

VITORIA-GASTEIZ AS AN EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE



NEOCLASSICAL Vitoria



Vitoria-Gasteiz
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Ayuntamiento de Vitoria-Gasteiz
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itinerary

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1. PRESENTATION	5
2. THE ITINERARY	7
3. PRECEDENTS.....	8
4. THE NEOCLASSICAL EXPANSION	9
5. PLAZA DEL MACHETE	10
6. THE ARQUILLOS.....	11
7. THE FORMER BANK OF SPAIN BUILDING.....	14
8. PLAZA DE ESPAÑA.....	15
9. PLAZA DE LA VÍRGEN BLANCA.....	17
10. THE MAGDALENA CONVENT FACADE	19
11. THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT PALACE	20
12. ACTIVITIES.....	21
13. GLOSSARY	24
14. BIBLIOGRAFY	25

The participation in the Historical-Artistic's Itinerary Programme is going to give you the opportunity to get better acquainted with your city: its origins, its evolution, the socioeconomic, urbanistic and artistic characteristics of each historical period, and to compare them with the characteristics that it shows nowadays.

By getting to know it better, you will appreciate it more, you will try harder to take care of it and you will be better equipped to suitably use the services that it offers you.

1. PRESENTATION

From 1256, the year in which the urban space that we know as the “Medieval Almond” was established, up until the 18th Century, Vitoria-Gasteiz did not experience any kind of expansion outside the defensive walls that surrounded the city.

This first expansion outside the defensive walls was carried out towards the south, looking for the proximity with the postal route that went from Madrid to France and with the intention of urbanising the area where markets and fairs were held. In the painting by Juan Ángel Sáez, which shows an interesting panoramic view of Vitoria-Gasteiz in the 17th Century, it can easily be seen how the area used to be, before the neoclassical expansion was carried out in the 18th Century.

The main difficulty that this expansion faced, was to overcome the existing slope of more than 20 metres between the old medieval town and the *Camino de Postas*. A construction based on terraced platforms solved this inconvenient problem.

