LA TIRANÍA DE LOS MESONES: THE SPANISH INN AND ITS REFORM DURING THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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Conditions in the Spanish Inns during the Eighteenth Century

In reading the narratives of the travellers, both Spanish and European, who travelled in Spain throughout the eighteenth century, the reader is forcibly struck by the volume of complaints over the condition of the Spanish inns. Bad as the roads and bridges were in Spain, they were nothing, if the travel narratives are to be believed, compared with the conditions and facilities found in the average venta or posada where the traveller stopped for the night. Indeed, a sizeable anthology might be compiled of traveller’s complaints about the Spanish inns, an anthology whose principal characteristics would be monotony and repetition of content, as we find the same complaints being made with an unvarying regularity throughout the century. To the eighteenth-century traveller the Spanish inns were a byword for dirt, overcrowding, and discomfort in general, to which was added a systematic overcharging and a lack of even the minimum of service. By all accounts, the average Spanish inn seems to have remained unchanged since the days of William Lithgow, who in 1620 warned travellers of the ‘hard lodging and poore, great scarcity of beds and deare’ they would find in the inns of Spain, conditions which were to persist in many rural inns up to the middle of the nineteenth century and beyond (Lithgow 258).

However, any attempt to describe the Spanish inn of the eighteenth century immediately encounters a problem of definition. In theory there were four types of inn in Spain, the venta, posada, mesón, and fonda, but these terms are used indiscriminately, even at an official level, and it is not always easy to distinguish between them.¹ Moisés García de la Torre has attempted to fix some definitions based on Covarrubias and Fernández de la Mesa, but unfortunately with only qualified success. According to Covarrubias a mesón was a casa pública which provided lodging for travellers and their animals, whereas a posada was a house which ‘received guests’ (García de la Torre 397). To Fernández de Mesa, who also followed Covarrubias, posadas

¹ The text of the 1781 Interrogatorio de Fermín de Garde uses the term mesón throughout to describe both urban and rural inns, Archivo Histórico Provincial de Toledo (hereafter AHPT) H–1947. I would like to acknowledge the help of the staff of this Archive in locating the Interrogatorio de Fermín de Garde and other documents relating to the inns in the Province of Toledo for me.
were simply a better class of mesón, while the term mesón itself is applied to all classes of house which received guests in return for payment (García de la Torre 397–8). Needless to say these definitions do not tell us a great deal, and I have found it of more value to follow the classification given by Alexandre de Laborde in 1808, a classification based on the recognition of three basic types of inn:

The houses for the reception of travellers are divided into three classes, the posadas, otherwise called casas de posada, or mesones, and the ventas. The fondas and posadas are always situated in the towns and villages; the ventas are detached houses in the country by the side of roads, at a distance more or less removed from the village (Laborde I cl).

If we follow Laborde’s distinction between the venta and posada, and accept that the term mesón can be used as a synonym for both it will avoid confusion, although it must also be borne in mind that in terms of the conditions and level of service offered there frequently was little material difference between the two. Among the Spanish inns, Laborde recognises only the fonda as being noticeably superior, but unfortunately he notes that they were few and far between in much of Spain (Laborde I clIII). 3

Whether posada, venta or mesón, travelling through eighteenth-century Spain the traveller usually encountered two basic types of structure. In the larger towns and along the principal highways he might find a two-storey structure, if not entirely built of stone, at least stone-fronted, usually of mampostería, built round a patio which offered accommodation for one or two carriages, very rarely more. The ground floor contained the stables with accommodation for 100 or more mules, depending on the size of the inn, some bedrooms and usually the kitchen, floored with either stone or earth and with wood or stone benches running around the walls. In the centre would be an open fire for the travellers to cook their meals, usually with some kind of chimney to draw off the smoke. On the upper floor were located the bedrooms, varying in number and size according the size of the inn, and frequently the innkeeper’s own quarters.

2 Richard Ford confuses the situation still further by describing the term mesón as being ‘almost equivalent’ to that of posada, the difference between them being that the term mesón was applied to the inns in rural communities and the small towns, that of posada being reserved for the inns in the larger towns and cities (Ford 173).

3 Some travellers questioned even the standards of the fonda. Sir John Carr described the food in the fondas as being ‘execrably bad’ (Carr 69).

4 Inns built of cut-stone blocks or sillería were very rare before Floridablanca’s inn-building programme of the 1780s. Even then very few of these new inns were completed.
As regards furniture, bedding and general appointments the situation varied. The inns in the larger towns and along the principal highways could usually provide the traveller with a bed if he so wished, but as the number of beds was never very high, they would not be able to cater for a large party. These beds, made of planks set upon trestles of iron or wood, were provided with sheets of cotton or canvas and a straw-filled mattress and pillows, which apart from providing an ideal habitat for fleas and bugs, were not always in good condition or indeed clean, and it is not surprising that many travellers chose to carry their own bedding with them. Of furniture and furnishings, again the situation depended on the status of the inn, although most urban inns seem to have been able to provide at least some curtains and chairs, and occasionally a table or two. Representative of the better type of inn the traveller could expect to find outside the major cities, in terms of structure and appointments, are the inns in the town of Valdemoro, as described in the 1781 Interrogatorio. Valdemoro was located on the main routes from Madrid to Andalucia, Valencia, Murcia and Cartagena, and was also on the road leading to the sitio at Aranjuez. The local inns could therefore expect to receive a steady volume of traffic, and the location between Madrid and Aranjuez also meant that a significant number of these travellers were of a higher social status than the arrieros, who were the mainstay of the business of the average Spanish inn. In 1781 Valdemoro is listed as having eight inns, four in the town itself and four along the edge of the newly-constructed camino real. The principal inn, belonging to Juan García de la Raza, was a two-storey structure beside the camino real, and built entirely of stone (mampostería), with stabling for two hundred and seventy mules, and with a partly-covered patio which could accommodate two or more carriages. On the ground floor it had four rooms with eight beds, and on the upper floor seven rooms with ten beds, and four rooms ‘sin cama alguna’. Each bed had a mattress and two pillows, all clean and in good condition, and the rooms themselves were furnished with ‘decent’ chairs, curtains of both cotton and damasque, and there was also an unheard-of luxury in the Spanish inn, glass in the windows.

