



CARMEN

López

María del Carmen López Bonilla

The one who could have been Spain's first woman lawyer but wasn't

Madrid, 1898-1958

María del Carmen Basilia López Bonilla is the character in a story that has been used to claim that she may have been the first woman to join the Bar Association in Spain. She was born in Madrid on 28 February 1898, the daughter of Lorenzo López Martín, from Mazarambroz, and Aquilina Bonilla Torralva, a native of Malpica. She completed her baccalaureate at the Instituto Cardenal Cisneros in Madrid on 21 June 1915 with the outstanding marks. Her diploma was issued on 8 March 1916.

She joined the Faculty of Law at the Universidad Central de Madrid in academic year 1915-1916 (preparatory). She completed her Bachelor's in 1921 (according to Guil and Flecha). She applied for her Bachelor's diploma on 4 April 1922, which was issued to her on 12 April and collected on 11 July 1922. She studied Law and earned outstanding marks on the exams, not without some hardship, given her father's scant economic resources, as he apparently worked as a doorman at the headquarters of the Ministry of Grace and Justice.

She requested assistance from a women's association (*Cruzada de Mujeres Españolas*) to pay the fee for the issuance of her diploma, as deduced from the interview that Cristóbal de Castro held for the *Nuevo Mundo* (Madrid) magazine issue on 13 January 1922, entitled 'Las mujeres: la primera abogada', along with a close-up photograph by Padró in which she is wearing the professional cap and gown.

Faced with the prospect of joining the Bar Association but also with the need to pay its fee, she had apparently been requesting assistance for this since the year before she completed her degree. In 1921, Carmen López Bonilla 'will start the process of becoming a Bar association member in the Madrid branch', Manuel Góngora Echenique anticipated the new member in his article 'La primera mujer abogado: Señorita Carmen López Bonilla', with a

photograph of her, published in issue 33 of the *Boletín del Colegio de Abogados de Madrid* (third quarter, 1921).

On 31 October 1921, the Governing Board of the Bar Association of Madrid agreed to decide when the application for entry was formally submitted. Meantime, on 5 January 1924, Carmen López Bonilla submitted a petition to the president of the Military Directorate requesting '(...) that a Royal Decree be published authorising woman to sit for civil service tests in the Property Registry, corps of Notaries, etc., when they hold a Bachelor's degree in Law issued by state universities (...).' The request was rejected by the Royal Order dated 24 April 1924.

She finally submitted her application to join the Bar Association of Madrid on 25 November 1930 and was accepted at the Governing Board session that same day, to take effect on 2 December. As she acknowledged years later in her application, the reason she had not submitted an application to join the Madrid association in the 1920s was because she was married on 16 August 1922.

She joined in August 1925 as an administrative warden (*vigilante administrativo*) at the Directorate General of Security. Between 1936 and 1938, she served as the senior officer at the Court of Constitutional Guarantees, which issued a proceeding against her on the charge of hostility to the regime, without sanction, on 4 May 1938. The *Boletín Oficial del Estado* dated 3 August 1939 reported Carmen López Bonilla's permanent removal from the National Investigation and Surveillance Corps of the Directorate General of Security because she had not appeared at work before the authorities of the new regime. Finally, she was readmitted to her job in the presidency of the government without sanction by the Order dated 7 December 1939. She died in Madrid on 24 July 1958; her stated profession was 'lawyer'.

José Santiago Yanez Pérez
PhD in Law
Universidad de las Palmas de Gran Canaria

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