

ORIGIN - 12th Century

In the 10th century, on a summit in La Villa mountain range at an altitude of 730 meters, the first stronghold of Villena was built: the Castle of Salvatierra. For two centuries it was the only castle in the area, controlling the historic thoroughfare that involved crossing the river Vinalopó. In the 12th century, the Almohads built a new fortress: the Atalaya Castle (*Atalaya* meaning watchtower) on a promontory in the same mountain range to hold back the Christian advance. At this time, the castle consisted of one tower, corresponding with the two lower levels of the current keep, and a rampart that would be the beginning of the original courtyard. The two Villena strongholds coexisted together until, in the 14th century, Salvatierra was abandoned, leaving it to ruin.

After surviving two previous attacks, in 1240, the Atalaya Castle yielded to the armies of Jaime I El Conquistador, thus the castle passed to the rule of the Crown of Aragón.



▲ Image of how the Atalaya Castle would have looked after just being completed, with Salvatierra Castle in the background – 12th and 13th Centuries

THE “HOUSES OF VILLENA” 13th to 15th Centuries

In 1244, after the Treaty of Almizra was signed by the Crown of Castile and the Crown of Aragón, the fortress passed into the hands of the Castilians. A few years later, Alfonso X created the Lordship of Villena and granted it to his younger brother, Don Manuel, who would manage an extensive border territory between Castile and Aragón that provided a substantial feudal income. His favourite castle can be found on the estate: the Atalaya Castle, which he improved through new restoration works by adding a reception area, which is evident in the last archaeological dig made in the courtyard.

After the death of Don Manuel in 1283, his one-year-old son, Don Juan Manuel, inherited the lordship of Villena. This Castilian noble united with Aragón a few years later by way of an engagement to the daughter of Jaime II, Doña Constanza, a six-year-old girl who had to remain at the Atalaya Castle until she turned twelve and could then marry. During this period, and to protect the child, Don Juan Manuel reinforced the castle defenses in 1308, which was considered the “capital” of the dominion. There is no documented evidence of these works, but there is evidence that the Manuel family also built a small chapel dedicated to Our Lady of the Snows, Villena's patron saint by that time.

The noble Don Juan Manuel, known as the Writer Prince by some, wrote a few passages about the beauty of the countryside that could be seen from the castle's keep in his work: “*El Libro de la Caza*”.

Rule over Villena stayed with the Manuel family until 1366, when the astute soldier Don Alfonso of Aragón, who was fighting for Castile, managed to obtain the Marquisate of Villena, the first title of its kind awarded in Castile.

After a period of private ownership, in 1445 King Juan II of Castile gave the Marquisate to his favourite, Don Juan Pacheco, a powerful noble who oversaw a vast enlargement of the fortress, building the two upper floors of the keep and constructing the outer rampart, which has changed very little since then.



▲ Chapel during the reign of Don Juan Manuel – 14th Century

VISITING THE CASTLE

PRICE	
General admission: 3 €	Discounted admission: 1,5 €
(Check prices and opening times at www.turismovillena.com)	

TICKETS, INFORMATION AND RESERVATIONS	
TOURISM OFFICE Pl. Santiago, 5 - 03400 Villena www.turismovillena.com villena@touristinfo.net Telf. (+34) 966 150 236	VISITOR RECEPTION CENTRE C/ General Prim, 2 - 03400 Villena crv.villena@gmail.com Telf. (+34) 965 803 893

RULES DURING YOUR VISIT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The duration of the tour is approximately 1 hour. ■ The maximum number of visitors per tour is 50. ■ The tour will be performed by an official tour guide designated by the Villena Council. ■ For your safety and the conservation of the archaeological sites, do not leave the designated path of the tour. ■ Please use the bins provided. ■ Pay attention to the instructions provided by security staff and abide by their warnings. ■ Children should be informed of these rules so they can understand and abide by them. ■ Throughout the visit, children under 16 should be accompanied by an adult at all times. Responsibility lies with the teacher/parent/guardian or group leader.