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5 Cf. Fernández de Mesa’s witticism that in the Spanish inn the traveller finds: ‘...no que comer sino quien le coma’ (Fernández de Mesa I 14). The subject of bugs and fleas seems to have been a frequent joke among travellers. See also Southey I 48.

6 There was perhaps another reason, and that was that the average Spanish bed was often too short for the taller foreigner. In 1755 the Italian Norberto Caimo, who claimed to be not a particularly tall man, found the beds in the Spanish inns to be too short, obliging him to ‘curl up like a mole’ to sleep in them (Caimo I 94).

7 In 1781 in the province of Toledo the charge per night for the use of a bed was two reales, irrespective of its condition.
other inns along the highway, were structures of stone and adobe, but all in a good state of repair, and with ample accommodation for mules, and for one or more carriages. All had at least two or more beds, with chairs and curtains of cotton or canvas in the bedrooms, but none had glass in the windows. The other inns in the centre of the town which were described as being ‘solo para arrieros’ were stone and adobe structures, in need of repair, and with few beds and furnishings in the rooms. Overall, only the first, second and fourth inn listed in the Interrogatorio are described as having ‘buen surtido, mueblage y aseo’.8

Yet these inns were certainly better than the average: the condition of the inns deteriorated noticeably away from the towns and principal highways. In 1781 the village of Herencia had a total of four inns, all of which were in such a state of disrepair that they could only be made serviceable through major renovations or by being completely rebuilt. None of them had any accommodation for carriages, and only some of them had bedrooms furnished with beds, bedding and a few articles of furniture.9 Some inns were in such a ruinous state as to be unusable, even by arrieros: of the two inns in Villafranca, only one could offer accommodation to travellers, the other being described as ‘inservible’ owing to its delapidated condition.10

However, even a ruinous inn was better than no inn at all, and there were many rural communities which were either too small, poor, or isolated to maintain even the most rudimentary of inns. The 1781 Interrogatorio lists a group of villages near Talavera that possessed no inn accommodation at all, and which could only offer the traveller lodging in private houses.11

8 Interrogatorio de Fermín de Garde AHPT H-1947-1 Valdemoro.
9 Interrogatorio AHPT H-1947-3 Herencia. See also Townsend’s description of the inn he stayed in at Junquera: ‘No bedsteads, but only three boards laid upon trestles to support a mattress; no bed curtains ...’ (Townsend I 92).

10 Interrogatorio AHPT H-1947-3 Villafranca.
11 Interrogatorio AHPT H-1947-4 Guisondo (lodging for arrieros in private houses during chestnut harvest only), La Parra, Las Herencias, Lucillos, Pepino (village too small and isolated). This lack of inns in many rural areas conditioned where the traveller went, and may perhaps explain why so few travellers journeyed to the Roman ruins at Mérida. Travelling conditions were particularly bad in Extremadura, even by eighteenth-century standards: the French traveller de Laborde advised the traveller ‘to arm himself with courage and patience’ as the conditions in the inns in the rest of Spain were nothing in comparison with those he would experience in this province (de Laborde I 380). Those few travellers who did make the journey often found themselves obliged to sleep in the open air, as the German traveller Fischer had to do in 1798 (Fischer 254–6). Lack of inns seems also to have been a problem between Zaragoza and Madrid, according to the
To judge by the traveller's accounts, the worst inns in Spain terms of state of repair and furnishings were to be found in Galicia and Extremadura, and there was a rough north-south divide, with the better inns being found in the north. Curiously, there was no necessary link between the prosperity of the region and the condition of the local inns; the more prosperous parts of Spain often had inns which were as bad as those found in the poorest. Travelling through Valencia in 1775 Henry Swinburne noted that they seldom found anything at the inns except the ‘bare walls, and perhaps a few eggs, which they sell at an unconscionable price’, and of furnishings he noted that ‘If we chance to find a few unbroken chairs we esteem ourselves uncommonly fortunate’ (Swinburne 116). Even in the capital cities the standard was not greatly above the national average; In 1775, Philip Thicknesse found the fonda, the Fontana de Oro, at Barcelona to be both ‘dirty and expensive’ (Thicknesse I 199), and conditions in the fondas at Madrid were not much better, as Peter Besas’ recent study has shown (Besas 23–63).

The best inns in Spain were nearly always those kept by foreigners, usually French or Italian. Both de Bourgoing and Fischer praised the Italian-owned Venta de San Carlos near Valencia which provided silver cutlery, English crockery, and beds with curtains, and which was in Fischer's words ‘in short a good French inn, to which even the best in Valencia could not be compared’ (Fischer 347, de Bourgoing III 282). Similarly, in the list of inns given by Swinburne in the Itinerary of his Travels through Spain we find the following type of entry: ‘Venta San Felipe’ (between Valencia and Alicante) ‘French: clean’, and of the inn he stayed at at Aranjuez he noted that it was ‘Italian: good’ (Swinburne xii–xv).

This shortage of rooms and beds, especially in the rural inns, meant that they were often overcrowded, especially when the traveller’s arrival coincided with that of a large party of arrieros, and it also meant that privacy and quiet were at a premium. The English travellers in particular felt the lack of curtains on Spanish beds, but this was minor when compared with the overcrowding, such as the English traveller Richard Twiss had to endure in the venta at Casarabonela in Andalusia in 1772, where he found himself forced to share a single room with ten other people, this being the only room the inn possessed (Twiss 262). Also, irrespective of its size, the average Spanish inn was noisy, much more so than elsewhere in Europe according to the traveller’s accounts. In 1798 Fischer penned the following description of the situation he found on arriving at an inn in the Basque Country:

The whole posada or inn was full of muleteers coming from Castile, so that those who followed scarcely found any room. They soon assembled testimony of Norberto Caimo, who experienced difficulty in finding lodgings on this route in 1755 (Caimo I 117).
round a large fire, where a crowd of people began to dress their suppers, ... the different groups crowded close to each other. Here two individuals playing the devil's tattoo [rhythmic drumming] on their pitchers, there a newsmonger just arrived ... from Bayona de Francía, next to him a guitar player and some young women toying with their sweethearts, and beyond them some drunkards quarrelling. Add to these the squeaking voice of the landlady, calling out and reckoning up her accounts, the confused voices of the guests calling for wine, the eloquence of the landlord endeavouring to sell a donkey, a tambouriner playing for the young people to dance, the noise of the mules, separated from the kitchen merely by a partition, the barking of dogs mingling with the general uproar, and you will have an idea of this noisy scene ... (Fischer 113).

