Rabbi Ben-Zion Abraham Cuenca (1867-1937)

Rabbi Ben-Zion Cuenca was born in the old city of Jerusalem in 1867. His last name, Cuenca, corresponds to a city in Spain. His family was among the “Expulsadaos de Castilla”, the Jewish families expelled from Castilla and Aragon in 1492. The Cuenca family settled in Salonika (Greece) and lived there for centuries. Rabbi Cuenca’s father, Abraham Cuenca, made aliya to Eretz Israel around 1850.

Before the age of ten, rabbi Cuenca was regarded as an *‘iluy* (a child prodigy) by the Rabbis of Jerusalem. Knowing this, his father devoted all his resources to hire for him the best Rabbis and mentors. He also provided for rabbi Cuenca with a vast secular education, especially in the fields of History and languages.

At the age of 30 Rabbi Cuenca established a Yeshiba “Tiferet Yerushalaim”. In this Yeshiba, which also included general studies, were educated among others the Chief rabbi of Israel Ben-Zion Meir Hay Uziel (see **this**), the famous Sephardic Hebrew writer Yehuda Burla, and rabbi Moshe Nissim, the father of Chief rabbi of Israel Isaac Nissim (see **here**)

One of the most important contributions of Rabbi Cuenca was the creation of the Halakhic Journal “hame-asef”. Hame-asef is a collection of Halakhic studies done by hundreds of Rabbis: Sephardim, Ashkenazim, from Israel and from the Diaspora. Bringing together so many rabbis from all different backgrounds was at that time by itself a virtual a dramatic positive innovation. Rabbi Cuenca operated singlehandedly all the stages of this publication for 19 years. The first journal appeared in 1897. Rabbi Cuenca was of course one of the main contributors. He was particularly interested in reexamining the Laws of Eretz Israel (*terumot, ma’aserot, shemita, etc*) a subject that remained virtually dormant for centuries. Now, as the Yeshub of Eretz Israel was growing, these Laws needed to be reviewed, especially in light of modernity and its new challenges. In rabbi Cuenca’s own words □□□□□□ □□□ □□□ □□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□ □□□□ □□□□□□ ,□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□□ □□□ □□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□ □□□□□ □□□□ □□□.

In the *hame-asef* rabbi Cuenca introduced a short biography of the writers, which given the tremendous lack of information especially about Sephardic rabbis of the 19th century, constitutes an invaluable contribution to modern Jewish History.

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