Iglesia de Santa María Church of Saint Mary	Fuentes Fountains	Ermitas Chapels
Castillo de la Atalaya Castle of "La Atalaya"	Casa de la cultura Cultural Centre	Museo del Festero Moors and Christians Festival's Museum
Museo Arqueológico J.M. Soler Archaeological Museum	Ayuntamiento Town hall	Iglesia de Santiago Church of Santiago
Oficina de Información y Turismo Tourist Info	Biblioteca Library	



In 1467, the title of Marquis of Villena passed to his son, Don Diego López Pacheco, putting him in charge of completing the projects started by his father. The family emblem can be admired in the coat of arms situated on the upper part of the keep, just like the other towers and walls that were rectified.

In 1476, a little before the Marquisate was lost, López Pacheco had to endure the uprising of the old Christians of Villena trying to expel the new Christians (Jews and Moors converted into Christianity) who were under his command. From 1480, after the signing of the capitulation in Belmonte (Cuenca), both the castle and its citizens came under rule of the Catholic Monarchs, Isabel and Fernando, while the marquisate remained just a title.

MODERN ERA – 16th to 19th Centuries

Once the castle came under crown rule, numerous conservation actions took place, demonstrated by the economic resources that were provided by Juana I of Castile, Carlos I and Felipe II in order to repair walls and ramparts, as it was in the best interests of the royal service that the town, “which was the capital of the Marquisate”, be well defended.

Between 1522 and 1523 the Revolt of the Brotherhoods erupted in Valencia, pitting the Valencian nobles against the most underprivileged classes (artisan guilds, farmers, etc.). The Atalaya Castle proved a safe place of refuge away from the conflict for the Viceroy of Valencia, Don Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, after his defeat in Gandía at the hands of the “brothers”.

After the expulsion of the *moriscos* (Moors converted into Christianity) from Villena on 24 September 1609, restoration began again on the town walls and castle in order to prevent any future attacks or sackings, distributing muskets, gunpowder and lead for its defence.

One conflict that really left its mark on the castle was the War of Succession. In 1707 Villena, as an ally of the Bourbon side, was being permanently defended by 150 French soldiers and a few Spanish soldiers under the command of Captain De la Grossetete. This garrison had to withstand a tough siege by the Habsburg forces between 17 and 24 April, being attacked by various cannons that fired from sunrise to sunset. The damage caused during its defence can still be clearly seen today.

The French occupation of the castle during the War of Independence left even more damage. In April 1813, during the retreat of the Napoleonic Army led by Marshall Suchet, part of the fort was reduced to rubble after the command to blow up the keep was given, partially destroying the magnificent Almohad vaults.



▲ Artillery hits on the keep

CONTEMPORARY HISTORY – 20th and 21st Centuries

In 1931 the castle was declared a National Historic and Artistic Monument, and in 1958 the first restoration work began, focusing on the keep, followed by other subsequent interventions that would recover the castellated ramparts and the main entrance.

By this century some major interventions had been completed, targeted at restoring and recovering the entire fortified enclosure. Throughout the last phase of restoration, finalized in 2013, some important archaeological remains appeared in both the courtyard and the barbican.