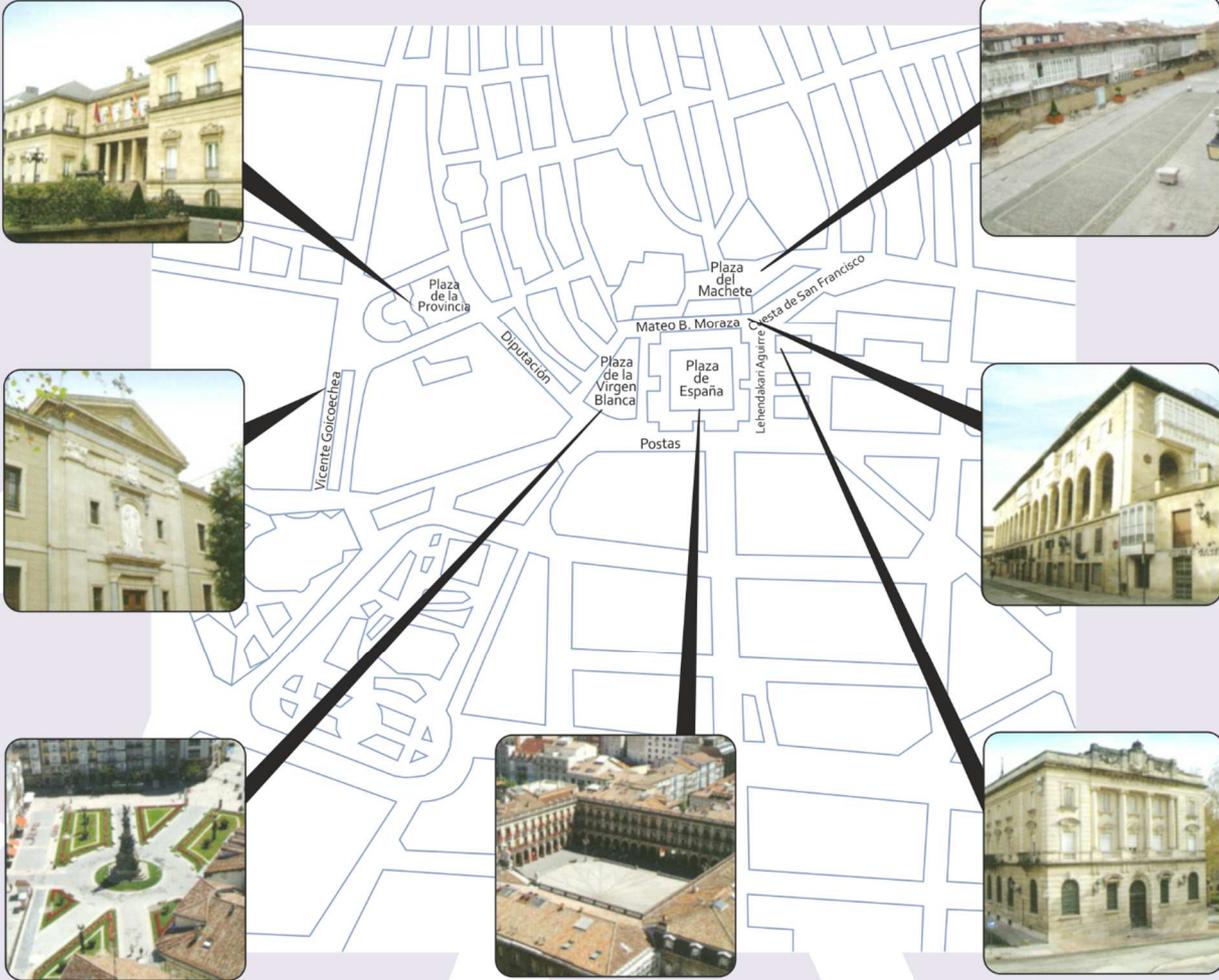
Among the constructions that were built, some stand out: the *Plaza Nueva* (current *Plaza de España*) and the *Arquillos*. Because of the architectural style employed in these constructions, the area is known as **Neoclassical Vitoria**. Despite being small in size, it turned out to be very important, not only in the period when it was built, but also in the expansive future of the city towards the south.



VISTA ANTIGUA DE VITORIA. COPIADA A LA TINTA DE CHINA DE UN CUADRO YA DETERIORADO, POR DON BENITO DE CASAS EL AÑO DE MIL OCHOCIENTOS TREINTA Y OCHO Y MANDADA PINTAR EN MAYOR ESCALA Y AL ÓLEO PARA MAS DURACION, POR EL MUY YLUSTRE AYUNTAMIENTO, ESTE AÑO DE MIL OCHOCIENTOS SESENTA Y DOS.

Old View of Vitoria (Juan Ángel Sáez)

2. THE ITINERARY



3. PRECEDENTS

For a good part of the 17th Century and the beginning of the 18th Century, every aspect of life in the city had arrived to a halt, corresponding with the precarious situation that Spain was going through and because of the continuous wars in Europe to establish a supremacy in the continent.

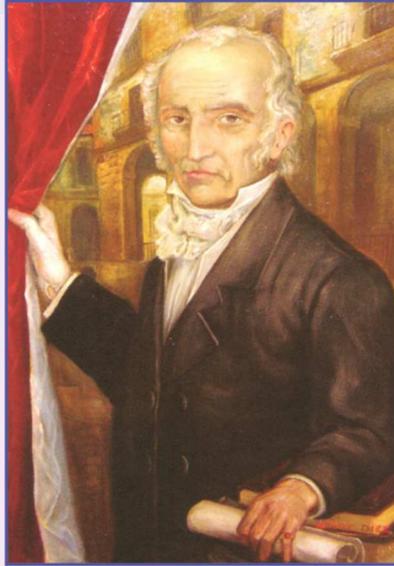
However, well into the 18th Century, a series of events in the European and Spanish context played out, which also had an effect on Vitoria-Gasteiz:

- The Borbon Dynasty grew stronger in Spain following the Austria's reign. This resulted in stronger political stability in Europe.
- A resurgence in trade and production occurred.
- The Enlightenment movement inspired great progress, especially in the scientific, philosophic and political fields.
- The population increased thanks to the improvements in living conditions and a decrease in the mortality rate.

