





Jaén Journal
on Approximation

ISSN: 1889-3066
vol. 3 (2) (2011), 6M-15M



the southern Renaissance

*“The splendour of a serene time and the
beauty of order in the greatest Renaissance
legacy of southern Europe”*



There was a time when harmony was imposed on the tangle of narrow streets handed down by the Roman and Arab past, where balance instilled a beautiful serenity in the rebirth of a society which was discovering light in shadows and silences. In the 16th and 17th centuries Jaén found its place in the world power which was the Kingdom of Spain. The Renaissance, as an artistic and cultural style, is considered the most brilliant period of the Modern Age in this area of the south-eastern Iberian Peninsula, and this is reflected in the rich legacy which has become part of the heritage of humanity as a World Heritage Site. In the sea of olive groves sweeping over the Jaén countryside, sometimes falling into a symmetrical order, are set palatial castles, mansions, churches, abbeys and cathedrals which recall the Renaissance splendour of these lands. Úbeda, Baeza, Jaén, Canena, Alcalá la Real, Martos, Cazorla, Villacarrillo and many other towns of the province jealously guard monuments among their streets and squares that well repay the gradual discovery of a tranquil visit.

Chronologically, the Renaissance in Spain includes most of the 16th century (from about 1520) and much of the 17th. The powerful urban development in the territory of the former kingdom and diocese of Jaén meant that by the end of the 16th century it had three cities with over 15,000 inhabitants: Jaén, Baeza and Úbeda; Andújar and Alcalá la Real with more than 10,000; and nearly as many in Cazorla, Martos and Alcaudete. In that era these figures meant ranking among the thirty largest cities in the Iberian Peninsula.

This population density was made possible by rich farming production, especially of cereals, and a lively local

industry in crafts such as weaving, pottery and building, as well as the development of trade and professional services. A fundamental reason for the formation of towns and cities and their flourishing cultural was the role of the higher social classes: the nobles and the clergy. The most notable of the former were the recently ennobled who provided services to the government, with a unique position held by the Cobos Molina family of Úbeda, two of whom were Royal Secretaries: Francisco de los Cobos, secretary to Emperor Charles V, and his nephew Juan Vázquez de Molina, in the service of Philip II. Another member of this family was Diego de los Cobos, bishop of Jaén. Their rivals among the nobility were the Benavides in Baeza, and the Messía-Fonseca, lords of La Guardia. Other powerful hidalgos, with or without public office, and rich landowners added religious foundations and their own houses to enrich the artistic heritage of Jaén.

Meanwhile, the clergy contributed not only material wealth but an intellectual training which led many Jaén natives to hold posts of responsibility in the Vatican, becoming privileged intermediaries and spreading the taste and language of Classicism and Humanism in Jaén.

Public powers also contributed to renewing the urban setting, first by building their own seats of power: city councils, houses of correction and prisons, notably those of Baeza, Úbeda, Martos, Andújar and Torredonjimeno, and those of Linares and Jaén, which are now lost; pósitos, storehouses for grain, alhóndigas or grain markets, and bridges were other influential buildings. But it would be the clergy's plan to renew parish churches and especially the two cathedrals of the diocese, Baeza and Jaén, which would introduce the most authentic language of the Renaissance with the architectural value of its buildings.

The Renaissance triangle

Úbeda, Baeza and Jaén form one of the most illustrious artistic triangles of Andalucía. These three cities are marked by the most consistent principles and beautiful forms of the Renaissance. Declared Unesco World Heritage Sites in 2003, Úbeda and Baeza complement each other in an inseparable and indissoluble partnership, the former lordly and the second simpler, both crowned by the Cathedral of Jaén, a jewel of the Spanish Renaissance.