While Fischer found this scene interesting for its ‘variety and singularity’ (Fischer 113), other travellers took a different view: after a night at a Catalan inn in 1785, the Irish traveller Maurice Keatinge dryly observed that ‘as to tranquility, that the genius of the people completely banishes’ (Keatinge I 44).

Although the Spanish inns were usually noisy, it was not noise that occupied the principal place among the traveller’s complaints. This was reserved for the fact that they kept no stocks of food to sell, and that on arriving at the inn the weary traveller was forced to make the round of the puestos in the village to buy what he needed, and carry it all back to the inn to prepare his dinner.13 When the inn was situated in a village which had a surplus foodstuffs to sell this was no doubt irksome, but when the inn was an isolated rural venta or situated in a village at subsistence level,14 the

12 Curiously, there was a ‘noise tax’ called the ruido de casa, which the innkeepers were allowed to levy on all travellers. Although this ‘tax’ was almost certainly unofficial, as there is no reference to it in any official documents, from the frequency with which travellers refer to it, it was evidently common throughout Spain. Unfortunately none of the travellers gave any information as to how much it was; the only information I have been able to find comes from an anecdote of Mesonero Romanos about a traveller who argued violently with his host over the bill only to find himself charged an extra 10 reales ‘por el alboroto’. (Mesonero Romanos in Irribarren 171). According to Irribarren this tax persisted until the middle of the nineteenth century.

13 The inn at Venturada seems to have been allowed to keep and freely sell food to travellers, but such inns were very, very rare in eighteenth-century Spain. AHPT H-1947-2 Venturada.

14 Keatinge noted that in the poorest parts of Spain the innkeepers were unwilling to sell the traveller anything at any price, even if they had it. (Keatinge I 143). Such a village was Castilmimbre in the partido de Alcalá which in the 1781 Interrogatorio returned the following reply to the questions relating to the price of provisions ‘No se vende cosa alguna, pues el que las tiene, las tiene por su abasto’ (AHPT H-
situation was more serious, and unless the traveller had brought a supply of provisions with him he might well have to starve, as Townsend and his party had to do in 1786 when crossing a depopulated part of Aragon (Townsend I 122, 224).

The reasons for this situation were complex. To begin with there was the question of the system of monopolies, a system made more complicated by the fact that there were often three or sometimes more sets of regulations in play. Firstly, there were the local monopolies such as the selling of the exclusive right to deal in a given commodity to a local tradesman, a privilege which would be seriously infringed if the innkeepers were allowed to sell food to travellers. Next came the municipal monopolies enjoyed by many communities, such as the bodega cerrada which meant that only locally-produced commodities could be sold in that community; if a certain commodity was bad or non-existent in that locality, the innkeeper could not seek for one of better quality elsewhere. Finally, at a more national level there were the guilds, whose statutes forbade anyone who was not a member from engaging in the trade of the guild: an innkeeper could not be a member of the guild of butchers and therefore could not sell meat. Thus, the butcher or baker in any given community would have his or her trade and position protected by at least three sets of ordinances, ordinances which left no room for manoeuvre for even the most progressively-minded innkeeper. And these privileges were jealously guarded: in 1785 rumours that the inns in Valdemoro were illegally selling wine from Valdepeñas set in motion a major investigation by the Ayuntamiento, with rigorous inspections of the inns concerned, sworn depositions from the inn servants, and with even the local shopkeepers being questioned to ascertain if there was a significant decrease in the volume of foodstuffs being purchased by the innkeepers.\footnote{AHPT H-1949-5 \textit{Autos} Valdemoro 1785.}

In practice, however, most of the better inns do seem to have had a stock of basic commodities, although not enough to provide the traveller with a dinner. One of the results of the 1785 investigation in Valdemoro was that the search for the contraband wine also shed light on the quantity and type of provisions held by the innkeepers of the locality. Although the search only yielded 17 arrobas of wine in the Parador Nuevo, the investigating officials also found 7 flitches of tocino and 2 arrobas of oil in the same inn, one flitch and two pieces of tocino, and 4 arrobas of oil in the inn belonging to Rodrigo Arias, and 2 flitches of tocino plus 8 arrobas of oil in the house owned by Augustín Sal. These quantities are too great to be considered as

\footnote{1947-2 Castilmimbre). In places were there was practically nothing to buy money would have been of little use to the innkeeper.}
being for the innkeeper’s personal use, so we must conclude that they were held as a stock to sell to travellers.\(^\text{16}\)

In considering the conditions of the average Spanish inn account must be taken of the type of traveller who habitually used them. Spaniards of the higher social levels rarely travelled, and when they did it was usually along well-defined routes such as those between Madrid and the sitios, or in the case of the clergy, between one religious house and another. Travelling in fact was considered suspect, and anyone who undertook what were considered unjustified journeys was regarded with suspicion. One of the problems faced by the funcionario Francisco de Zamora in undertaking his scientific journeys through Catalonia in the 1780s and 90s was the hostility and suspicion they aroused among his colleagues, who could not understand why he wanted to travel at all (Zamora 1v-2r). Consequently, apart from the relatively few foreign travellers,\(^\text{17}\) the main clients of the Spanish inns were the arrieros, who paid between 2 and 4 cuartos a night for feed for their mules and a place to sleep on the floor. Those few wealthier Spaniards who did travel seemed to be immune to these hardships, or so at least it appeared to travellers like Keatinge, who marvelled at the apparent unconcern with which they endured the primitive conditions (Keatinge I 154). Reliant as they were almost exclusively on the custom of the arrieros, it is not to be wondered that the Spanish inns did not provide better facilities as there was practically no demand for them.