In Vitoria-Gasteiz, as in the rest of the Basque Country, the Enlightenment ideas were channelled through the Royal Basque Society of Friends of the Country, which very favourably influenced progress in the city.

The city benefitted from these sets of circumstances that resulted in an economic expansion and an increase in the population. The new situation forced the need to consider an expansion of the city outside the medieval area.





Justo Antonio de Olagüibel

4. THE NEOCLASSICAL EXPANSION

The Neoclassical expansion formed the first city extension outside the defensive walls and was promoted by the Alameda Marquis, mayor of the city and member of the Royal Basque Society of Friends of the Country.

The fundamental element of that expansion was a square with arcades that would host the Town Hall and give character to the city. The square works began in 1781 and ended in 1790, following the project by the architect **Justo Antonio de Olagüibel**.

In 1787, the Vitorian graduate José Nicolás de Segurola requested permission to start the construction of the current eastern *Arquillos*. The works were completed in 1792.

With the aim of urbanising the remaining area between the first *Arquillos* and the *San Miguel* Church, the City Hall requested project submissions from a number of architects. Although, in 1796 Olagüibel's project was approved, it was not actually implemented due to a lack of resources and ultimately, in 1802 the construction of the second *Arquillos* was granted to the architect Güemes.

Both the *Plaza Nueva* and the *Arquillos* were built following the neoclassical style, which prevailed at the time. This style is characterised by the use of noble materials (dressed stone, marble...) and classic elements of decoration (columns, capitals, pediments...), achieving a clean and uniform aesthetic.

The adjacent surroundings to the neoclassical area were slowly urbanised until the creation of the spaces that we currently know: *Plaza de la Virgen Blanca*, *Paseo de los Arquillos*, *Plaza del Machete*, Mateo Moraza Street and the *Cuesta de San Francisco*...

5. PLAZA DEL MACHETE

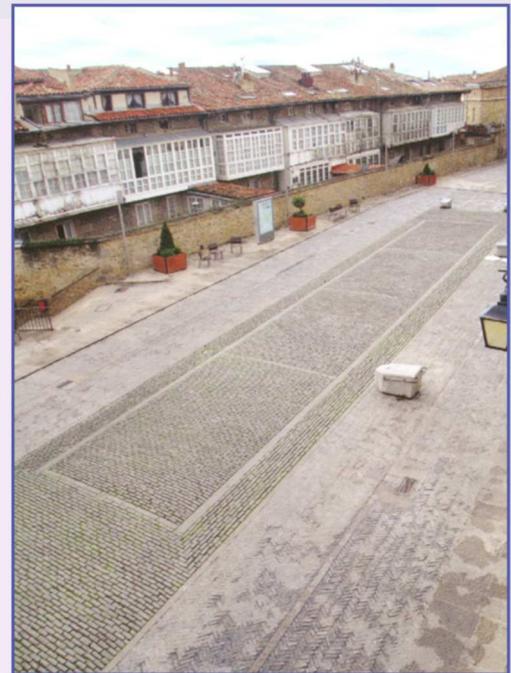
The *Plaza del Machete* was built at the beginning of the 19th Century as a result of the levelling of the lands that was carried out after the construction of the *Arquillos*.

This space receives its name from the machete upon which the Syndic Attorney General would be sworn in. The ceremony took place once a year next to the walls of the San Miguel Church, which is where officials were sworn in.

The constructions made under the *Cuesta de San Vicente* called “*covachas*” (little caves) are characteristic to this square. Inside them were placed the stalls to sell fish, fruit and vegetables, as they needed the cool and dry conditions to preserve the goods.