▲ Restoration works in 1960



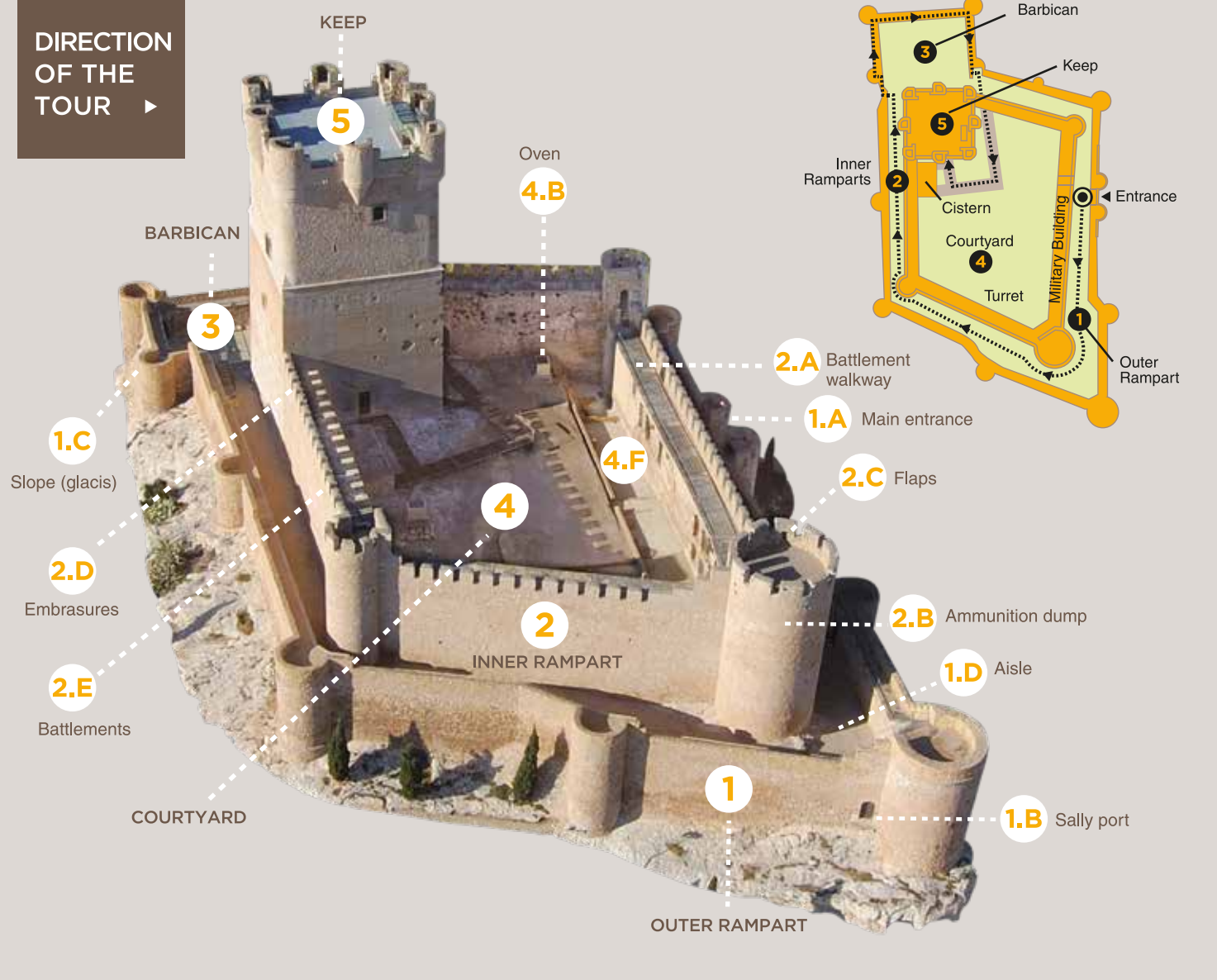
VILLENA CASTLE. FRONTIER OF KINGDOMS.

VILLENA
TURISMO

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DESCUBRE ESPAÑA

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DIRECTION OF THE TOUR ▶



1. OUTER RAMPART

This was built in the 15th century to strengthen the protection of the courtyard and the keep. Although there is no battlements today, originally it would have included this element of defence.

1. A. MAIN ENTRANCE. Reconstructed at the beginning of the 1970s in line with the typical Castilian constructions of the 15th century: two semi-circular cubes flanking the entrance gap, formed by an ashlar stone arch on the outside and another lower one inside in brick.

1. B. SALLY PORT. A small gate leading outside the fortress. During the War of Succession in 1706, it was agreed that the door should be closed and filled in to improve the defence of the fortress. It was uncovered during the restoration of the outer wall in 2003.

1. C. SLOPE (GLACIS). Steeply sloping exterior reinforcement all along the lower part of the outer wall, the purpose of which was to keep assault machines at a distance.

1. D. AISLE. A space between the outer wall and the ramparts which increased the castle's defence capacity by making it easier for the troops to move around, and might also have accommodated other services.