A direct consequence of this lack of travellers of a higher social status was that there was little attempt at segregating or treating the travellers according to their social class. The French traveller Fonvielle described the Spanish inn as being a perfect example of a democracy where all classes were mixed together in what he described as a ‘hideous equality’, and where no civilised distinctions were observed (Fonvielle 194), and while allowances must be made for exaggeration: Fonvielle was one of those travellers who were disgusted by Spain, the truth was that the foreign traveller could not expect to readily find the kind of deference and service available elsewhere in Europe.

There was, however, a simple system of social classification in operation with respect to the inns, and this was whether the inn had carriage accommodation or not. Inns with accommodation for at least one carriage could consider themselves suitable for a better class of traveller, while those without being considered as only fit for arrieros. We can see this distinction clearly in some of the replies to the 1781 Interrogatorio, as for example in the village of Corral de Almagro which described itself as having ‘seis posadas, tres para carruages, y los otros tres para arrieros’\(^\text{18}\).
Poor facilities, overcrowding, noise, lack of food and dirt were not, however, the only complaints made about the eighteenth-century Spanish inn. What particularly angered travellers, especially Spanish ones, were the prices charged by the innkeepers for this rudimentary accommodation and non-existent service: indeed the phrase la tiranía de los mesones was more usually invoked as a complaint against the widespread practice of overcharging the traveller as against any of the other defects in the Spanish inn service. To many Spanish Ilustrados the average Spanish innkeeper was little better than a robber and criminal: Sarmiento, having angrily denounced the practice in many Spanish villages of operating a double-tariff system, with one price for the locals and a higher one for travellers, had no hesitation in including innkeepers among the class of ‘wild beasts, bandits, gypsies and thieves’ (Sarmiento Apuntamientos 79v–80r), while his exact contemporary, Fernández de Mesa added the crime of murder to those listed by Sarmiento as being natural to the average Spanish innkeeper (Fernández de Mesa I 14). If these descriptions seem excessive it should be borne in mind that the Spanish innkeeper had enjoyed an evil reputation since before the time of Cervantes, and all the Ilustrados were doing was to express certain deep and long-held prejudices in Spain. Certainly there were innkeepers who were in league with bandit gangs, or who turned a blind eye to their houses being used as a rendezvous for criminals or gambling dens, but they were not the rule, and there is no doubt an element of traveller’s resentment for past extortions and discomforts which prompted Sarmiento and Fernández de Mesa to portray innkeepers as they did. Significantly, although the foreign travellers complained just as angrily of the extortionate prices charged in the Spanish inns, they did not regard the innkeepers as particularly criminal as a class, at least no worse than innkeepers elsewhere in Europe.

Yet the fact remained that the Spanish inns were expensive, too expensive by European standards for what they had to offer in the way of accommodation and services, and in this both Spanish and foreign travellers were unanimous. In 1775 Henry Swinburne estimated that the Spanish inn was asking the same price for a bare unfurnished room as would purchase a good dinner and comfortable bed elsewhere in Europe (Swinburne 123), a

19 This was particularly so among the officials and government ministers whose job it was to tackle these abuses. From the numerous documents generated by the inn reforms it is clear that to the official mind at least, the ‘tyranny’ exerted by the Spanish innkeepers was mainly an economic one.

20 Calling the Spanish innkeepers ‘gypsies’ may have had an element of objective truth: Richard Twiss noted that many of the inns he stayed at in 1772 were kept by gypsies, whom as a class he described as ‘thieves and libertines’ (Twiss 179).
view shared by Antonio Ponz who described the prices charged in relation to the service provided as ‘scandalous’ (Ponz VIII 207). Nor was this just mere grumbling on the part of the travellers: records of official inspections of inns refer to a systematic overcharging of travellers by innkeepers. An inspection by the Alcaldes Ordinarios of the inns of Valdemoro in 1787 found overcharging habitually practiced in all of them, and two inns without a proper arancel or price list displayed, in contravention of the law.21

In theory the prices the innkeeper was allowed to charge were set out in the arancel, a document which was drawn up by the provincial Intendente for all the inns in the locality and witnessed by the Ayuntamiento in the presence of the Alcalde and the innkeepers, at least one copy of which was to remain in the Ayuntamiento, while the remaining copies were to be displayed in prominent and clearly-visible places in the inns.22 The arancel was an itemised price list which clearly set out how much the innkeeper could charge for meals, lodging and attendance. In the arancel set for the village of Tembleque in 1783 we find a partridge priced at 5 reales 136 maravedis; a ración of cocido ‘buen acondicionado’ at 2 reales 102 maravedis; a bed ‘bien acondicionado’, 3 reales 102 maravedis per night, and for the owners of a carriage, for lodging, light, utensils and service, 12 reales 408 maravedis per night.23

Comprehensive though it was in its pricing, the arancel just cited was not the norm. Most aranceles covered just the price of feed for the mules and straw, leaving everything else to the innkeeper’s discretion. They also varied widely from place to place, even in the same province, were subject to all the local price fluctuations, and were difficult to enforce. While in 1783 the inns of Tembleque were governed by a comprehensive and detailed arancel, the situation in Valdemoro was very different as we learn from the report of the Administrador de Correos of the preceding year:

... annualmente por las Justicias de esta Villa se dan Aranceles a los mesoneros de ella, señalando precios para la venta de paja y cevada ... y el de una cama por la ocupación de una noche ... pero nada se les prefija en

21 AHPT H-1947-1 Valdemoro 25 de febrero de 1787.

22 The Reglamento of 1783 for Tembleque ordered each inn to display two copies of the arancel ‘bien fijado en una tabla’, one beside the principal entrance and the other at the entrance to the bedrooms. AHPT H-1947-5 Reglamento comunicado a la Villa de Tembleque 27 de febrero de 1783 pliego 7 1v. The arancel was also an ipso facto licence to keep an inn, since it was only granted to those houses which had official approval, although in some communities it was necessary to obtain a specific licence to keep an inn as well.

23 Arancel, o tarifa de los precios de vivros que se consuman en las posadas de la Villa de Tembleque AHPT H-1947-5 Tembleque.
quant to los mantenimientos o viveres, y mucho menos en lo tocante a hospedaje de los viajeros.  