Baeza, the city whose silent streets were paced in search of solace by the poet Antonio Machado, reached its highest splendour in the 16th century. The first seat of the bishopric of Jaén, a flourishing centre from Visigoth times, its medieval core within the city walls flooded out into a spectacular growth of new suburbs which would form the historic city we know today. Within the historic site, the highlight is the axis running from the Cathedral to the former Jesuit school, Colegio de Santiago, the setting for the great seats of education which made the city famous in the 16th and 17th century: the University, the Seminary and this school, together with the Jabalquinto Palace and the early gothic church of Santa Cruz. The Cathedral is outstanding, rebuilt over a gothic predecessor, traces of which are visible at its foot. Andrés de Vandelvira, at last during two stages, was responsible for the interior space, well resolved in a simpler way than in Jaén. It contains four magnificent Renaissance chapels, the chapel of Los Arcedianos or San Miguel laid out by Vandelvira; two iron grilles by Maestro Bartolomé and an interesting museum in its gothic cloister.





In the centre of the Plaza de Santa María, the freestanding fountain in the form of a highly ornamented Palladian arch is a rare example of its kind, dated 1554 and built by Ginés Martínez. Opposite it, the imposing Seminary of San Felipe Neri, founded in the 17th century, and now home to the University of Andalucía, which backs onto the Jabalquinto Palace, with a Flamboyant Gothic façade with Renaissance elements, one of the most photographed sights in the province. The University, the Colegio de Santiago and the Plaza del Pópulo are among the other Renaissance spaces and buildings scattered throughout Baeza, transporting visitors to the splendours of the past.

Just 8 kilometres away, Úbeda is one of the great cities of the Andalusian Renaissance. Its original walls speak of the military importance of the town in the middle ages, both strategically and in terms of its social structure, to which a significant political element would be added in the 16th century, when it would be the birthplace of great statesmen such as Francisco de los Cobos and Juan Vázquez de Molina, secretaries to Charles V and Philip II respectively, who would give the city a unique Renaissance character.

The core of the architectural heritage of Úbeda is Plaza Vázquez de Molina, presided over by the funerary chapel of El Salvador, the burial place of Francisco de los Cobos and his wife, María de Mendoza. The Chapel follows classic models of rotunda inspired by the Pantheon of Rome connected to a nave, a form which had already been tried in the cathedral of Granada. Andrés de Vandelvira, the master builder, contributed the layout of the sacristy, with an original façade opening at an angle, and the two side façades. Two palaces side by side on the North side of the square, and another, the Orozco Palace, opposite, define the space. Of the first two, one belonged to the clergyman Hernando Ortega – known as Dean Ortega, as he held that post at Málaga Cathedral – and is now a Parador of the National Tourist Board. The other, the “Palace of Las Cadenas”, was built for Juan Vázquez de Molina and is now the City Hall. Both buildings are by Andrés de Vandelvira and are two versions of the classic theme of the Roman house, but with original interpretations by the architect. Opposite the Palace of Vázquez de Molina is the medieval Colegiata de Santa María de los Reales Alcázares, the highest-ranking church in the city, built in the 13th to 17th centuries in the Gothic-Mudejar style. Its interior chapels are notable for



their Renaissance fittings, particularly the series of railings by Maestro Bartolomé.

But apart from the Renaissance complex of this square, Úbeda offers exquisite examples of civil and ecclesiastical spaces and buildings, such as the churches of San Pablo, San Nicolás de Bari, San Pedro, and Santísima Trinidad; the convents of Santa Clara, San Miguel and the Oratory of San Juan de la Cruz; and Castilian-accented palaces studded with coats of arms and carved stonework. Outside the city walls, the Hospital de Santiago is an iconic monument. This building by Andrés de Vandelvira, commissioned by Bishop Diego de los Cobos, is now an exceptional setting for concerts and public events.

Our journey through the southern Renaissance now comes to the capital of the province. Jaén's old quarter is home to one of the most illustrious Renaissance sites, the Cathedral of La Asunción de Nuestra Señora, Vandelvira's greatest work. Built on the site of a mosque and remodelled from 1550 over the earlier Gothic cathedral, the architect created the Cathedral's aesthetic that still impresses us today. Its interior is a superb interplay of columns and vaults, while the main Baroque façade reproduces in its two slender belltowers the obsessions of Vandelvira's Renaissance style.