2. INNER RAMPART

Originating in the 12th century, although the image we see today comes from the reforms made by the Pacheco family, who expanded and increased their sections in the 15th century.

2. A. BATTLEMENT WALKWAY. Section above the ramparts protected from the exterior by a line of turrets which allowed the sentries to patrol and the emplacement of soldiers across the entire fortress.

2. B. AMMUNITION DUMP. A small room situated inside the circular tower which was intended for the on-duty guard but also used as an ammunition dump.

2. C. FLAPS. A fixture not often found in fortresses, although they existed in the Atalaya Castle, consisting of a hinged panel of wood like a single-paned window, protected between two battlements. The hinge or knuckle joint is at the highest point so it would close by its own weight.

2. D. EMBRASURES. Situated below the battlements, these are vertical openings with a circular hole in their lower section to shoot firearms such as cannons.

2. E. BATTLEMENTS. Stone prisms placed on the ramparts and the towers to protect the defenders from their attackers. Most of the battlements are the result of the restoration work in the mid-20th century.

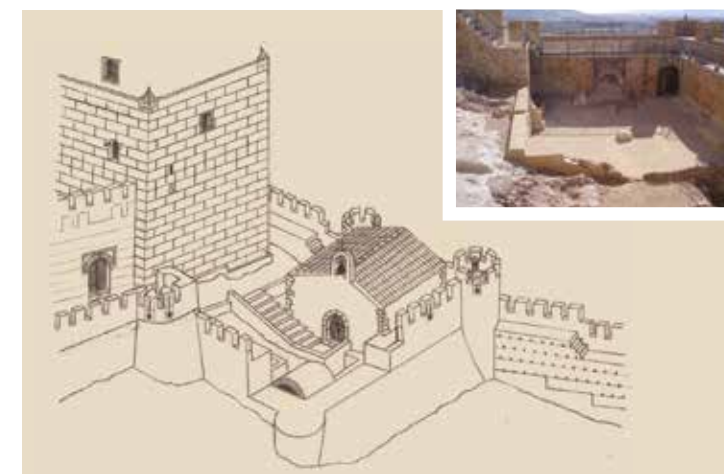
3. BARBICAN

Built at the same time as the outer wall in the 15th century, its true purpose was to protect the chapel of Our Lady of the Snows, a small temple constructed by the Manuel family in the 13th century. With the construction of the new ramparts, the configuration of the chapel changed, opening a new entrance where the altar once stood and covering up the original door.

Beside the chapel was a cistern holding approximately 70,000 litres of water that would originally have been covered by a brick dome, as is still visible today in its foundations. A well can be seen beside the cistern which formed part of the water supply.

▼ The chapel at the time of D. Juan Pacheco -15th century

▼ Remains of the chapel today



4. COURTYARD

This large space lies at the centre of the castle and was surrounded by different quarters leaning against the inside of the ramparts, and was the hub of the daily lives of its inhabitants.

4. A. CISTERN. Subterranean tank with a capacity of 10,000 litres of water. It relied on a system of capturing rain water on the roof of the keep. It was an essential resource for withstanding long and difficult sieges.

4. B. OVEN. Uncovered during the last archaeological dig in 2012, it was crucial to ensure the castle's inhabitants had access to warm food.

4. C. MILL AND TROUGH. Mill and trough. Built between the late 15th and early 16th centuries.

4. D. LIVING ROOM. Built around the 14th century by Don Juan Manuel, the main room would have been built to host receptions. Covering an area of 100m², its roof was supported by brick arches, whose bases can still be seen today. On the façade, overlooking the lower bailey, you can still see the original entrance and various windows covered up by successive restorations.

4. E. STONE CANNONBALLS. (mid-15th century). Possibly projectiles from high-calibre weaponry, or for inclusion with hewn stone for reuse in the construction.

4. F. MILITARY BUILDING. (16th and 17th centuries). Intended for troop barracks, it had two floors and would have been covered by a sloping roof. The gap giving access from the courtyard, the room partitions, a small oven and the beginning of a staircase to the upper floor are still visible today. The gaps in the wall, like cupboards, would have been used to store the gear for the inhabitants' daily chores.

