

The chapel of Santa Engrazia



The chapel of Santa Engrazia is located in an exceptional setting, on a mound (507 m) of Aizarna, municipal area of Zestoa in the Urola Valley. Like many other chapels it was built under the invocation of Saint Engratia, a woman born in Portugal who died martyred in Zaragoza.

The walking distance is just a quarter of an hour from the Santa Engrazia country inn. It has a long history, undoubtedly it is one of the oldest chapels of the Basque Country. It arouses special feelings in both Aizarna and Zestoa, and it is one of the most emblematic buildings in the Urola Valley, especially for mountaineers. In spite of its location in a

rock, the chapel is in good condition, mainly by the efforts of the neighbors, many times making use of the "auzolan" system (solidary cooperation of the locals). From the height of Santa Engrazia you can see the whole valley with spectacular views over Aizarna, Hernio, Izarraitz, Pagoeta and the sea. The chapel is built in a strategic place, very close to one of the main routes of union of lands belonging to Navarra and Gipuzkoa in the Middle Ages.

Santa Engrazia resembles a fortress more than a church, and has exterior dimensions of 10.54 x 15.68 m. The light enters through four small windows, some of them presenting slightly pointed arches. The entrance door, folded, has at its side a tough baptismal water font with a very worn cross. It has a simple and rough structure, like most chapels built with the auzolan system. But undoubtedly, it is the bell tower and the bell itself the elements which attract the eyes of the visitors.

In the interior, in the central altar, Saint Engratia is venerated, integrated in a mosaic with the figure of Christ, produced in the year 1975. On the right is the image of Saint Agatha, and on the left wall one can contemplate the images of Saint James and San Ignatius of Loyola. At the very back, entering to the right, the image of Saint Paul is located whereas in the corner we are struck by the machinery of the clock placed in the chapel in 1914, protected by a large glass. The maximum interior height of the chapel reaches 5.85 meters.

Origin of the chapel. Historical facts



We have little information about the origins of the chapel. The priest Hipólito Usabiaga, assigned to Zestoa, attributed the construction of the chapel to the Templars, but no document has been found to corroborate this. The Templars arose in 1119 and disappeared in 1312. They formed a religious-military order that among other things protected the pilgrims. According to other sources the chapel of Santa Engrazia may once have been a kind of fortress for the defense or tasks of monitoring the surroundings. When it lost that function, the building would have turned it into a church. There are those who think that it was possibly a pagan church before the

introduction of Christianity. But all these are nothing more than conjectures that have not been documented. But what we do know is that Bishop Adriani of Pamplona manifested in his day that the chapel of Santa Engrazia was one of the oldest basilicas of his diocese. It is believed to have been the first parish church in Aizarna.

In any case, the earliest written document we know dates back to 1405. It is found in the Vatican archives bearing the signature of Pope Benedict XIII in Savona, Italy. The document written in Latin comes to say that «Benedict XIII grants indulgences to the Christians who on certain days visit the chapel built under the invocation of Santa Engracia in the chapel of Santa Engracia de la Peña, located in the parish of Santa Maria de Aizarna , diocese of Pamplona, helping to preserve it».

We also have proof of the will of Juan Sebastián Elcano, signed eleven days before his death on the Victoria vessel dated July 26, 1526. Among other donations is that of a golden duchy for the chapel of Santa Engrazia.

There are also documents dated in the seventeenth century. In the year 1600 a *cofradía* was founded based in the chapel of Santa Engrazia, among whose members there were the majority of the parishioners of Aizarna. In the municipal archive of Zestoa there is the robbery that in 1691 suffered the nun sacristan Dona Maria Perez de Echaide. Four individuals who went up to the chapel on horseback stole clothes, a chalice, food and money. They mistreated the woman, leaving her with tied hands and feet. They arrested Juan de la Villa, as alleged perpetrator of the wrongdoing.



Dwellers of the chapel. Nuns lived in the chapel



In the documents found by Jose Maria Zunzunegi in the archive of Oñati, it can be seen that some time ago, nuns lived in Santa Engrazia, whose job it was to take care of the chapel. It was a very venerated church and received considerable alms. A nun that lived in the seventeenth century stated that «People come to us from all over the Lordship of Biscay».