Other than the market, this space was also used as a bullfighting arena.

Nowadays it has been turned into a public space mostly used for cultural activities.



Plaza del Machete

6. THE ARQUILLOS

They were thought up with the aim of finding an urban solution to the existing slope between the medieval old town and the new built-up area that then existed in the city: the *Plaza Nueva*. In this way, the *Arquillos* represented a linking point between the higher part of the hill, where the city came into existence, and the flat area.

The Arquillos del Juicio

The first *Arquillos* to be built were the eastern ones, that is to say, the ones facing the *Cuesta de San Francisco*. The *Arquillos del Juicio* (“The Judgement *Arquillos*”) were so named because that space was used to hold the public trials.

On the 17th of October 1787, José Nicolás de Segurola requested from the City Hall the concession of the land known as the *Costanilla del Juicio*, which became the starting point for the construction of the eastern *Arquillos*, that were finished in 1792.

They were built as housing blocks and received the name of *Casas del señor Segurola* (“Houses of Mister Segurola”) and were later sold by the owner to private buyers.



The Arquillos del Juicio

The Arquillos del Ala

After the construction of the first *Arquillos*, the land contained between them and the San Miguel Church was still in a deplorable condition, which is why the City Hall put out a call for various projects with the aim of tidying up the area.

The chosen project was the one submitted by **Justo Antonio de Olaguíbel**, which provided an interesting solution to overcome the topographic slope and maintain architectural uniformity with the first *Arquillos*.

In the end this project was not carried out due to a lack of resources, but later, the one submitted in **1801** by **Eustaquio Díez de Güemes**, was finally accomplished, with Olaguíbel being appointed as the structural surveyor. Güemes simplified the facade of the lower floor and added an extra floor to the building.

They were called the Ala ones because they were built on the location of the former Ala Market, located to the right of the old building of the *Alhóndiga*.



The Arquillos del Ala

Architectural features

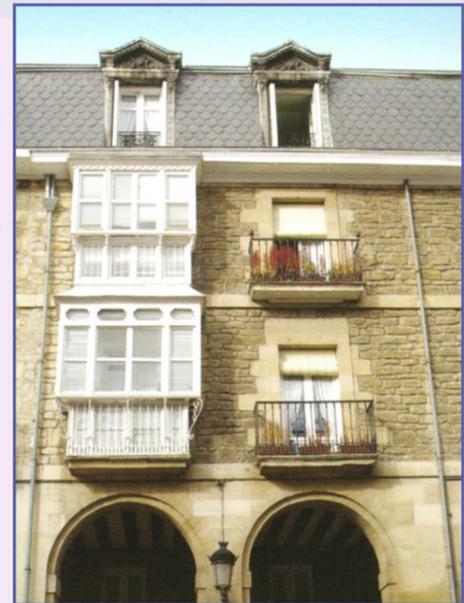
The construction of the *Arquillos* was executed following the Neoclassical style which prevailed at the time. The pilasters and the series of arches in the covered floor and the vertical balconies, which follow a rhythmic sequence, are the elements that stand out the most. The main characteristic is the existing uniformity in the distribution of materials, bays, rooves, attics, ceilings, arcades...

As for the materials used, the use of dressed stone stands out in the jambs of doors and windows, as in the impostes and corners of every large exterior wall, and the use of masonry in the stretches of wall and parapets.

All the ensemble follows the uniformity idea that Olaguíbel proposed for the *Plaza Nueva*.

The construction of the *Arquillos* ensemble was arranged on three levels or platforms (*Plaza del Machete*, *Paseo de los Arquillos* and *Mateo Moraza Street*), all linked together by stairs and slopes.

Its architectural and urban value was recognised with it being declared a **Historical-Artistic Monument** in 1983.



Architectural detail of the *Arquillos*

7. THE FORMER BANK OF SPAIN BUILDING

The former Bank of Spain building is located on Lehendakari Aguirre Street. This street was previously called Hospital Street, since it was here where the city's only hospital was located, the same one that is known nowadays as Santiago Hospital and which was moved to its current location in 1807.