This lack of regulation gave the innkeepers a free hand in setting prices as the report openly admits:

... ocurre en la actualidad que los mesoneros, aunque observan sus Aranceles en lo que contienen, sin que llegue a noticia de las Justicias, se excedan y tiranizan a los viajeros en aquella parte [en] que nada se les arregla, exhiéndose a su arbitrio y voluntad lo que quieren por el hospedaje, pienso, utensilios, y aún por las comidas, especialmente en las cuatro posadas inmediatas a el nuevo Real Camino.

Since the vast majority of inns were not allowed to keep and sell food to the traveller, the prices the innkeeper could charge could not be fixed as they would vary in accordance with the prices being charged in the community at any given time. The situation with regard to lodging was similar; the prices charged would depend on the volume of traffic and the amount of accommodation available: the arrival of a royal party (very possible at Valdemoro) would automatically increase the price of lodging.

In the case of the arancel for Tembleque there is also a problem of interpretation. Since none of the provisions listed in the arancel could be bought at the inn, the traveller would still have to make the round of the puestos públicos in order to buy them, and as it is not made clear anywhere in the arancel or accompanying Reglamento whether these prices were simply for preparing or for both providing and preparing the items listed: the traveller could easily find himself being charged 2 reales 102 maravedís for a portion of cocido, all the ingredients for which he had provided and already paid for himself. It is of course possible that these prices were for food provided and prepared by the innkeeper, who would visit the puestos himself, but it still left ample room for extortion, as the traveller would have no way of knowing how much difference there was between what the innkeeper had paid and the price he was being charged unless he did his own shopping. In any case, not all innkeepers were prepared to provide this service.

24 AHPT H-1947-1 Valdemoro Josef Lerena to Fermín de Garde 7 de abril de 1782 fol.1r.

25 AHPT H-1947-1 Valdemoro Josef Lerena to Fermín de Garde 7 de abril de 1782 fols 1r-1v. Valdemoro was to receive an arancel identical to that of Tembleque in 1783 (AHPT H-1947-6).

26 See William Dalrymple, who in 1775 made the following observation on Spanish innkeepers: ‘In all the inns I have hitherto been, the landlords think that you are obliged to them for even allowing you to spend your money in their houses; they will scarcely stir to get anything for you.’ (Dalrymple 11).
The simple greed of innkeepers cannot be considered the sole cause of the high cost of board and lodging in the Spanish inn, for there were serious defects in the way in which the inns were administered as well. Very few inns were owner occupied which meant that the innkeeper had to pay an annual rent either to a private landlord, or where the inn was the property of the community, to the local Ayuntamiento. And these rents were high: of the eight inns in Tembleque in 1783, the five poorest mesones de herradura each paid an annual rent of 1500 reales, the two posadas 8800, and the parador 5500 respectively. Where the inn was sublet the rent was even higher: the inn at Valdemoro let to Juan Antonio Suárez, and sublet by him to Jenaro Manrique, paid a total annual rent of 10000 reales to the landlord Don Jorge Palacios. In cases where the inn was the property of the Ayuntamiento this situation was compounded further by the practice of putting the tenancy of the inn up to public auction, a practice which, among other things, allowed the other innkeepers in the community to combine to stifle competition by bidding up the price as high as possible, thus hopefully making taking on the inn an uneconomic proposition, or at least guaranteeing that the prices the innkeeper would have to charge would be higher than their own. This appears to be what happened at Tembleque in 1790, where the inn, property of the Ayuntamiento and rented to Joseph Ayllón at 3500 reales pa., was due to come up for public auction. Ayllón appealed to the Intendencia of Toledo, asking for the inn not to be put up for auction and to be allowed to continue at the existing rent, alleging a conspiracy against him by the other innkeepers.

On top of the high rents were the high taxes the innkeeper had to pay to the local Ayuntamiento, the amount of which varied widely from place to place, and even among inns in the same community. In 1785 the alcabalas...
paid by the different inns of Valdemoro ranged between 200 reales and 8500 reales annually\(^{30}\), sums which, when added to the high rents placed a heavy if not intolerable burden on the innkeepers of that town, and which in 1785 led them to address appeals to the King to have the alcabalas reduced.\(^{31}\) In this instance the Ayuntamiento did agree to a reduction in the alcabalas levied on the inns,\(^{32}\) although not without a certain amount of pressure from above.\(^{33}\)

Not all Ayuntamientos were so forthcoming: indeed it was officially recognised that there was a link between excessive taxation and the high prices charged in the Spanish inns, as the 1783 Reglamento de Posadas clearly shows:

> ... grabando las Justicias a los posaderos con cantidades excessibos por los derechos de consumos, es preciso que las tarifas sean mui subidas, y que les permiten o táticamente autorizan estafar a los Pasageros que sobrecargan estos gastos al precio de sus géneros.\(^{34}\)

Such a system could only function on the basis of a systematic overcharging of the traveller. The bulk of the inn clientele was made up of arrieros, who paid between two and four cuartos a night for floor space and stabling for their mules and nothing more. Thus, in a country where travellers were few, and affluent ones fewer still, the innkeeper was forced to make as much as he could out of those travellers who lodged in his house in order to meet the excessive rent and taxes he had to pay, and the complicity of the local Justicias in this is not to be wondered at as it was the only way the system could be maintained.

Dirt, noise, a building frequently in a ruinous condition, lack of facilities and food, and exorbitant prices, these had always been characteristic of the average Spanish inn, and were to remain so during the eighteenth century as well. However, what sets the eighteenth century apart from its predecessors is the fact that for the first time there was a concerted effort on the part of the Spanish administration to attempt to change this situation, to try and raise the level of the Spanish inn to that of the rest of Europe, and it is these reforms which I will examine next.

\(^{30}\) AHPT H-1947-1 Valdemoro fol 3r.

\(^{31}\) Aranjuez 21 de junio de 1785 and 12 de agosto de 1785. AHPT H-1947-1.

\(^{32}\) Ayuntamiento of Valdemoro to Alberto Suelbes 27 de noviembre de 1785 AHPT H-1947-1 Valdemoro.