According to the aforementioned documents, two or three nuns lived in the house attached to the chapel. They were single women who led a life entirely dedicated to religious services. There are still remains of the ruined walls of the house.

To realize the importance of the nuns, it is interesting to know the content of the «Testament of *freira* (nun) Maria Etxegarai in which Maria Zelaia leaves the *freira* a white garment, as well as the amount of five hundred ducats collected in the alms of the chapel».

In the eighteenth century King Charles III repealed that tradition. In spite of everything, the chapel of Santa Engrazia kept the house annexed until 1828, the year in which a spark destroyed the building, causing the guardian of the chapel.

At that time the priest responsible for Santa Engrazia resided in Txiriboga.

- The four central wooden pillars that supported the roof were removed. In its place were placed the two large oak scissors that are supported on the side walls.
- The bell tower also gave a lot of work. Some stones were missing and the bell presented a serious danger of collapsing. The bell had to be fitted to repair the bell tower. A new stone cross was placed, after removing the previous three.
- The round window of the facade was changed, because according to the experts it was relatively new and did not fit with the style of the chapel. In its place, the window that was on the left wall (north) was placed.
- The lightning rod was repaired. The previous copper cable was extended to a more clayey area, to facilitate the deflection of the beam, because the previous installation had been damaged.
- Important reforms were also carried out in the interior. The old altarpiece was removed and replaced by a mosaic. It was the work of Jose Luis Iriondo and Jesus Huarte.
- When the old altarpiece was removed, a Gothic window appeared on the right side. That corner was adapted and stained glass was added to a part of the window.
- All the images of the chapel were restored and a new one was placed: the image of Saint Ignatius that was brought from the premises of the diocese.



Year 2010. The bell tower and roof leaks were repaired.

Year 2017. As a result of the restoration of the Santa Engrazia clock, various repairs were carried out in the surroundings of the chapel:

- Cleaning work was done on the road from the Santa Engrazia Inn to the chapel. It was also given a good overview of the external environment of the chapel. After removing the weeds and some bushes, the visual panorama was extended, especially towards the north.
- Some repairs were made on the roof, especially in the vicinity of the bell tower: removing leaks, fixing the bell tower and bell support, renewing the support of the bell mallet.
- A new lightning rod was installed to adequately protect the roof and the bell tower. The copper cable installed in 1975 was lengthened. In addition, more grounding rods were nailed.
- Some adjustments were made in the power line connection made in the 1980s. The installation came directly to the external wall of the chapel. The meter box was also installed on the wall. With the adaptation the last meters of the attack were buried, and the wall of the chapel was totally clean.
- Various works were also carried out inside the chapel: the location of the clock was completely renewed, the altar part was painted, part of the floor was renovated, the figures were cleaned, and so on.



The bell. The echoes of the sixteenth century

The Santa Engrazia bronze bell deserves special attention, with a maximum diameter of 1,420 mm and a height of 1,325 mm. The visitor is amazed by the placement of a bell of these dimensions in a chapel located in the mountain; it is not usual. It is estimated that it will weigh more than five hundred kilos, perhaps up to one ton.

Around the bell there are three inscriptions made in three parallel circles:



A FULGURE ET TEMPESTATE LIBERANOS DNE.
ANO DNJ MDLI ESISTENTS. VICARIUS DE
URVIETA JOANES DE LECU- BERI ME FECIT

MENTEN SANCTAN ESPONTANE IN HONOREM
DEO ET PATRIE LIBERACIONEM VOX MEA SIT
TERROR OMNIUM DE MONIUM VOX DNJ SONAT

ECCE CRUCEM DNJ FUGITE PARTES ADBERSE
VICIT LEO DE TRIBV JVDA RADX DABID ALLA
XPS VINCIT XPS REGNAT XPS IMPERAT XPS
TEMTESTATEN MALAM DESTRUAT

In the text of the first inscription the God is asked to free us from lightning and storms (Santa Engrazia has always been a favorable place for lightning). Below is some information. The bell was made in 1551 on

the initiative of the vicar of Urbieta and the smelter of the bell was Joanes de Lecumberri. Urbieta refers to the valley of Altzolarats, since the religious leader of the chapel resided in that valley.