In 1820 the Main Theatre was built on this land, being the street known at the time as Theatre Street. After its destruction in a fire, the Bank of Spain was built there, in 1920.

Although it is not a neoclassical building because of the period in which it was built, it does show, however, structural and decorative elements that follow the main characteristics of this style.



The former Bank of Spain building

8. PLAZA DE ESPAÑA

The construction of *Plaza de España* was of great importance for the future of the city, as it was the first work that was done outside the limits of the medieval defensive walls and also being an inspiration for later interventions in the city's expansion.

It was built towards the south, looking for the proximity of the *Camino de Postas* that went from Madrid to France, and urbanising the lands where the markets and fairs were held.

It was designed with three functions: to place the City Hall, to satisfy the demand of housing and to create an open space to celebrate public and festive acts. Also, it was wished that it would become an emblematic place in tune with the importance that the city was achieving.

The promoter of the construction was the Alameda's Marquis, who was the mayor of the city at the time, and it was started on the 17th of October of 1781, following the proposal of the architect **Antonio Justo de Olaguibel**. The works were finished in 1790.



Plaza de España

Architectural features

The square was built in the **neoclassical style**, which prevailed at the time of its construction.

It is formed by four blocks of buildings that draw a perfect square of 61 metres each side and because of that is the squarest public square of all Spain. It has three entrances on its south, east and west sides, being the north side closed by the entrance of the City Hall. All sides are uniform, with the exception of the one that forms the City Hall, to highlight its importance.

The arcades of its four sides are formed by semi-circular arches with attached pilasters that, at the entrances are replaced by columns. These ones are free-standing at the entrance of the City Hall.

Above the arcades, two levels of floors follow with uniform balconies that, on the first floor, are crowned, alternatively by small triangular or curved pediments, while the ones on the second floor are finished with simple lintels.

The facade corresponding with the City Hall is finished through a balustrade with vases, a large pediment and the coat of arms of the city made in stone. The remaining fronts show only a ledge.

In the construction, dressed stone, masonry and brick are blended together.

Its architectural value was confirmed by the fact of being declared an **Historical-Artistic Monument** in **1984**.



A facade of Plaza de España

9. PLAZA DE LA VÍRGEN BLANCA

The square appeared in the empty space that was left between the *Plaza Nueva* and the *Correría*, *Zapatería* and *Herrería* Streets.

After various name changes (*Plaza Vieja*, *Plaza de Castilla*, *Plaza Mayor* and, popularly, *Sartén* and *Mentirón*), in 1901 it was officially named *Plaza de la Virgen Blanca*.

In the past it was a market place and also the place where stock exhibitions, popular shows performances, movie projections, bullfights...were celebrated.

Its appearance has been modified throughout the years, being initially an open space with trees and some kiosks. Later, it was urbanised and the central monument and the gardens were added, elements that would characterise it for decades. In the year 2007 the new renovation of the square was performed.

Since 1971 the local festivities honouring the *Virgen Blanca* start in this square.



Plaza de la Virgen Blanca before the last renovation

The Monument to the Battle of Vitoria

At the centre of *Plaza de la Virgen Blanca* stands the commemorative Monument for the Battle of Vitoria. The battle ended with the victory against the French troops on the **21st of June of 1813**.

Mr. **Gabriel Borrás** was the winner of the projects competition organised with the aim of designing the monument. Due to various difficulties it was not finished on time for the Centenary and it was unveiled the 4th of August of 1917.

The materials used in the construction were concrete in the foundation, white stone in the lower body and marble and bronze on the upper figures, in which the battle is depicted through the figures of the General Álava and the Duke of Wellington, the coat of arms of the allied countries and, on top, the Victory's allegory.



