

Arquitectura i temps

A Collective View of the Xàbia Heritage



AGRUPACIÓ
FOTOGRAFICA
XÀBIA

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“Arquitectura i temps” (Architecture and Time) A Collective View of the Xàbia Heritage

Presentation

The traditional architecture, both urban and rural, is still the most important cultural heritage which Xàbia conserves. Houses and little houses, “casups” (sheds), “riuraus” (grape-drying facilities), limestone kilns, brick kilns, wind mills, water mills, grinder mills, wells, cisterns, reservoirs, waterwheels, corrals; diverse structures, for dwelling and rest, or work and manufacturing spaces which were built with the materials which the environment provided: solid stone, “tap” (calcareous stone), “tosca” (local sandstone), limestone, gypsum, sand, clay, wood and canes.

These constructions are the reflection of a world which has passed and yet still lives in the memories of many Xàbia citizens, who created landscapes and architectural structures tailored to the needs and technical possibilities of traditional society. It is an architecture linked to its environment, able to create harmoniously balanced landscapes without the need for urban planning regulations.

Many of these structures have been destroyed or in the best of cases, they have been refurbished or adapted to the new demands of the present; while others have disappeared due to abandonment and the passage of time.

Whether or not included in the municipal catalogues of “bens i espais protegits” (assets and protected spaces), many of these buildings have lost their roofs and other essential elements for their preservation; the lack of use for these buildings has condemned them to destruction.

The Photography Exhibit prepared by the Agrupació Fotogràfica de Xàbia (Xàbia Photography Group) allows us to explore several of these rural architectural structures of our town, and beyond the beauty of the images, they transmit- as well as nostalgia for some - which should serve as motivation for the preservation and study of this extensive and fragile legacy.

Notes about the traditional architecture of Xàbia

The optimal geographic location of Xàbia as well as the wealth and diversity of its ecosystems has facilitated the human occupation of this territory, which according to data which is now known, began approximately 30,000 years ago in the Palaeolithic cave site: Cueva Foradada.

Starting from that time, various cultures settled on these lands. Thus, there are numerous archaeological sites located in its municipality, which in some cases have supplied pieces with a special interest, such as the Iberian Treasure of Xàbia from the 4th Century B.C.

However, the origins of the current town of Xàbia date back to the Catalan-Aragon occupation. At the beginning of Summer in 1244, these lands which had been held by the Muslims since the 8th Century, were conquered by King Jaume I and subsequently became a part of the Kingdom of Valencia.

New settlers, mainly from Catalonia, created the early walled centre of the town, whose site was expanded at the end of the 15th Century, until it was defined by the fortified walls which comprise the current ring roads.

This inaugurated a long period between the second half of the 13th Century until the 18th Century, an epoch which was characterized in our town and generally along the entire coast, by the continual raids by North African pirates and corsairs. The fear and uncertainty which this caused led to the construction of several defensive works to protect the town, as well as the towers and castles, which were erected on the coast to watch and defend the population. Outside the walls and except for the strong houses located in the Pla area and several sanctuaries, the municipality hardly possessed other buildings.

The agricultural expansion of the 18th Century

The 18th Century marked a profound change in the agricultural landscape of the Xàbia municipality. The major demographic growth which took place in the Kingdom of Valencia during the 18th Century culminated in Xàbia with a sharp rise in the population, which grew from 1432 inhabitants in the census of 1735 to 3,000 in 1793.

In Xàbia, this significant general growth benefited as a consequence of two facts of special relevance. On the one hand, the triumph of the Bourbon option in the Spanish War of Succession for the Crown of Spain (1705-1714), the side which had been supported by the elite citizens of Xàbia against Dénia and other towns of the district; and on the other hand, the practically total halt of the pirate raids in the Valencian coast.

Now, the demographic growth and the almost complete disappearance of the raids by the North African pirates led to the ploughing of new lands for farming and the intensification of the municipality's occupancy.