On the other hand there is a very curious legend. Legend has it that a sturdy ram of the Apategi farmhouse dragged the huge bell to the top, before the unsuccessful attempts of the yuntas of oxen that could not walk the rocky path. Today, this legend is still alive.

The bell has a robust clapper. In his day they would be operated from below by means of a rope. The clapper has been silent for a long time, probably since the clock was installed.

The clock. The heartbeats of the valley

At the beginning of the 20th century our ancestors decided to place a clock in the chapel, a real jewel. We do not have much information about it, but we think that it would be at the initiative of the peasants of the area and the priest responsible for the chapel. At that time it was not usual to have a clock in the hamlets. On the other hand in the zone the chimes of the church of Aizarna are not listened to. It is evident that the neighbors of the Santa Engrazia environment would need some time reference.



Thus the Yeregui de Zumaia were in charge of installing a magnificent clock, as it appears on the label: YEREGUI Y CIA CONSTRUCTORES ZUMAYA. AÑO 1914. Some members of the Yeregui family began to build clocks back in the 18th century. Family of Navarre origin one of its branches was established in Zumaya from Aginaga (Usurbil). Benito Yeregui Goldarazena appears as the main representative of that branch that has been counted eighty-one clocks. Precisely that of Santa Engrazia bears the number 81. The clock of our chapel was placed after the death of Benito.

It's a *Morez* type bell clock. Possibly the Yeregui would bring the clock from Morez (Jura, France) and they would condition it to the chapel. It should be noted that at the beginning of the twentieth century the construction of clocks of these characteristics was in decline. Besides the Yeregui, by then they were already fully dedicated to the construction of diesel engines.

For the clock to give the hours, a heavy mallet connected by a cable was placed on the bell.

The clock has indicated the hours punctually in many years. It consists of three main elements: the movement or core of the clock, the chimes or the one in charge of the ringing of the bells and a third element to trigger the particular bells (matins, angelus ...). The first two elements we have always known them in action. No one is aware that the third element has been in operation, but is prepared for it.

Since the clock was placed in the chapel Joxemari Azpeitia Odriozola *Santangrazizarra* (1896-1986) of the Venta de Santa Engrazia was in charge of taking care of the clock and winding to raise the iron weights. He went up to the chapel three times a week to wind the clock.

Joxemari Azpeitia continued in this task accompanied by her grandson, approximately until 1980 when she went down to live in Zestoa, to her daughter's house.

On that date the clock stopped because there was no one who would give him a rope. A few years later Erramun Etxaide *Legoia* went to work to put the clock back on track, with the collaboration of Joxe Orbegozo and other friends. This is how the first automation system for lifting weights was installed in the 1980. To do this, the electricity supply had to be carried to the chapel. Since then, it was not necessary for anyone to climb the chapel to wind the clock. In spite of everything, Erramun continued with his maintenance work and often went to the chapel.

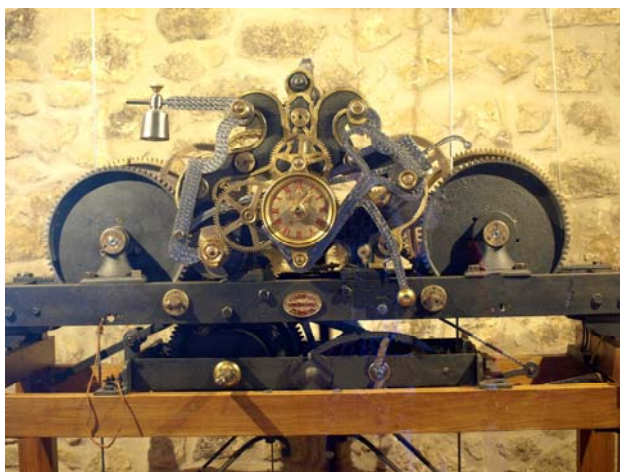


As a result of the health problems of Erramun, Joxemari Azpeitia Rementeria, assumed the responsibility of clock care, following the steps of his grandfather.