5. KEEP

This is the most dominant and representative part of the entire castle. It is the most protected part; in it you can find the command post and the very last defenses of the fortress. The first two floors are covered by two beautiful Almohad vaults of intertwined arches, two gems of Andalusian architecture. The exterior part of the tower was decorated with a lime line finish, known as "false carvings" characteristic of Almohad military constructions.

The two remaining floors, corresponding to the extension undertaken by the Pacheco family, have a wooden coffered ceiling and a slightly pointed barrel vault in brick.

The tower is topped by eight bartizans or cylindrical towers, which were very common in the Castilian castles built in the 15th century, underneath which are the sculpted coats of arms of the second Marquis of Villena, Juan Pacheco.

The impact of artillery projectiles launched during the siege of 1707 in the War of the Spanish Succession can still be seen.

GRAFITIS

During the 18th and 19th centuries, coinciding with the last two wars that the fortress witnessed, the War of Succession and the War of Independence, the castle was converted into an improvised prison. A lot of the prisoners held there left testimonials on the walls of the keep, describing their longing and sufferings during their incarceration by means of drawings and engravings. Created with exquisite taste by scratching into the blackened surface, they make up a whole range of motifs, providing vital information about the circumstances of their creators and their surroundings at the time the drawings were made. One drawing which stands out for its antiquity is the Islamic symbol of the Hand of Fatima.

▼ Room with Graffiti

▼ Hand of Fatima



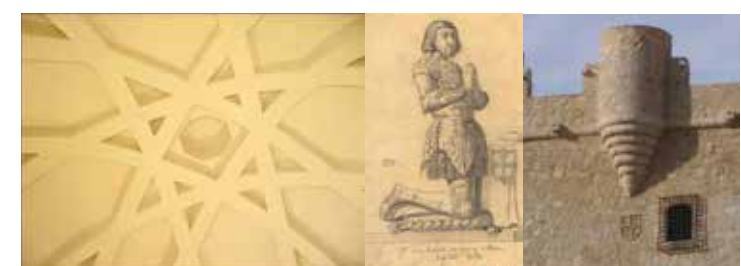
THE ATALAYA CASTLE OF VILLENA

Rising up from the mountain of Saint Christopher at an altitude of 550 meters, the castle is strategically located on the corridor of the River Vinalopó, giving it control of passage towards the lands and valleys of Castilla-La Mancha, the valley of Montesa and the lands of Valencia and Murcia.

The fortress now allows us to distinguish the two key periods in its history: Islamic and Feudal.

Its construction began with the Almohads in the late 12th century, employing the rammed-earth building technique to raise the ramparts and the first two floors of the keep. This involved compressing a damp mixture of sand, gravel and lime into an externally supported frame or mould, creating a solid wall.

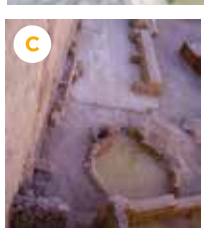
Various changes took place after the Christian conquest in the 14th and 15th centuries, which included the stone reinforcement of the existing ramparts, the enlargement of the keep using masonry, which reflects how the tower looks today, and the construction of an outer wall or barrier surrounding the entire fortress, in line with Castilian traditions. As a result, it was transformed into a magnificent late medieval construction whose structure and appearance allow us to place it amongst the large castles that marked the extensive Marquisate of Villena.



▲ Almohad dome with intertwined arches

▲ D. Juan Pacheco

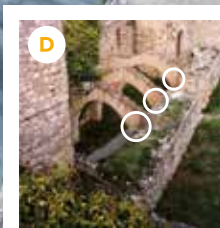
▲ Tourelle and the coat of arms



▲ Mill and trough



▲ Arches at the Segura de la Sierra castle (Jaen)



▲ Arches at the Segura de la Sierra castle (Jaen)



▲ Stone cannonballs arranged together next to the living area



▲ Staircase going down to the inside the cistern from the courtyard