In the 18th Century, several isolated buildings appeared in the municipality, generally located in the flat and fertile areas, however we can also find them in more marginal zones in which non-irrigation farming predominated, such as the "partidas" (districts) of Cansalades, Cap Martí, Els Tossals, el Barranc del Pou del Toll or Les Valls. These buildings have a rectangular floor plan, in some cases with small dimensions and a single "nevada" (gallery) -"casups" (sheds)-, and other larger structures with one or two

galleries and a single or double tile gable roof. The majority of the conserved buildings have a room in the upper floor which is accessed by a stairway with "tosca" sandstone steps from the ground floor. The most characteristic feature of this architecture is the semi-circular arch located in the entrance doorway to the house, almost always built with sandstone voussoir arches. Above this entrance doorway in sections which have an upper floor, there is a window also framed with a moulded sandstone "ampit" (window sill).

The upper part of the house or the second gallery was usually occupied by the stable, which in some cases, possessed an access to the exterior with a straight lintel or semi-circular arch. The construction process primarily used the masonry of (calcareous or "tap") stone blocks worked with lime mortar cement although in the cornerpieces of the buildings, sandstone ashlar stoneworks were used to reinforce the structure. In the building façade, at mid-height, there are usually a series of "cans" (corbels) arranged in a horizontal line, which were used to buttress the "ombrall" (lattice) which would be laid out in front of the house as a type of "asbardal" (small porch).

This architecture, in spite of its imminently agricultural use with an occasional occupancy linked to works in the field, in several cases, displays ornamental elements such as the decoration painted on the roof tile cornices of the houses called "Casa de Tena" and "Casa de la Sénia Blanca", in the Mesquides district, or the false ashlar stoneworks painted in red on the border of the "Casa de la Sénia Blanca".

Related to the agricultural expansion at that time, numerous waterwheels and reservoirs were built in the Pla and les Valls areas, linked to houses or isolated. Introduced in the Islamic period, these structures had a major development during the 18th, 19th and early 20th Century. The traditional mechanisms of wood and clay buckets, moved by ponies and mules, were replaced by iron mechanisms since the end of the 19th Century. The intense farming transformations of that age along with the expansion of the cultivated surface area made it necessary to build structures and machines in order to handle and prepare the cereals, a basic staple of the human diet. At that time, new windmills were built in La Plana, as well as several hydraulic mills which used the water from the Barranquera. Only one of them, the windmill of Narret or la Barranquera, conserves the majority of its elements: irrigation channel, reservoir and oil/wine press.

The Architecture of the Raisin

The strong economic and demographic stimulus of the 18th century was continued in the next century due to an agricultural product with major commercial success: the raisin. The origins of this project - dried grape - can be dated back to the Hispano-Muslim period. After the Catalan-Aragon conquest, the raisin production was maintained by the Mudejar population in the interior lands of the district, although its trade was in the hands of Christian intermediaries, such as the Sapena family of Xàbia, who were active during the 15th and 16th Centuries.

However, it was not until the 19th Century when the raisin cultivation, production and trade became the main economic activity of Xàbia and the entire district. With many ups and downs, the raisin trade reached its peak in 1890, a date which marked a turning point and a decline its production and exportation. Thus began a long period of recession which we could say lasted until the Sixties decade of the 20th Century, when the preparation of this product became a practically testimonial activity.

The "Caseta" (shed) and the "Riurau" (Grape drying facility)

The cultivation of the muscatel grape (which replaced the traditional grape vine during the first decades of the 19th Century), and its transformation into the raisin, created a new scattered rural architecture, which was created and adapted to this process. Throughout almost the entire municipality of Xàbia, houses were built with one or two galleries, with a chamber in the upper floor which generally had a portico and roof space in front of the entrance which was called: the "naia". This "filter" space between the exterior light and the interior darkness of the house, was characterized by the presence of several arches called "ulls" which define the exceptional features of this architecture. These dwellings, used as the family residence during the "renda" [harvest] period (Summer and early Autumn), had several spaces such as the chambers or bedrooms, the stable and corral, the kitchen and other elements such as the cistern and oven to bake the bread.

