

History of Mijas

Contemporary Age

In the XIX century, throughout the war of Independence against Napoleon, which began in 1808, there was an oral tradition which showed how a group of guerrilla fighters from Mijas caught unaware the Napoleon troops in a place called “***La Matanza***” (The Slaughter) in the area of Entrerrios of Mijas. It is true that in Mijas, as in many villages of Malaga, a French garrison of between 75 and 100 men was established, to which has to be added others which where established in **Calahonda** and the fortress of Fuengirola.

The later years of the French occupation in Malaga were very hard on the rural population, due to the continuous battles between Spanish and French troops. In august of 1812, the French took possession of a provisions warehouse in Mijas which the local authorities had reserved for Ballesteros, general of the Spanish troops who pursued the French, imposing a heavy fine on the municipality (25,000 reales) and in revenge, killing two local residents. Two days later, the French troops abandoned Mijas and moved on to Malaga, from where they finally abandoned the province to go up north.

In 1827, Mijas suffered a serious crisis. According to certain sources (Miñane) it is said “*...that the ancient population was ruined by the heavy census that it suffered: that the farmland belonged to communities and entailed estate, and that sixty per cent of the vicinity consisted of day labourers and beggars.*”

On the 30th May of 1841, the separation of Fuengirola from Mijas took place, becoming an independent municipal district.

One of the most dramatic events that Mijas suffered was the flood that occurred on the 2nd November of 1884. At approximately 10.00a.m. there was a heavy downpour of rain over the mountainside that provoked a flood of water that destroyed an important amount of houses and caused the death of a large number of residents and animals. In memory of that tragic day a tablet was erected in C/ Carril, where the water level which was reached can be seen, and a fountain was also built in the Constitution Square from the stones that the flood water carried, as can be read on the inscription of the fountain.

Throughout the XIX century the economic activity of the municipality was based on agriculture, livestock and the paper industry. The mills and paper factories flourished, mainly in the western region of the municipality, taking advantage of the natural water springs of the mountainside, which where abundant in the Osunillas region and also in the area of El Barrio. Many of these mills, which by this time were many centuries old (in “The Allotments” an oil mill `of the Moors´ is mentioned and a `bread´ mill built by the first mayor of Mijas, Lope de Aponte), maintained their activity until the middle of the XX century (1950´s).

Along with the paper factories and mills, one of the main activities was vine cultivation, mainly in the eastern region of the municipality and also in the region of Las Lagunas, producing a multitude of press houses and tents of dried grapes. This economic activity came to an end when it suffered a serious crisis originated by a plague of phylloxera which affected the majority of the vineyards of Malaga at the end of the XIX century, finally wiping out all the cultivation and strongly affecting the healthy wine and dried grape industry.

Up until the middle of the XX century the most prosperous economic activity came from the paper factories and mills, along with the development of an agriculture based on autoconsumption (each rural house possessed its own threshing floor, oven, etc.) It is also worth noting the important development that reached the `water architecture´. Irrigation ditches, water tanks, etc., flourished in the rural areas. Thus, it is important to mention that in 1948 in the municipality of Mijas there were more than 200 km of irrigation ditches, 236 water tanks, 168 threshing floors, 13 waterwheels, 65 wells, 17 mills and 2 paper factories registered, although there existed many more in function without being registered.

Towards the end of the 1950´s, this situation began to change and more drastically so in the 1960´s and 70´s, due to the development of the tourist industry on the Costa del Sol. Numerous owners of small rural properties sold their land and began to work in the flourishing construction sector, building numerous urbanisations that would make Mijas the main destination of residential tourism in the Costa del Sol and Spain. The tourist boom caused an abandonment of the agricultural industry and a new economic period began whose main activity concentrated on the service sector. This change also affected in a radical way the population. In the 1950´s Mijas had a population of some 7,000 inhabitants, reaching 15,000 at the beginning of the 1980´s, 33,000 at the start of the 1990´s and boasting some 80,000 today.

Mijas is now one of the most important economic centres of the Costa del Sol, being one of the principal tourist destinations and boasting an ample supply of leisure and culture of which millions of visitors and tourists can enjoy.