Near the Cathedral, Jaén also offers other spaces in the Renaissance style, such as the Palacio Provincial, Palacio de Villardompardo, and the church of San Ildefonso, with a rich façade in this style.

A legacy scattered throughout the province

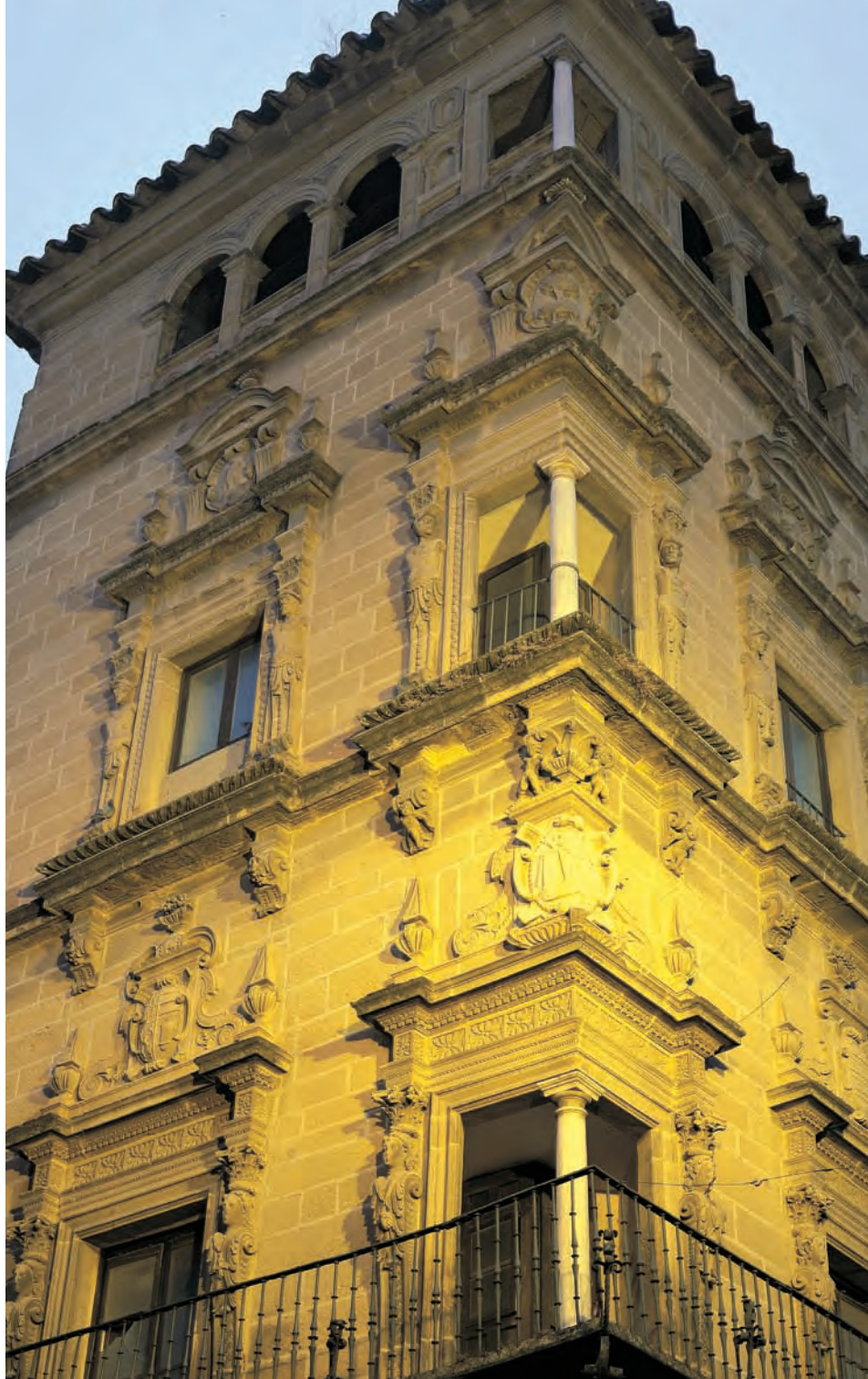
Andrés de Vandelvira (1505-1575) is the outstanding architect of the 16th century in Jaén, and one of the three cornerstones of the Renaissance in Andalucía, together with Siloé and Hernán Ruiz II, and thus in the forefront of the Spanish architects of his time. Born in Alcaraz (Albacete), where he began his career as a simple stonemason, he soon moved to Uclés (Cuenca), accompanying his future father-in-law, Francisco de Luna. Here he would come into contact with the early Spanish Renaissance style known as “Plateresque”. With Luna, he visited the towns of Sierra de Segura, the domains of the Order of Santiago, repairing and building parish churches in Hornos, Segura and Orcera.