However, the most characteristic building dedicated to the raisin is the "riurau". The first documented testimony which we now know about the "riurau" is recorded in the Report from the Archbishop Fabian y Fuero to the Minister of the Count of Floridablanca about the Diocese of Valencia, which was presented on the date of 29th of July 1791. In this interesting document, we may read: "...And in the municipality of Xàvea, there are over one hundred and fifty waterwheels with a simple roof next to them, and there are another type of sheds which are used to shelter the raisins and figs during the harvest time of these fruits...". The same document mentions the "riurau" again, this time in Poblenu de Benitatxell: "...And there are over thirty two sheds or roofs commonly known as "Rius-Raus", which are used to store the raisins and figs in the harvest periods..."¹

These "types of sheds" must necessarily be the free-standing buildings, with the "jambaje" (door posts) in a semi-circular arch, which was mentioned early when discussing the 18th Century.

The "riurau" as we know it, was architecturally defined in the mid 18th Century of shortly before. It involves a single, free-standing or attached building to the house, with a rectangular floor plan and

(1) The Marina Alta, according to the report by Fabián y Fuero (1791). Joan Ivars Cervera. Ayuntamiento de Dénia Beca d'Investigació Ayuntamiento de Dénia, 7. 2007

one height (exceptionally we can find two floors), with segmental arches in one of their sides with a single gallery and a one gable roof or double gable roof, and in this case, it has two galleries with a central wall buttressed by the arches and a double tile gable roof. The structure of the "rioraus" was planned to create a ventilated and dry space which generally faced south, where the raisins were stored during the drying process, which prevented the moisture from rotting them. Briefly, the raisin preparation process consisted in blanching the muscatel grape which was submerged in an iron cauldron, with boiling water and "lleixiu" (bleach), which was placed in the blanching oven. The bleach was prepared in the "safreigs" (small wash basins) or in large ceramic wash basins. The blanched grapes were scattered on top of the thatched mats which were distributed in the "sequer" (drying area), a flat spacious area in front of the "riurau", where the sun and wind dried out the muscatel grapes. At night or in the case of rain, the thatched mats were stored in piles inside the "riurau".

In several of these "pansers" (raisin) complexes, we can find heaters. These structures, introduced later (above all starting from the last two

decades of the 19th Century), were used to accelerate the grape drying process, maintaining a stable and controlled temperature of approximately 60/65 degrees. They are enclosed spaces, with stakes or lanes to place the thatched mats, and with large iron heaters which were fed with wood.

The "riurau" is an exceptional structure, which in spite of using construction techniques and specific architectural solutions of the country, arose as a consequence of the boom in the "pasera" (raisin) production since the second half of the 19th Century, although its origins date back to the end of the 18th Century. The simplicity and singularity of their lines is still a motif used and re-adapted in the new tourist architecture.

The "Casas Burguesas" (Bourgeois Houses)

The upper middle class citizens achieved major benefits with the production and trade of this food product. The economic and social - and obviously political - supremacy is clearly reflected in the architecture built for this dominant group in both the urban and rural territory.

Thus alongside their "riuraus" and other architectural buildings of the raisin production process, the major owners and merchants built magnificent residential buildings, which were more in harmony with the academic and romantic styles of the period than with the country's traditional architecture. They are buildings with a cubic shape, proportioned and balanced, which in some cases, followed the "nine squares" scheme of the Palladian tradition. They have two floors and a 4-slope tile roof, with large spans laid out symmetrically on the façades. Among the few concessions to the local style of this Bourgeois architecture, there is the use of the "tosca" sandstone, which was used to frame the doors and windows and to highlight the residence's lines. In many cases, a "naia" (portico gallery) space was used in front of the house entrance, a characteristic feature of the local architecture.

Other traditional architectures

The traditional culture has created various structures and buildings which were adapted to the specific requirements and features of each territory. The extensive and diverse municipality of Xàbia possessed and still conserves the significant variety and

wealth of this architectural heritage. Windmills.- In Xàbia, twelve flour windmills have been conserved: eleven were built in La Plana between the 16th-17th Centuries and another (isolated and near the river) which was built in the mid 18th Century called: the "Molino de Safranera".

"Teuleries" (Roof Tile and Brick Factories).- These workshops, which consisted of a large kiln, reservoir, cistern, the "era" (threshing floor) and drying area, and basically produced roof tiles, bricks, ceramic tiles locally known as "matacans". Of the eight "tejerías" (brick kilns) known in Xàbia, only in "La Tarraula" did they use the "torn" (a type of rotating "lathe" tool), which was produced here, jointly with ceramic materials with an architectural use, several lathed pieces, such as clay buckets, jugs, bowls and wash basins.

