

Référence électronique

GAUTIER Pierre, “The Artillery School and the Academic and Patriotic Society of Valence”, translated by Adèle Verdier and edited by Alexandra Woolley, *Les papiers d’ACA-RES, Brefs historiques*, put online in March 2020.

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The Artillery School and the Academic and Patriotic Society of Valence

Located in the Dauphiné Province until the French Revolution, before integrating the Drôme department¹, Valence had always been an important military town, ever since the Middle Ages. In 1776, it became a fortified city or “*place de guerre*”, placing it in front of Grenoble, that nourished similar ambitions. During the last quarter of the Eighteenth Century, Valence’s local economy was orientated towards the Artillery’s Staff-Headquarters called the *Polygone* which were established there permanently after 1783, following long and expensive negotiations. The Town council deliberation registers also show how Valence, a city with little means, devoted a significant part of its expenses to repair the damages caused by the floods of the Rhône². Thus, before the last decade of the Eighteenth Century, education, other than military, was clearly not a priority. Valence’s main concerns were the *Polygone*’s establishment, developing budding industry and sustenance production³. Its main ambition was to assert its power in front of Grenoble⁴.

Far from being a major city – in 1790, its population only ranked sixth in the Kingdom’s⁵ –, Valence still possessed a University founded in 1492, thanks to the *Dauphin* Louis II, future King Louis XI. However, in the Eighteenth Century, the University was very ill reputed until it closed in to be transferred to Grenoble⁶. The public Library which was founded in 1775 was also moved to Grenoble. Unlike other nearby towns, Valence did not have a School dedicated to drawing.

The Artillery School, a true place of knowledge, was at the heart of discussion, and had had among its residents, Napoléon Bonaparte from 1785 to 1786, and then again in 1791. From 1766, the town decided to focus its economy on the army, with the ambition to get the Artillery School back from its great rival, Grenoble. This resolution was voted in 1768, and a loan of 20.000 pounds followed this local decision, in order to finance the transfer and buildings of the new *Polygone*. In total, the town supposedly invested in this project around 190.000 pounds, but the School of Grenoble was finally transferred to Metz. In the end, it was Besançon’s Artillery School that was transferred by Royal approval to Valence on the 1st of July 1777. However, the Minister of Finance Jacques Necker, influenced by the Prince de Montbarrey

¹ The Province for made up of the today’s Department of the Drôme, Isère and Hautes-Alpes until 1790, as well as the Principality of Orange from 1734.

² See the town county’s archives: 1D1/1-8, 2D1/1 and 2D2/1-2 for the Eighteenth Century.

³ As underlined by André Blanc, agriculture in Valence was healthy and could properly feed its population during the Eighteenth Century, which was quite an advantage. One can understand why the subject is a delicate one and why the *Société Académique et Patriotique* wrote about it in numerous essays.

⁴ It should be pointed out that the relationship between the two towns was conflictual during the years of the Eighteenth Century, mainly due to Grenoble’s Parliament.

⁵ The arrival of Regiments from 1777 and in 1783 also made its population rise of about 1000 people.

⁶ Yet the Law School survived.

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(protector of Besançon), managed to cancel the project. In garrison in Valence for about a year, Besançon's regiment called "de Toul" discretely returned home in the night of the 1st of March 1778. Considering the amount of money invested, the anger of Valence's citizens was acute. After multiples protests, the town fought with the War Minister until he accepted to (re)re-establish the "de Toul" regiment and the Artillery School in Valence. Such was the case on the 5th of June 1783, under the direction of the *maréchal des camps et armées* Bouchard and following the plans of the mathematics Professor to-be, Henri-Sébastien Dupuy de Bordes⁷. The arrival of the School represented a leap forward for the small town. Indeed, not only did its population grow overnight with more than a thousand people settling in Valence (which was one seventh of its population), but also from an intellectual point of view, as most of them were soldiers and officers (many were from nobility and educated) as well as professors.

The French Revolution had disastrous consequences on the region of Valence. Added to this, Grenoble made claims on the *Polygone* during the first departmentalisation projects, which speeded up the removal of two of its departments. The War Minister finally planned this new transfer from 1790. In 1792, Grenoble obtained from the General Montesquiou-Fézensac the Artillery Regiment's general staff's transfer⁸ which in its midst, deprived the School of students. However, a decree from the month *floréal* of the *an III* (April/May 1795) was pronounced in favour of Valence: The School was to remain there and any talks on the matter would be "postponed until peace was found". Nevertheless, according to the Town Council, who claimed this to be a *coup monté* (a setup), Valence had apparently been replaced by Grenoble when a decree was printed depriving the town from of its School. Despite strong protests, including letters addressed to Bonaparte himself, the School and the Regiment were immediately transferred to Grenoble to never come back. In 1802, a new Artillery School was re-established with town funding. The money paid for new infrastructures which included stables. Yet, this new School was transferred to Nimes in 1875.

Less than a year after the foundation of the Artillery School and prompted by its constant rivalry with Grenoble, Valence founded an Academic and Patriotic Society in 1784, instigated by Jacques de Tardivon, Abbot of Saint-Ruf. The Society received patent letters in December 1786 and was then registered at the Grenoble Parliament on the 5th of June 1787. Tardivon became its President and Antoine-Joseph Pernety (1716-1796) its permanent secretary and vice-president. This new Society, especially its productions of academic essays, is representative of the requirements and problems that rural towns such as Valence encountered. The description of a contest prize of 50 pounds, awarded each year on the 29th of December from 1785, shows how the Society was dedicated to artisans. Indeed, the contest's aim was to encourage and "emulate" perfection in the Applied Arts and Crafts in Valence⁹. In 1791, the description of the same prize did not mention the "*Arts et Métiers*" but "*Arts Mécaniques*". The Academic and Patriotic Society mainly focused on agricultural issues and on agricultural yielding, and also on how to assist the needy, as their essays demonstrate, such as those written by Rostaing de la Bretonnière: *Mémoire présenté à la société patriotique de Valence sur les moyens de détruire*

⁷ Who also offered to give free Mathematics lectures at the University until a position was created for him, which never happened.

⁸ See AM de Valence, 2D1/1 f°35/36, délibération 41 du 23 Ventôse an 9 (14 mars 1801).

⁹ See AD de la Drôme, D72, pièce n°6 : The desire to « établir un concours d'émulation dont le but est le perfectionnement des Arts et Métiers exercés à Valence »

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la folle avoine ou avoine sauvage ; or Des moyens d'avoir de plus beaux blés et de meilleur pain qu'on en a communément. It seems that the French Revolution got the better of the Society, so much that after 1792, it was forgotten. Some steps were taken, from 1957 only, to resurrect the Academy which still exists today.

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(1790-1810) 2D1/1 : registre des arrêtés municipaux (an IX-1806)

2D2/1-2 (anciennement 2D422-430) : neuf cahiers de correspondance municipale (an

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