\(^{33}\) Floridablanca to Intendente of Toledo 24 junio de 1785 AHPT H-1947-1 fol 1r.

\(^{34}\) Reglamento de las Posadas AHPT H-1947-6 Valdemoro fol 2r.
The Inn Reforms of the Eighteenth Century

The attempts to reform conditions in the Spanish inns can be traced back to the days of Philip II. Significantly, in view of one of the goals the eighteenth-century reformers were trying to attain, this was an attempt to break the local monopolies and to permit the inns to keep and sell provisions to the traveller. That it was unsuccessful needs no comment; the fact that the reformers of the eighteenth century were to return to this problem again and again speaks for itself. It was also unique, for after this single Provisión there was a complete loss of interest on the part of the authorities, both local and national, in the state of the inns in Spain.

The eighteenth century was to see a change in this situation, and although inn reform never became a major priority the way the roads did, it nevertheless formed an important part of the overall transport reforms. Article 49 of the landmark Instrucción de Intendentes ordered the newly-created Intendentes not to neglect the condition of the inns in their jurisdiction:

... zelaireis, que en las Posadas, Ventas y Mesones se encuentre toda la possible providencia, abundancia, buen trato y servicio, haciendo que los tengan de los que se inclinaran a este servicio, los más hábiles...

As well as legislation at the level of central government, the eighteenth century was to see the appearance of a specific arbitriamo in relation to the inns, something which was entirely new: Spaniards had frequently complained about the state of their inns, and indeed individual travellers often proposed solutions to particular problems, but before the

35 Provisión que Su Majestad mando hazer este presente año de MDLX para que los mesones destos reynos estén bien proveydos de los mantenimientos necesarios para los caminantes. Toledo 20 de octubre de 1560 Madrid AHN Bca. 1531.

36 I have been unable to find any reference to the inns anterior to the eighteenth century in either the AHN in Madrid or the AHPT in Toledo. It is possible that material may exist in a provincial archive which I have not visited, but it is unlikely to be significant: the indifference at the level of central government would have given little incentive to local officials to plan or undertake reforms.

37 Some reformers such as Ward were inclined to ignore them, arguing that conditions in the inns would improve in line with the general economic improvement of the country as a whole. (Ward 56).

38 Ordenanza de 13 de octubre de 1749 para el restablecimiento e instrucción de Intendentes de Provincias y Exércitos Madrid: Manuel Fernández 1749  Art. 49. The text of this Ordenanza is identical to that of the 1718 Instrucción.

39 For example Antonio Ponz' suggestions that the monopoly of innkeeping be broken, and that the status of the innkeeper be changed, thus hopefully attracting a better class of person into the trade (Ponz VIII 207–12). Breaking this monopoly
publication of Fernández de Mesa’s *Tratado legal* in 1755, there had been no attempt on the part of Spanish theorists to deal specifically with the problem of the condition of the inns.

Fernández de Mesa’s programme for the Spanish inn was an ambitious one, nothing less than a root and branch reform of the whole system of innkeeping as then practiced, of which the first step was to radically alter the status and condition of the innkeeper himself. To provide a model for the Spaniards to follow, he suggested that foreigners, especially Frenchmen and Italians be encouraged to establish inns in Spain. Only people of a certain social level were to be allowed to keep an inn, and people of the lowest classes were to be prevented from doing so. (Fernández de Mesa II 16-21). There was, however, a problem with this: innkeeping was not a highly-regarded profession, and as he intended to exclude the poorest classes from whom the innkeepers were habitually drawn, this meant that there might not be enough people to serve all the inns. To this problem he proposed an ingenious solution: to change completely the status of innkeeping and thus make it more attractive to those of a higher social level:

... para autorizar este empleo, convendría el mudar hasta el nombre, para que parezca todo nuevo, llamando a los Mesoneros Maestros de Possadas, Directores o Superintendentes, Prefectos, o con otro semejante título; pues tal es la humana flaqueza, que se paga de estas apariciones; y hasta un poco de viento de una voz, hace variar a los hombres el concepto, como si se introdujese en las ideas interiores, y se hincharse y disfigurasse (Fernández de Mesa II 21).

To further reinforce their new social position he argued that the innkeepers should be given special legal powers, such as the right to levy

would have been difficult, if not impossible as innkeeping was usually hereditary, with the children of innkeepers following their parents in the same profession. See the comments of the Intendente of Toro in *Ynotefes de los Intendentes y Sub-delegados de las Provincias maritimas en el Expediente General sobre arreglo de posadas en todo el Reyno* AHN Cons. Leg 3.235 pieza 3.

40 The exact social status of the eighteenth-century Spanish innkeeper is in doubt: both Antonio Morales Moya and Santos Madrazo have no hesitation in classing innkeeping among the *oficios viles* (Morales Moya, 967; Madrazo II 462), and certainly the fact that it was a trade common among gypsies would indicate that it occupied a low position in the hierarchy of trades. Kany, on the other hand, notes that it was a common trade among the *majos* of Madrid, a class who, although not noble, cannot be considered to be at the bottom of the social pyramid (Kany 227). It is possible that the status of innkeeper varied throughout Spain: travelling through the Basque Country in 1822 John Bramsen observed that among the ordinary people only the innkeepers seemed to be able to read and write (Bramsen 109). If we accept that a degree of literacy was a sign of social status, this would indicate that innkeepers were not always from the lowest social levels.
fines on the muleteers and carters who used the inn, and the right to apply the birch in certain circumstances. In short, Fernández de Mesa was proposing to convert the *posadero* into a minor *funcionario*, one who would be on a level of social equality with people of the same class in the community. (Fernández de Mesa II 22).

With regard to the location and domestic economy of the inns themselves, he proposed that they be located at least every five leagues, and that they should be subject to a special inspection by ‘una persona hábil y económica’ who was to decide the quantity and quality of provisions and furniture required. In addition to this special inspection there were to be regular inspections by the local authorities to ensure that all the regulations were being complied with (II 45–50).