This first contact with the territory of Jaén would soon be consolidated when he set up home in 1530 in Villacarrillo, now married to Luisa de Luna. However, as soon as he arrived, he would combine his work with commissions in local towns, such as Sabiote and especially Úbeda, the prosperous city of Francisco de los Cobos, who called him in 1536 to build the Chapel of El Salvador and take over the work laid out by Diego de Siloé, but with his own original contributions. In 1553, now in his prime, he was contracted as the Master Builder to the Cathedral and diocese of Jaén, putting him in control of the



construction of the cathedral and all the other ecclesiastical buildings, including the continuation of the Cathedral of Baeza.

The work of Andrés de Vandelvira can be summed up as solid in construction, while constantly experimenting with the language of architecture. His mastery of the art of stone-cutting, the basic material of his work, inherited from a rich medieval tradition, would undergo an extraordinary conversion or adaptation to the “Roman” or “antique” idiom of the Renaissance. This meant cutting the stones precisely so that when assembled, they would support themselves. The difficulty arose in enclosing spaces with curved surfaces and gaps, given the systematic use of the semicircular arch. Here Vandelvira would combine his hands-on experience with knowledge of Euclidian mathematics, enabling him to create daring circular or square vaults, always with a curved profile, known as sail vaults, which give a feeling of weightlessness and lightness to spaces enclosed by tonnes of stone. This virtuosity required constant experimentation with forms, explaining the variations in style throughout his work, while not discounting his contacts with other, more experienced architects.



Rebirth of the senses

The southern Renaissance not only satisfied the sense of sight with its great buildings. Jaén enables visitors to absorb sensations of every kind, a rebirth of the senses with gastronomy and music, offering a total experience of the light, reason and harmony of the Renaissance period.

Olive oil is irreplaceable for creating the most tempting dishes of Jaén's traditional cuisine. The villages and towns of the Renaissance route base their cooking on this liquid gold, adding produce from their vegetable gardens, pulses and cereals, poultry and small game, pork and lamb. These are the raw materials for a historic cuisine which can be sampled at the Renaissance Food Festival in Úbeda, offering tastings and menus based on the traditional Renaissance cookery of Úbeda, as well as demonstrations and lectures by the restaurateurs on 16th and 17th century cooking.

There are cultural events relating to the Renaissance throughout the year. The "Ciudad de Úbeda" International Festival of Music and Dance is held every spring with excellent concerts and parallel activities in the Music Fair, with concerts in various squares and historic buildings in the town. In summer, the historic centre of Úbeda becomes a theme park, where we can admire its buildings, shop in the historic market, discover ancient crafts, listen to music of the period and eat Renaissance dishes. In July, Canena Castle is the incomparable setting of the Canena



Music Festival, held at the weekends, with concerts in the colonnaded courtyard or Patio de Armas of the castle. Finally, in autumn the sounds of antique, Renaissance and Baroque music return to Úbeda and Baeza in one of the most attractive festivals of the Andalusian music scene. The auditorium of the Hospital de Santiago, in Úbeda, and the ruins of San Francisco, in Baeza, are the ideal monumental settings to enjoy a journey to the past.