

PIRACY AND COASTAL DEFENCES

The Christian conquest of the lands of "Xarq al-Andalus" (Eastern Moorish Spain) moved the border with the Moors both to the south, but also most importantly towards the east and to the sea. Xàbia and its lands was occupied by the troops of Jaume I in the mid-13th century. From that moment on, the whole coast became as a border which had to be protected from the frequent pirate raids, which came at first from the southern Iberian peninsular and then from North Africa. One of the first attacks that we know about happened in 1304, resulting in the destruction of the Xàbia valley. This can be read about in a document dated 10 September of that year, preserved in the Archives of the Crown of Aragon.

" And the first Sunday in September came Arrendaçi, with four galleys and two atzauras (a type of small boat - from Arabic "zawraq") to Dénia, from where they left one in the valley of Xabia, they took some land and burned the entire valley ...".

Years later, another raid in 1387 was responsible for the plundering and abandonment of the monastery of St. Jeroni de la Plana, which had been built in 1374/75, only 13 years earlier. The pirates captured the monks, who were taken to Bugía.

These attacks become more frequent, and forced the inhabitants to protect the town with walls and to defend the coast, which was characterized by a coastline full of inlets and coves, making for easy landing. The pirates looted properties and captured people, for whom a very high ransom was then demanded, making it a very profitable activity economically.

Furthermore, the Christian population was made increasingly fearful and insecure because of an understanding between the North African pirates and their co-religionists, the Moors. At that time this group made up one third of the population of the Kingdom of Valencia and were the vast majority in the interior of the Marina Alta.

For these reasons, various defensive structures were built on the coast of Xàbia between the 15th and 18th centuries, after which time the pirate raids on our coasts lessened. The last known episode was a pirate attack in 1812, when the intruders entered the town of Xàbia, robbed and looted the homes of the rich, then quietly fled.

From north to south on the coast of Xàbia, the following fortifications were built: tower of Sant Antoni (1553-54), Castle of Sant Jordi (1578), Castle of la Fontana (1425 / 16th century), tower of Portitxol (1553-54), tower of Embolo (1553-54) and Castle of Granadella (1739).