In choosing inn servants care was to be taken that only people who were ‘loyal, clean and intelligent’ were employed, and as well as being a person of a certain social status, the innkeeper himself should also be a person of proven business acumen with a sound knowledge of cookery, for even though he might not have to cook himself, he needed to be able to show his servants how to do so. Finally, in what must be one of the most fantastic of his suggestions given the scarcity and irregularity of travellers in Spain, was his insistence that the inns have set mealtimes, lunch at 12.00 and dinner between 9 and 10 at night (II 23, 48).

In conclusion, Fernández de Mesa offers us his vision of what the ideal Spanish inn might look like. This ideal inn was to be run on the basic principle of a rigid separation of the classes. There were to be two separate entrances, one for the ‘gente baxa’, the other for the ‘personas decentes’, and the two classes were to be kept apart as much as possible. The ‘gente visible’ as he also calls them were to have a separate dining room on the first floor, overlooking the courtyard, to allow them to keep an eye on and give orders to their servants. Their sleeping accommodation was to be on the third floor, away from the noise, and the kitchen where their food was prepared was also to be totally separate from that of their servants and the ordinary people. To better maintain the distinction between the ‘brutos’ and the ‘racionales’ all domestic animals and the stables were to be separate from the main inn building. In order to maintain a stricter control over the inn, the innkeeper’s quarters were to be located on the top floor, with windows set into the floor to allow him to keep a check on the guests and their servants without being seen himself. As a final touch the inn was to be provided with a lantern on the roof to guide travellers at night, and was to have revolving chimneys to allow the smoke to escape from the kitchens, whatever the direction of the wind (II 78–92).

Although in reality it was impossible to provide a network of inns on such a magnificent scale, given the economic and social realities of eighteenth-century Spain, Fernández de Mesa’s *Tratado Legal* can be taken as a blueprint for what the Spanish reformers were trying to achieve. The proposals to reform the local inns in the Castilian villages of Dueñas and
Torquemada in 1769, with their emphasis on the strict social separation of travellers, and their desire to create a modern well-appointed inn, while lacking the evidence to suggest they were directly the result of his ideas, do at least indicate a uniformity of opinion on the direction in which inn reform should go.  

However, despite its inclusion in the Instrucción of 1718 and the Ordenanza of 1749, and local initiatives such as that of the Intendente of Palencia in 1769, the reform of the Spanish inns did not fully begin until 1781 when the Superintendente de Caminos y Posadas, the conde de Floridablanca issued an Orden to the Intendentes of each of the Spanish provinces to carry out a survey of all the inns in their jurisdiction. This, the Orden a los Intendentes sobre arreglo de Posadas of 30 September 1781, was to be the most significant piece of inn legislation drafted during the eighteenth century, and one which was to provide a model which would continue to be used into the nineteenth century as well. As a survey it was to be nothing less than a complete catastro of all the inns in Spain. Each town and village was to send a complete report to the Intendente of the number, condition and appointments of the inns in the community, how much they charged for food and service, who they were owned by and how much they paid in rent etc. Based on these reports, the Intendentes were to see to it that repairs and renovations were carried out where necessary, and that all the inns in their jurisdiction were clean and properly furnished. They were also to exercise more control over the landlords, making sure they did not charge excessive rents and to make them bear some of the costs of the necessary repairs to their properties. In communities where there was no inn or where the existing ones needed to be completely rebuilt, a detailed report was to be sent to Madrid for further action. Finally, the Intendente was to personally oversee the fixing of the arancel or price index of commodities in all the communities in his province.

If all the provinces of Spain sent in as complete returns as those we have for Toledo, the only complete set which seems to have survived, we can say that the 1781 Orden was at least partly successful. For the first time

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41 Intendente de Palencia a las Villas de Duenas y Torquemada, 24 de Octubre de 1769 fols 5r–6r Madrid AHN Cons. 3.235 pieza 6.

42 Madrid AHN Cons. 3,235 pieza 6.

43 This Orden was in three parts: the Real Orden of 3 setiembre de 1781 (Osuna Cartas 427 bis, tomo 5º), the Orden de Intendentes de 30 setiembre de 1781 (Colección de Instrucciones y Ordenes Generales fol 56). There was also a further Instrucción issued in December 1783 (Floridablanca to Intendentes Madrid 20 December 1783 AHPT H-1947-1 fol 1v).

44 For the influence of Floridablanca’s Orden see the Plan de Posadas of 1803 drawn up by the conde de Guzmán (Madrid AHN Cons. 3.235 piezas 2 and 3).
we have a clear and comprehensive picture of the conditions in the Spanish inn, one that is not based solely on the passing comments of travellers, and such a comprehensive picture was an essential first step in the kind of centrally-directed reforms that Floridablanca wished to carry out. In other respects, however, some clauses of this Órden proved to be unworkable in practice, particularly the injunction to the Intendentes to personally oversee the setting of prices in the local communities, as the Intendente of Toledo was quick to point out:

...no es fácil a la Intendencia acudir oportunamente a estos Autos, ni ser tampoco fácil a este fin tener noticias de los precios corrientes en una circunstancia de verificarse muchas veces variedad aún en su Proximidad de uno a otro pueblo [y] con la dificultad por esta razón de acudir a las alteraciones que ocurren tan frecuentemente en una Provincia...45

If the 1781 Órden had one basic flaw, it was that it placed too much of the burden of the practical details of inn reform on the shoulders of the Intendentes, giving them a multitude of extra duties which it was not possible for them to perform, given their other responsibilities. Indeed, this problem was not a new one; in 1778 Campomanes had drawn attention to the sheer size of some of the Intendencias and the impossibility of the Intendentes carrying out regular inspections because of the distances involved, and added that this lack of regular inspection was having a detrimental effect on the progress of the public works programmes. As a possible solution, he proposed using the provincial nobility as inspectors, thus taking some of the burden off the Intendentes (Campomanes fols 77v, 113v, 114r). Although there is no evidence to suggest that Floridablanca adopted Campomanes’ proposals, he did realise that the Intendente could not cover everything46 and consequently undertook some of the task of inspecting himself, although his inspections were usually limited to visiting those communities without an inn, accompanied by an architect, in order to find and survey a suitable site for the building of one.47

The overhaul of the structure of the average inn was undoubtedly long overdue, but it was not the principle objective of Floridablanca’s or indeed the eighteenth-century reforms as a whole. What the reformers were particularly intent on achieving was to break the local monopolies on

45 Fermín de Garde to Floridablanca Toledo 10 de julio de 1782 AHPT H-1947-1 fol 1r-2r.

46 He allowed the Intendente of Toledo to forgo the inspections and to leave the fixing of the aranceles in the hands of the local Justicias as before (Floridablanca to Fermín de Garde 21 de julio de 1782 AHPT H-1947-1 fol 1r-1v).