Little by little the problems of the clock followed, especially the electrical ones. As a result, the clock was stopped for several years, although sometimes efforts were made to start it.

Joxemari Azpeitia went to various people seeking help, among others Xabier Alvarez Yeregui (descendant of the clockmakers of Zumaia). In the end it was seen that the clock needed a good restoration.

After some negotiations Xabier Alvarez presented a proposal in the town hall of Zestoa on July 26, 2016, to restore the clock in *auzolan*.



In September 2016, a group of volunteers was formed to restore the Santa Engrazia clock. The headquarters of the group was set in Lasao.

The clock was dismantled in the chapel and on September 16 the old clock and other utensils were lowered to Lasao on a tractor. There the restoration work was carried out.

From then on the working group met almost every day in Lasao in the mornings. Clean the components of the clock, condition them, repair them and assemble them again, those were the main tasks.

After the first cleaning, the clock was reassembled to perform the function tests.

But the work did not stay in that. The clock was disassembled piece by piece, the sketches of all the pieces were made, some were repaired and painting works and other arrangements were made. With all this, from the middle of December began the final assembly work. A new oak frame was also made. So at the beginning of the year 2017 the repair of the clock was practically finished. The integration to the clock of the electrical / electronic board indispensable for the good operation and to carry out the second automation for the lifting of weights was lacking.

Before reinstalling the clock in the chapel, various works were carried out. The old wooden structure that protected the clock was completely dismantled. It was decided to relocate the clock to ground level. Before it was at an approximate height of two and a half meters. Since the winding mechanism was automated, there was no need for a very long course of weightlifting.

When the restoration work was completed and the appropriate adjustments were made, the clock was relocated in the chapel and an event was organized to celebrate the restoration of the clock on July 2, 2017.

Since then, the clock is protected by a crystal structure. That way, visitors have the opportunity to see the restored restored clock up close.



Myths. The legends of Santa Engrazia

ARGIA
ASTEROKOA

DONOSTIA, 1932ko Abuztuaren 14. Gaurko 22 - Urtatik 1933. Zeharkia 8,16 - Argia orria 5,30

ZELATARIAK

Santa Engrazi'ko eleiza

—Aita... ta jergatik an arkaitz tontofean jaso zuten Eliza ura?
Beia bano geyagotan galdetu genion aitari Santiago'tan edo, orduan bait dira «Santa Engrazi»-ko jayak. Izan ere afitzekoa da.

Amaika bidex igoa naiz tontor artara Aizarna'tik nere sutzarora, baita baseliz artan Santiago ta Santa Engrazi'ri nere otoi'tzak zuzendu ere...

Ufuti'tik dakusanari, arkaitzari gain-mutufa moztu ta an mendigoizaleak aterpetzat irazi duten txabolatxoak deritzayo elizatxoak. Tontorerako bide bakafu du; arkaitz biziaren gaucean egina, izardia ugari ixuritzeko egokienetakoa, Santiyo egunez an gora Meza nagusira dijonari euzkiak ateratzen dizkiyo otzak.

Goi-goyan beriz, eliz-aufe ta Inguru-bira guztian zelai orleji txikia; albo batean orma zar batruen onafiak, tzadon-zayaren etxearenak alegia, ta lau aldetan izugafizko afu ta arkaitz-aldapa bildurgafiak.

Bere onetan, nere jayotefi Aizarna, txukun, apal, gentzaso.

Antxe dago; noiztik edo nortzuk faso ta ez dakigu Santa Engrazi'ko eleiza: tente ta sendo oraindik bere azpiko arkaitzak bezela, amaika tximist bere onetan lertu badira ere; aufez-aufe daukan Kantauri-itxaso asfetuaren araso-aldi galantak eraman bear izan baditu ere. Kanpan-tofeko joale aundia ere ez da oraindik moteldu; ez da ala ere atzo-goizekoa; orduko toki aldatze biderik beintzat nere aitaitak ezagutu zunik ez det ueste.