Prehistory and Protohistory

The most ancient traces of human occupation in the actual municipal district of Mijas go back to the Bronze age, approximately the second millennium BC., not withstanding, other evidence in nearby districts of the Mijas mountain range and its southern dependencies, such as Bajondillo Cave (Torremolinos), the caves of Botijos and Zorrera of the Palaeolithic paintings of the Toro cave (Benalmádena), clearly show that this territory presented sufficient resources to facilitate an intense occupation during the Prehistory.

Based on this, between the Palaeolithic and the Bronze Age, the ancient population of this area must have taken advantage of the caves and shelters that are situated in the southern fringe of the Mijas mountain range, especially the formations rich in water springs.

As from 800 BC. the arrival of the **Phoenicians** (a race originating from the Eastern Mediterranean) to the Malaga coast, caused a big change to the local communities. The Phoenicians settled in the outlets of the main rivers of the southern peninsula, converting these into ways of communication to the inland and generating a healthy trade of mineral and agricultural resources. In the outlet of the Fuengirola River ancient settlements can be found, probably related to the control of the communication between the rivers Ojén and Pasadas, through which they found access to the territories of the actual Mijas.

The arrival of these oriental populations modified the territorial conception of the natives.. In these times some of the native populations created settlements close to where the Phoenicians were established, the reason for this being to control the access to the inland. In the case of Mijas, indications of this period can be found in the fertile plain of the Fuengirola river in the site of Finca Acebedo (2nd Iron Age). Another site of this period can be found a few kilometres inland from the Arroyo de La Cala, in the Roza de Aguado, corresponding to a population of the 1st Iron Age, which shows all indication of a Phoenician settlement in its outlet.

The Roman Trail

From the II Century BC. onwards the arrival of the roman influences can be seen, culminating in the first centuries of our era. In relation to the commercial and military needs of the Romans a great amount of communication routes were built to allow a quick and sure way of contact between the zones of the roman empire, which were far and wide. One of these routes, mentioned in the Itinerary of Antonino, (compilation of roads from the Roman Empire that dates back to the end of the III century), joins Malaca (Malaga) and Gades (Cadiz), crossing through the land of Mijas. This route, not only communicated these two large roman cities, but also served to connect many other smaller populations and condition the territory through which it passed.

In Mijas, the archaeological remains that have been found confirm the existence of the roman city of Suel, possible successor of the Iberian-Punic City that was formed after the arrival of the Phoenicians. The big buildings of this city, such as the temples, the forum, theatre, etc., have still not been found, but they are believed to have been situated, according to some writers, between the outlet of the Fuengirola river and the Cortijo de la Alberquilla, on the right edge of the river, where the settlements of the Finca de Acebedo and the roman town El Chaparral can be found.

Other ancient writers, such as Plinio, situated between Suel and Marbella the place called Salduba. In the same way, Martín de Roa pointed out in 1622 “*... and today appears, two leagues ahead (from Suel), towards Marbella, ancient remains of a grand place, where Salduba could have been*”, remains which were also mentioned by Macario Fariñas in the same century. In 1782, Medina Conde wrote that Osunilla could have been the Iberian-Roman City of Auxunoba. Also, certain authors have pointed out that Mijas was the ancient **Tamisa**, but this hypothesis isn’t contrasted by the archaeology or the epigraphy and has its origin in the reading of Medieval Arabic texts where the existence of a castle called Tamilla is mentioned in the Malaga Dale and which modern authors such as Fariñas del Corral link with Mijas.

Another roman writer, Rufo Festo Avieno in his book *Ora Marítima*, based on quotations from ancient writers, maybe Greek from the I century BC., made a description of the southern peninsula coasts and mentioned the *Lugum* (cape or headland) *Barbetium*, which has been identified as la Punta de Calaburras.

Alongside the roman routes, rural and commercial towns were developed, of which there is evidence in the roman tile work of Haza del Algarrobo and the town of Butibamba, along with the aforementioned town of Finca Acebedo. During this era there was an important exploitation of marble from the Mijas mountain range.

The roman population in Mijas are identified by the findings of roman ceramics (*terra sigillata*) and coins in different areas of the district (Osunilla, Mijas and El Olivar) dated back to the times of Octavio Augusto (I century BC. – I century AC.) up until the end of the IV century of our era.

The roman world fell apart after the invasions from Central-European populations, who finished with the roman administration and caused the breakdown of the commerce and consequently the towns related to it, which surely provoked the decline of the urban structure of Suel, whose population most likely fled due to the lack of security provided by the flat lands close to the sea, moving to higher and safer areas of the actual Mijas.

