of olive oil, sleep in a farmhouse or other unique buildings, receive massages with olive oil, acquire products derived from olive products or learn to appreciate the varieties and characteristics of the different types of oils. Of all the offered resources, which are grouped into seven different categories (experiences, oil mills, gastronomy, oil tastings, museums, farmhouses and landscapes), the last one is particularly interesting as it thrives on unique elements (ancient olive trees), viewpoints for contemplating the extensive patches of olive groves and a 55 km road (*the Olive Oil Green Route*). Along these lines, the immediate horizon is focused around an integrated project that is even more ambitious than what has been implemented until now. In this regard, as has happened with other kinds of heritage, and again modelled after what occurred in the case of vineyards and wine, this new phase will be marked by the preparation of a dossier to have the olive plantation declared a UNESCO World Heritage Cultural Landscape, an initiative which must involve the rest of the Andalusian provinces where olive cultivation is very significant. It was first attempted in 2008, without going further than a mere institutional declaration.