



## THE POLITICAL BACKDROP

The first third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a troubled period in Spain due to the unstable political and social panorama represented by the struggle between liberalism, defender of freedom and equality through the means of a Constitution, male suffrage, national sovereignty and the division of State powers, alongside absolutism, the traditional system of government in which all powers are exercised by the monarch.

Following the conclusion of the War of Independence, the return to power of Fernando VII (**E.35**) soon entailed the annulment of the Constitution enacted in Cadiz in 1812 (**V.B.11** and **V.B.2**) and the subsequent restoration of absolutism. Thus, the **absolutist six-year term** (1814-1820) commenced with widespread repression and persecution of liberal Spaniards.

From that moment onwards, a series of uprisings or liberal declarations occurred with the purpose of restoring people's rights, fleetingly acquired in 1812. Repression, persecution, prison, terror. The struggle between liberalism and absolutism would therefore define both Mariana's life and death.

The declaration in 1820 of the **liberal triennium** (1820-1823) inaugurated a new constitutionalist era (**V.B.14** and **V.B.3**) that would have a bearing on Mariana's first years of marriage. The triumph of the military uprising led by Rafael de Riego (**V.B.16**) in Cabezas de San Juan (Seville) signified the establishment of a new liberal regime in the country spearheaded by significant figures in Spanish liberalism, namely General Francisco Espoz Mina (**E.39**). This short period signalled the end of repression and freedom of the press. An example of the foregoing is the publication of Granada-based newspapers during liberal periods: *El loco constitucional* 'the Constitutional Fool' (**V.B.10**), *El hombre libre* 'The Free Man' (**V.B.9**), or *El manual tecnológico* 'The Technological Manual' (**V.B.7**), the suppression of the Inquisition, the restitution National Militancy to ensure public order and safeguard the constitutional regime (**V.B.6** and **V.B.1**), etc. The politician Juan Álvarez de Mendizábal (**E.38**) performed a major role in this period. Years later, upon the death of Fernando VII, he was appointed Finance Minister undertaking important measures such as the expropriation or confiscation of ecclesiastical assets.

Yet Mariana's years as a married woman came to an end, as did liberal political aspiration, with the return to power of the absolute monarch in 1823 (**V.B.4**). With the support of the European *Holy Alliance* and bolstered by the support of the army of *Saint Luis's One Hundred Thousand Sons*, under the command of the Duke of Angulema, a harsh and dark period in the History of Spain came about, defined by terrible epidemic outbreaks, financial downturn and notorious bellicose conflicts on the national and international stage: the **ominous decade** (1823-1833).

Once again political persecution, imprisonments, repression and executions intensified against masonic (**V.B.5** and **V.B.8**) and liberal congregations, which enforced liberals to flee to Europe to seek exile, mainly in Great Britain and Europe.

Upon the death of her husband, Mariana, swayed by the liberal cause, embarked upon clandestine political activism in Granada. Her role as widow made her the head of the household, with the right to respond for her own actions and financial matters. Her active participation was latent, as, under the pretext of visiting imprisoned relatives, she entered and left the Royal Chancellery jail freely, acting as messenger and liaison between political prisoners and liberal groups exiled in Europe. Furthermore, she attended conspirator meetings and helped manage documents and false passports at a time when Granada had featured, since 1825, a new mayor fighting Crime, Ramón Pedrosa Andrade, appointed to crush liberal conspirators. Any suspicious activity was sufficient to be arrested and sentenced to death. Even so, the young woman did not desist in her valiant quest.

From 1828 and until 1831, Mariana resided with her family in calle Águila in the Magdalena quarter, the last house in which she lived, and the current headquarters of the European Women's Foundation *Mariana de Pineda*. It was an area removed from the hustle and bustle of urban life and close to the Granada Vega (**V.B.15 and V.B.12**). It was in this residence where she fostered her cousin, the liberal Fernández Álvarez de Sotomayor, whom she helped escape from the Royal Chancellery jail, offering him indications on arrivals, departures and guard shift changes, as well as providing him with the disguise of a capuchin monk.

In the fateful year of 1831, liberal factions again attempted a new uprising under the command of the general and politician José María de Torrijos, exiled in Gibraltar (**E.36**). To celebrate the eagerly awaited victory, Mariana had commissioned the embroidering of a purple taffeta flag with a green triangle and the words: freedom, equality and law emblazoned in embroidery (**E.58**).

As the first biographer of Mariana, José de la Peña Aguayo (**V.C.9**) recalled, having discovered the insurrectional item, Pedrosa devised a ruse to insert the half-embroidered flag in an oven on the second floor of Mariana's property and order an inspection to locate the unfortunate evidence that would implicate Mariana definitively as a liberal conspirator.