Monument to the Battle of Vitoria

10. THE MAGDALENA CONVENT FACADE

The former Magdalena Convent was located in the place nowadays occupied by the New Cathedral and hosted, since 1653 the religious order of Santa Brígida. In 1783, **Justo Antonio de Olaguibel** executed the facade of the convent in the neoclassical style. When the constructive works of the New Cathedral began, the old convent was demolished and the facade was relocated to the new convent on Vicente Goicoechea Street. It was the architect of this new building, **Fausto Íñiguez de Betolaza**, who preserved and rebuilt the facade in its current location.



The Magdalena Convent facade

The facade is made with dressed stone, framed by pilasters and crowned with a triangular pediment and a cross. Inside the tympanum of the pediment there is a capital letter “M” referring to Mary Magdalene.

The central sculptural relief portrays the “*Noli Me Tangere*”* (“Don't touch me”) scene; the moment when Christ, after his resurrection, shows himself to Mary Magdalene as a gardener. Above this relief we can find the coat of arms of St. Bridget.

* “*Noli Me Tangere*” is the latin sentence that, according to Saint John the Evangelist, Christ said after resurrecting, in his apparition to Mary Magdalene.

11. THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT PALACE

Belonging to a late period of the neoclassical style, the Provincial Government Palace was built by the Vitorian **Martín de Saracibar** in two phases. During the first phase, carried out in **1833**, the central body and the two sides, with one floor and a semi-basement, were built. In the second one, in **1858**, the palace was expanded with the addition of an upper floor.

The aim of its construction was to provide the headquarters for the General Council of Alava, considering that until then the meetings were held at the San Francisco Convent, and, also in order to have a building that was a symbol of the Alava's freedoms.

The building has the characteristic simplicity of the neoclassical style, with Tuscan order columns in the porch and Ionic order pilasters in the upper floor, although the ornamented pediments in the balconies show us that the neoclassical sobriety was making room for new solutions. The palace is crowned by the coat of arms of the Alava province.

The material used throughout the building is dressed stone.

The ensemble is completed with the statues of two of the General Deputies on the upper landing of the staircase: Don Prudencio María de Verástegui and Don Miguel Ricardo de Álava.



The Provincial Government Palace

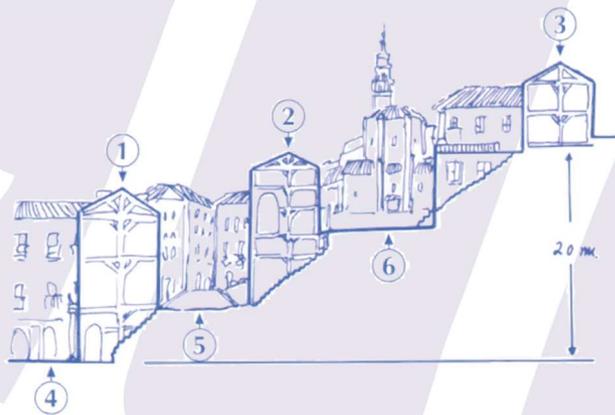
12. ACTIVITIES

12.1. **OBSERVE** the Juan Ángel Sáez painting on page 6 and **DO** the following exercises:

- Write down the streets and buildings that border the space where the neoclassical expansion was carried out.
- Complete the text with the following terms: *Arrabal*, *Ala* and *La Costanilla del Juicio*.

The space currently occupied by Plaza de la Virgen Blanca and Plaza de España was called The space between the Puerta de San Bartolomé, Cuchillería Street and Mateo Moraza Street was called, being called the space that went from the defensive walls to the Cuesta de San Francisco and that currently meets with part of the Plaza del Machete and the Arquillos.

12.2. In the following picture you can see the existing slope between the Medieval Old Town and the Neoclassical Expansion. **WRITE** the names of the buildings that mark the slopes and the streets or squares created by them.



1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

12.3. THINK

Would you be able to write down the different functions that, throughout history, have the following places had?