Mijas Hispano-Muslim

At the beginning of the VIII century (711 AC.) a military force compiled of Arabs and Berbers who depended on Omniad´s Caliphate of Damask, disembarked in Algeciras and occupied nearly all of the peninsula. The social problems, the ideological crisis, economic depression etc., which affected the Visigothic Kingdom, were factors that favoured a quick and easy occupation. This is how the land of the actual Mijas passed on to the Islamic influence.

After the occupation a process of arabicization was produced in which the language and the culture was assimilated progressively and a process of islamization which ended in a practical religious union of all the territory under Islam, although there was a certain tolerance towards the Christian and Jewish religions.

Throughout this period, which covers more than 700 years, there is not much creditable data about Mijas. We know that between the VIII and IX century (throughout the reign of Muhammad I, al Mundir and `Abd Allah`) riots broke out in the rural areas because the population here did not accept the by-laws. The most important was the “fitna” (civil war) which was protagonist by `Omar b. Hafsun´ and his sons who along with Bobastro capitalised from the social upset. The first towns to be united were Awta, Comares and **Mixas** (Mijas); progressively they united various populations until they controlled a large part of the actual province of Malaga and other adjoining areas. In the X century, at the beginning of the reign of `Abd al Rahman II´, the revolt was controlled and Bobastro destroyed.

Throughout this era a strong economic and population growth was produced. This was clearly demonstrated when the Catholic Kings conquered the land in 1487, with the existence of three different populations (according to Christians sources): **Mixas** (Mijas), Osuna (Osunilla) and Oznar (for some historians (Hornillo), along with the fortress of Fuengirola. The population increase could also be noted in the numerous country dwellings; testified today by the many Hispano-Muslim ceramic remains to be found throughout the municipal district.

Agriculture was the base of the economy, an agriculture which benefited from the so-called Green Revolution, introduced in al-Andalus in the times of `Abd al-Rhaman II´(822-852), and which consolidated in the X century. It was also possible thanks to the extension of the irrigation systems, mainly in the mountainous valleys, and the acclimatisation of new plants and cultivation (rice, sweet cane, egg-plants, artichokes, melons, water melons, saffron, cotton and numerous fruit trees: mulberry, pomegranate, apricot, peach etc.) and also the introduction of new cultivation in dried products (hard wheat, cereal originating from the south of the Sahara).

Modern Age

In May 1485 the Catholic Kings took the city of Ronda. The capitulation of the mountain populations took place immediately (Yunquera, El Burgo, Casarabonela, Monda, Tolox, Gaucín, Casares, Montejaque, Benaolján, etc.). Because of the success obtained they proceeded immediately towards the coast, where Marbella fell and was followed by the Castle of Fuengirola and Benalmádena. After this invasion, the Christian army returned to their base in the Guadalhorce Valley and the kings went back to Cordoba. After this action, Malaga lost its defensive cover in the west, except for Mijas and Osunilla who continued their resistance.

In 1487 the conquest of Malaga began, which fell on the 18th August of the same year. After hearing this notice, on the 25th August many neighbours from Mijas travelled to Malaga to surrender to the Christian king, supposing that the conditions of surrender would be the same as those which were offered to the populations who gave in without resistance: freedom; but the resistance shown by Mijas in the 1485 campaign was not forgotten and its inhabitants ended up slaves along with those from Malaga. Freedom and the maintenance of properties was only allowed to a few families (probably those who could negotiate their surrender).

In 1492 the distribution of properties was carried out to the fifty new Christian colonists who had settled in Mijas after the conquest. However, after a few years many of them left the land, due to the hard conditions they endured: the best lands being in the hands of the noblemen, invasions of pirate ships which attacked the Malaga coasts from locations in the north of Africa, etc.

Due to insecurity, the coast was eventually deserted making it impossible to repopulate the area of the Fuengirola Castle, which belonged to Mijas. To solve this problem several watchtowers were built along the coast to prevent and control the invasions of the North African pirates. Evidence of these watchtowers are numerous in Mijas: Calahonda, new Cala del Moral, Old Cala del Moral (actual Interpretation Centre of the watchtowers of the Historic-Ethnologic Museum of Mijas) and Calaburra.