Limestone Kilns.- Lime, the basic material of traditional construction which was obtained by the dehydration of the calcareous stone, was produced in large semi-exposed kilns with a circular form. They are structures defined by a stone masonry wall with a short height and a single door, partially excavated in the ground. The limestone kilns were normally located in marginal areas such as mountain zones, in which there was abundant calcareous stone and wood.

Water mills.- Starting from the second half of the 19th Century, the first water mills appeared which used wind energy to pump the water from the wells. Erected on a small - circular or square - tower or on a high metal scaffold, they did not have much presence in Xàbia.

Wells, cisterns and water tanks.- Xàbia has always needed water. For this reason, cisterns and water tanks are very abundant and they collected and stored the rainwater. These structures with variable structures were excavated in the geological soil, with a generally pyroform shape -cisterns-, with a large tank, more or less spherical, and a cylindrical neck which was externally covered by the hood or curbstone. The water tanks were less common here and were characterized by the rectangular form of the tank.

The wells, cylindrical structures excavated in the substratum, were built where there were underground water, which were for public use in several cases.

Corrals.- These buildings, designed to enclose and shelter the sheep and goat livestock, have significant dimensions. They usually have a square or trapezoid floor plan defined by a wall or masonry enclosure. The interior has a large exposed space and lateral roofed premises. They are located in marginal zones, generally in the border between the agricultural spaces and the mountain.

"Casups" (Sheds).- In addition to the houses scattered throughout the municipality linked to the raisin production, the traditional farming society built other buildings to provide shelter against bad weather, store tools, shelter the work animals and even temporary residence. These generally humble structures are especially numerous in the most marginal agricultural areas such as the terraced mountain zones -Montgons- or other farming zones far from the town -Cansalades, Tarraules, etc. the most simple "els casups" (sheds), are buildings with one gallery, ground floor and single or double tile roof.

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Exposició

“Arquitectura i temps, una mirada col.lectiva al patrimoni de Xàbia”