<i>PLAZA DEL MACHETE</i>	
<i>THE ARQUILLOS</i>	
<i>PLAZA DE ESPAÑA</i>	
<i>PLAZA DE LA VIRGEN BLANCA</i>	

12.4. ANSWER

What is the main architectural style that you have seen through the tour and to what period of history does it belong?

What are its main characteristics?

What was the main problem that the expansion of Vitoria presented? What solution was found to resolve it?

12.5. MAKE A LIST of the more characteristic buildings of the neoclassical period in the city.

12.6. RESEARCH and ANSWER

At your School Centre you have available a Didactic Unit named “*Vitoria Neoclásica*”, edited by the Municipal Department of Education in 1992. Inside the notebook named “*Documentación*” you will find information about these subjects.

What is the Enlightenment? And what is the Royal Basque Society of Friends of the Country?

Name some illustrious citizens of Vitoria from this period of history.

12.7. MAKE A LIST with the institutions and public services located in the neoclassical area.

12.8. DEBATE IN CLASS

Relate the different names that the *Plaza de España* has received along with its socio-political context.

What is your opinion about the changing of the names and characteristics or representative symbols of a specific political period? Discuss it with your classmates.

13. GLOSSARY

ARCADE: Space formed by a series of arches.

BALUSTER: Little column, normally made in stone or wood, that joins with others in railings, balconies, etc.

BALUSTRADE: A railing formed by balusters.

COLUMN: Cylindrical post formed by a pedestal, a shaft and a capital.

DRESSED STONE/ASHLAR: Polished stone, generally shaped as a rectangular parallelepiped.

DORIC ORDER: Characterised by a column without a pedestal, with a fluted shaft and an unadorned capital.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT: We call the Age of the Enlightenment the intellectual movement that prevailed in Europe and especially in France throughout almost the whole of the 18th century. Arriving from France, where it developed, it spread out across Europe and America. This movement proposes a renovation, especially in the fields of science, philosophy and politics.

GENERAL COUNCIL OF ÁLAVA: The highest representative and citizen participation body of the Historical Territory. The Council elects the General Deputy, approves the territorial budget and controls the actions of the Regional Government executive body, as well as having the power to pass regional regulations.

GRADING: Action and effect of levelling out land.

IMPOST: Band that horizontally goes over the facades of the buildings at the different floor's heights.

IONIC ORDER: The one which columns have a capital decorated with volutes.

LINTEL: The top part of doors, windows and other gaps, that loads on the jambs.

MASONRY: Unpolished stone.

NEOCLASSICISM: Neoclassicism or the neoclassical style was a cultural, literary and artistic movement that developed from the middle of the 18th century until the first part of the 19th century, when it was replaced by the Romanticism. It stands up for a return to the values, tranquillity, balance and the restraint of the classical period, having as a main characteristics symmetry, proportion and simple shapes.

PARAPET: Little stone wall or railing that is placed in high places to prevent people from falling down.

PEDIMENT: Triangular finishing of a facade, portico or window.

PILASTER: Pillar that is attached to a wall.

ROUND ARCH: Arch with a curved or semi-circular top.

THE ROYAL BASQUE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS OF THE COUNTRY: The Royal Basque Society of Friends of the Country was born during the meetings and social gatherings that the Earl of Peñaflores held in his Azkoitia residence. The wish of changing the surrounding structures took form in an association that in 1763 became the Royal Basque Society of Friends of the Country. The Society structured itself on a provincial level with the aim of being more effective and independent. Its motto was "IRURAC BAT", with three interlaced hands, representing the three Basque territories. The Society prioritised education and training, as well as the development of the practical aspects of economic and social life.

STRETCH OF WALL: The part of the wall between two pilasters, two columns or two gaps.

SYNDIC ATTORNEY GENERAL: Municipal position that acted as an intermediary between the citizens and the City Hall.

TUSCAN ORDER: A more solid and simpler order than the Doric or Ionic ones.

TYMPANUM: Triangular space that is located between the horizontal base and the leaning sides of the pediment.

14. BIBLIOGRAFY

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