The first evidence for the need of these watch-towers in Mijas can be found in a document edited on the 16th July 1496, which says “*for the well-being and safety of the coast*” and for “*vision and defence of the sea-coast*” the King and Queen ordered a

watch-tower to be built by the sea in Cala del Moral, granting the license to Francisco de Alcaraz, close ally of the King and Queen and Mayor of the castles of Cordoba. He was also authorised to build an inn in the same place.

One of the first buildings that was built for the new inhabitants was the church of the Immaculate Conception, already mentioned in the Allotments of 1492, probably on the base of the old Mosque, which must have been used devoted to Christianity until the actual church was erected and finished in 1631. One of the characteristic marks of this building is its square tower of military origin, which served as a refuge for the village inhabitants in times of danger.

During the reign of Carlos I of Spain the war of the communities took place, originated by the discontent of the Castilian noblemen, feeling their needs ignored by the emperor. Mijas did not participate in the conflict and stayed loyal to the emperor and his mother, Queen Juana la Loca. Because of this loyalty Mijas was granted a Royal Warrant in 1512, being declared exempt from sales tax among other privileges that were confirmed by the monarchs of Austria and the first Borbon King, Felipe V. Juana la Loca granted Mijas with the title of **VILLA** , and her son Carlos V gave Mijas the title of **VERY LOYAL**, titles which still stand firm today and granted for the reasons already mentioned.

After the allotments of the fifty households (some 200-250 people), the Mijas population had an unsteady growth which consisted of two different stages: one up to the middle of the XV century, where there were practically no changes except for a slight decrease, and another from this date onwards where a steady increase began up until the middle of the XX century. Thus, in 1585 there were some 130 households, in 1677 approximately 400 and in the middle of the XVIII century some 770 ((approx. 4000 inhabitants).

Origin of the Coastal Vigilance

Even though this coastal defence system has previous antecedents, at least since the roman age, and was used safely by the Muslims since their arrival to the Peninsula, the coasts of the Granada Kingdom became the focus of attention in the middle of the XIII century for political reasons. Because of this, the Granada monarchs built a series of watchtowers which, afterwards, along with newly built towers, were included in the Christian coastal defence system of the XVI century.

The first consequence of the expulsion of the Muslims from the ancient Granada Kingdom in 1492 was their immediate reaction. They organised invasions from Argel and other African landspots, their objective being to enter via the coasts of Granada and Malaga, attacking the population and taking prisoners, in order to weaken the Andalusian front. This piracy on a grand scale, with the support of the Turks, forced the Spanish Kings to organise a defence system which guaranteed the immunity of the zone, of vital importance to achieve the effective repopulation of towns such as Rincón de la Victoria, Benalmádena, Mijas, Marbella and Estepona.

To achieve this the watchtowers which formed part of the coastal defence front of the ancient Muslim Kingdom were repaired, and new ones built, which is the case of the **Calaburra Tower**, in Mijas. Others were also destroyed which were seen as weak points because they could be used by the enemy in their attacks. This policy produced a much stronger line of defence along the coastline from Gibraltar up to the Murcian border, of which the towers found along the Mijas coast are included. Their defensive function consisted of giving warning of the presence of enemy boats so that the armies of Fuengirola, Benalmádena and Marbella, among others, could go to the place where the Barbareque were trying to assault.

The problem in Mijas, as in the other repopulated areas of those times, was the existence of a Mudejar population which supported all the attempted attacks carried out by their African coreligionist, giving them information about the area and its inhabitants. This caused a continuous state of alert and danger, and a problem which was difficult to resolve, marking the lives of the coastal populations. The outcome of this can still be seen today in specific places like Mijas and Fuengirola where oral traditions are conserved with reference to the abduction of workers who were taken to the Argel baths.

Documents from this period prove these oral traditions and through these we know that on the 16th May of 1507 Francisco de Toledo, a labourer working in the tower of La Cala del Moral, was captured in an attack. The same happened to Alonso de Plasencia on the 12th of June, a labourer in the same tower. In the document there is also proof of a contract to rescue a resident of Mijas who had been captured by the Moors.

Contract to rescue a resident of Mijas who is in hands of the moors. Mijas. 17th November, 1594.

Juan Bautista Lunchón, resident of Mijas, is obliged to pay to Alonso de Madrid, merchant resident of Malaga, forty ducados in castillian reales, for the rescue of Cristóbal Gómez, who at present is in hands of the moors. I will pay the afore-mentioned forty ducados when Cristóbal is in Christian land, along with any outstanding costs.