Casup Cansalades
Foto: Vicente de Miguel



Casup Cansalades
Foto: Vicente de Miguel



Riurau de la Pegolina - La Lluça
Foto: Vicente de Miguel



Botes i taula. Riurau de la Pegolina - La Lluça
Foto: Vicente de Miguel



Riurau del Clot de Larion - La Riba
Foto: Pilar Lozano



Pou i safreig. Riurau del Clot de Larion - La Riba
Foto: Vicente de Miguel



Riurau del Mosso - El Rafalet
Foto: Pilar Lozano



Interior riurau del Mosso - El Rrafalet
Foto: Pilar Lozano



Alqueria - Les Valls
Foto: Toni Sanchis



Detall de brancalada. Alqueria - Les Valls
Foto: Toni Sanchis



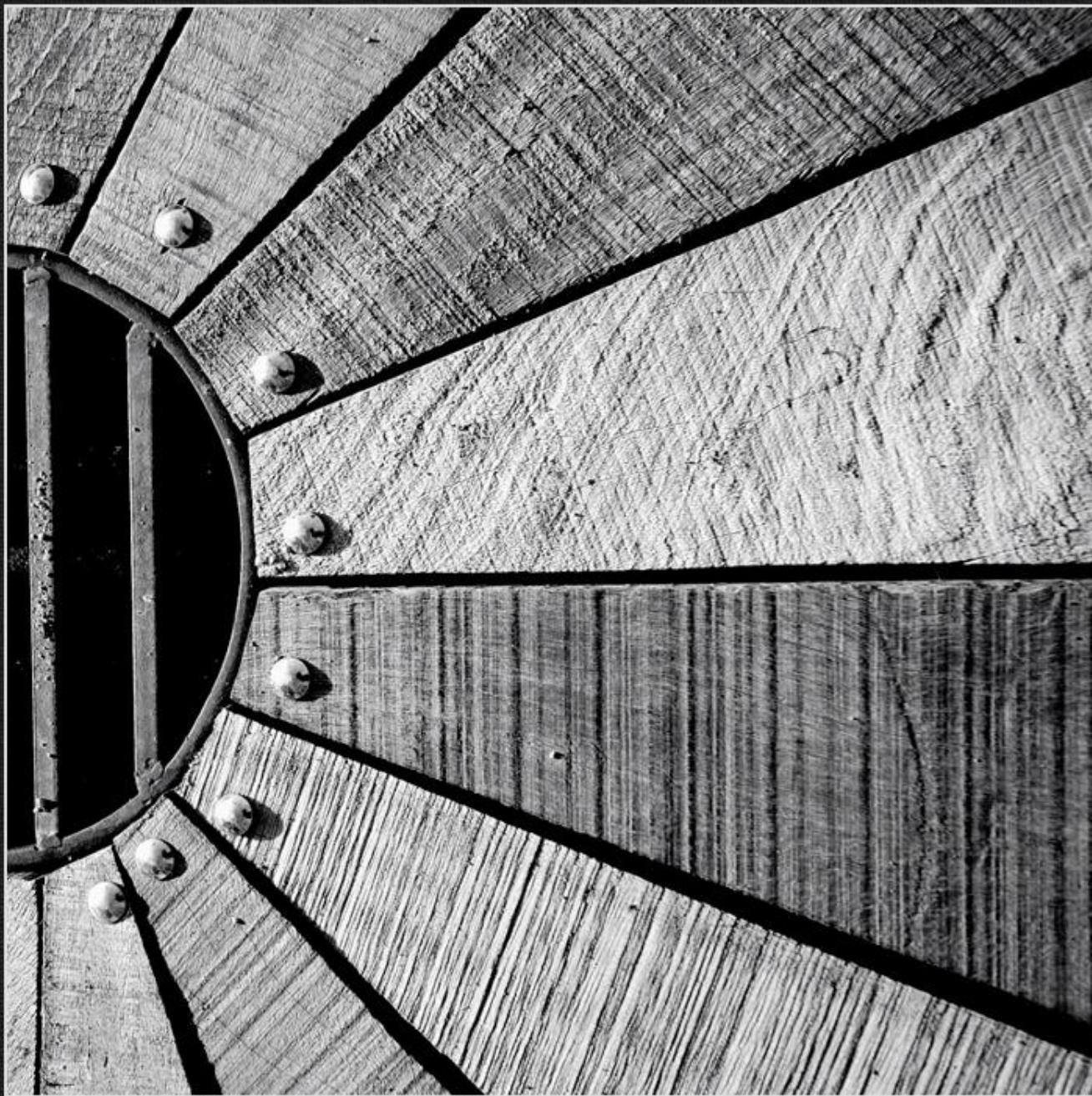
Casa de les Memes - La Plana
Foto: Toni Sanchis



Finestró casa de les Memes - La Plana
Foto: Toni Sanchis



Pou de Castells - Senioles
Foto: José Manuel Oliment



Detall Pou de Castells - Senioles
Foto: José Manuel Climent



Bassa de Bolufer - Els Julians
Foto: Cosme Moncho



Cup del molí de Climent - Les Barranqueres
Foto: Cosme Moncho



Casa dels Benimeli - El Rafal
Foto: Iván Almazán



Detall casa dels Benimeli - El Rafal
Foto: Iván Almazán



Brancalada de fosques. Casup - La Tarraula
Foto: Francisco Català



Jässena. Casup - La Tarraula
Foto: Francisco Català



Frontera casup - La Tarraula
Foto: Francisco Català



Cantonera de tosques casup - La Tarraula
Foto: Francisco Català



Casup de Cap de Martí
Foto: Patricia Girón



Detall casup de Cap de Martí
Foto: Patricia Girón



Casa de Tena - La Mesquida
Foto: Manuel Salmerón



Estable casa de Tena - La Mesquida
Foto: Manuel Salmerón



Riurau de Gaspanses
Foto: José R. Hernández Melero



Molinet - Les Fontanelles
Foto: José R. Hernández Melero



Estufa de la caseta dels Gostinos - La Llucà
Foto: José el Gallo



Estaques i canyissos. Estufa de la caseta dels Gostinos - La Lluça
Foto: José el Gallo



Caseta i bassa de Terra Soler - La Lluça
Foto: José el Gallo



Estaques i pessebre. Caseta i bassa de Terra Soler - La Lluça
Foto: José el Gallo



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