47 See the informe drafted as a result of his visit to Fuente del Sauco in 1782 (Madrid AHN Cons. Leg. 3.235 pieza 10 fols 1r-2v).
provisions, to allow the inns to keep food to sell to the traveller, and to finally put an end to the wearisome round of the puestos which the traveller had to perform at the end of each day. Again and again throughout the century we find the reformers turning their attention to this seemingly irresolvable problem. It crops up continually in Instrucciones, Planes de Posadas, in the communications between Madrid and the Intendentes, and the Intendentes and the village Justicias, and nearly always in the same form: the Intendente or Justicias are ordered to see to it that the local inns be freely allowed to keep and sell provisions to travellers, without any obstacles being put in their way. That these directives had little effect we know from their constant repetition, and from the accounts of travellers during the nineteenth century, who still had to collect the ingredients for their dinner themselves.

We should not be surprised at this failure; allowing the inns to keep and sell provisions would have resulted in a loss of income both for the village authorities and for the local shopkeepers, for the authorities in less taxes and in the devaluation of the monopolies to sell foodstuffs, to the shopkeepers because the innkeepers would have been able to enter into direct competition with them. It is not to be wondered at if the local authorities did not always readily enforce these directives or if the Intendentes did not always press the point.

Indeed, there was often considerable resistance at a local level to any changes in the status quo, resistance which could be both acrimonious and tenacious, as a single episode will illustrate.

In 1763 one Fernando Urbina had, at his own expense, built and fitted out a sumptuous new inn by the side of the camino real at Valdemoro. Initially, the local Ayuntamiento had allowed him to build and open the inn, but following protests from the other innkeepers they ordered him to close it. As Urbina had taken care to obtain the necessary licence from the same Ayuntamiento and claimed to be paying all the necessary taxes, he refused to do so and appealed to the King. The Alcaldes responded by placing a padlock on the inn door and threatening Urbina with a fine of 50 ducados if he disobeyed their order. However, as his inn was on the route

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48 According to an undated report, Urbina’s inn had only been open for a few days when the Alcaldes intervened (Madrid AHN Cons, Leg. 3.235 pieza 7 fol 21r).

49 Obtaining a licence to keep an inn was both difficult and contentious, as the laws requiring all inns to be licenced were unclear and contradictory. In a dispute over an unlicenced inn in the village of Menasalbes in 1783, the plaintiff, Alfonso Fernández Bueno claimed that there was no specific law stipulating that all inns had to be licenced by the municipality, and that in attempting to force him to close his inn the Ayuntamiento were in breach of Article 49 of the Ordenanza of 1749 (AHPT H-1949-1 Menasalbes).
between Madrid and Aranjuez, many of his clients were people of considerable rank and power, and they insisted on being allowed to lodge in the inn, although they often had to put pressure on the Alcaldes first in order to do so. After one such visit the dispute became extremely bitter, with the Alcaldes arresting and imprisoning Urbina in the town jail. Urbina appealed to Madrid and finally obtained an expediente confirming him in his right to freely operate an inn, without hinderance from the Ayuntamiento.\footnote{13 de abril de 1764 pieza 7 fols 27r–29r.} The Ayuntamiento did not give up, however: although promising to implement the instructions in the expediente ‘con la mayor brevidad’, (fol 31r) they continued to address petitions to Madrid to be allowed to proceed against Urbina, accusing him of attempting to defraud the state of taxes. (fol 44r) Finally the matter was laid before the Consejo de Castilla, who judged in Urbina’s favour, and at which point the trail goes cold, although I suspect that in the end the Ayuntamiento got it’s way (fol. 48r).

If the simple building of a new inn caused such an acrimonious dispute in a local community, how much more so would the programme of overall reform conceived by the planners in Madrid. Minor and local though the incident was, it does give us some idea of the problems that the reformers faced.

And in the end these problems were to prove insuperable, for the simple reason that solving them would have required a level of social and political change which the reformers were unable and indeed unwilling to bring about. To raise the overall standard of the inns would first require the breaking of the system of local privileges and monopolies, which in itself would have required a major social change. Then there would need to have been a significant increase in economic activity in the interior of the country with a consequent improvement in the living standards of the mass of the people, for as Ponz observed, you could not expect a poor bracero to provide luxuries such as beds, cutlery etc. when he did not possess or even know these things himself. (Ponz VIII 207).\footnote{In 1797 Fischer was struck by the lack of such basics as cutlery and glasses in many rural communities in Spain, articles which he said were taken for granted in even the smallest German village (Fischer 205). It was this poverty and backwardness which finally defeated Floridablanca’s inn building programme, as most rural innkeepers lacked the economic means and social skills to run inns on such a grand scale, which meant that most of these new inns remained untenanted. See Southey’s description of the situation at Griteru in Galicia (Southey I 45).} Lastly but not least, it would have been necessary to change the mentality and attitude of the majority of Spaniards towards travelling, to convince them that it was not a waste of time or frivolous diversion, but an activity which would bring definite economic benefits as well as broadening the mind, a task which probably
would have been the hardest of all. Although Floridablanca did succeed in building and opening some new inns on the Fernández de Mesa model they were too few, on too grand a scale for eighteenth-century Spain, and consequently too short lived to make any appreciable difference to overall conditions. In the end Bernardo Ward was to be proved right, and that conditions in the Spanish inns could only improve in line with the economic improvement of the country as a whole (Ward 56).

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52 See Townsend’s description of the inn at Roblar in 1787, which had glass in the windows, curtains on the beds, and which served the guest’s meals on Buen Retiro porcelain (Townsend III 231).
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