Apategi'ko ariak, lepotik zintzilikak kaletik tontoferaño eraman etsuan ba? Ala dio beintzat abitzak (la tradición). Amabost-gafen eunkadan, diotenez, Aizarna'ko jngizartegia kiskali zan eta orduan

auts biurtu zitzaizkigun noski Santa Engrazi'ko elizaren sorkun-agerkiak beste ainbeste ta ainbeste aizarnar jatofen eginkizunen befi zekiten paperak bezela.

Edestiaren ezan, etzaigu onten ere jo egon abitza. Aizarnar gutxi izango dira ez dakitenak. Ara zer dion:

Inguru nietakoak eliza bear zutela ta zeritzayen lekuri egokienan ekin diyote lanari bera irasiteko. Ufengo goizean ere an dator asitakoari jafaitzera, bano... egundano alakoriki... Aufeko egunean egindakoaren aztarnik ere ez. Nun egongo ta, andik ufuti xamar, arkaitz-tontor-tontofean, bai leltieruen orma-afiak, baita arotzen egufak ere. Jo beriz lanari ta ufengo goizean berdin atzokoa.

«Zer madarikatu ote diyagu emen... Baten-bati bizkar-erufa berotu bear ziogu ba...» Ta gaucean zelatan jartzen dira Ostolaza ta Zabale basetxetako nagusiak. Agai galanta eskuetan, pago baten atzetik bakoitza, lapufak noiz etorjiko zai-zai an zeuden gizarajoak. Ta ara gau-erdi-aldean non asten diran leyatsu lapufak aldaketa lanuan; gizonetzkoak ez izan ordia noski lapur-usteko oyek. Ayeta'ko batek asafe antean dasaye:

«Aida txuria ta aida beltza: zelatan dagonan begia irten begio ta zaapi gizarditan etxe oyetan ez da izango muta ta itxu-palatarik»

Ufengo goizean tontofera jo bear izan zuten langilleak egindakoaren bila ta zeruareu abotsari jafaituaz, antxe jaso zuten alderdi ayen zaindarizat Santa Engrazi'ko Eleiza.

Ain joraxon etan ere bi baxetxe ayetan beti bete omen da. Gurre aitonak ala diyote...

ERTXIÑA

Taking into account the history of the chapel of Santa Engrazia and its location, it is obvious to think that it has been a source of myths and legends. In the section offered to the bell, the strength of the Apategi sheep to carry the bell is mentioned. There is another legend, not so well known, in which we are told how the chapel was built. The story is based on a classic legend rooted in many other emblematic places of the Basque Country. That gives Santa Engrazia a special strength. That a classic legend has been adapted to Santa Engrazia indicates the admiration that the inhabitants of the environment have had towards the chapel.

This legend was published in the magazine *Argia* on August 14, 1932. Under the pseudonym of *Ertxiña* a neighbor of Aizarna tells us in his article of some experiences and interesting data about Santa Engrazia. Besides mentioning Apategi's ram, he tells us about an interesting legend.

Legend has it that the residents of Aizarna decided to build a church. One day they got down to work and began the work in the most ideal place they thought. The next day the neighbors of Aizarna returned to continue with the construction of the church. What would be his surprise, seeing that there was no trace of the work of the day before.

Inquiring through the area they found the vestiges of the works of the eve on a rocky summit quite far from the site decided. They collected everything they could and returned to the place of origin to continue with the work. But the next day, again happened exactly the same as the day before.

Not finding an answer to such a curse, the owners of the hamlets Ostolatza and Zabala decided to spend the night watching. With large antlers hidden behind two beech trees they say that they waited patiently for the arrival of the thieves.

Around midnight the thieves appeared and began to prepare the transfer work with enthusiasm. But the presumed thieves more than humans, had a trace of angels. One of them with an angry air said:

«Aida txuria ta aida beltza; zelatan dagonan begia irten begio ta zazpi gizalditan etxe oyetan ez da izango mutu ta itxu-paltarik»

(Come on, *Txuria*, come on, *Beltza*! To the one who is on the lookout for his eyes to jump in. And in seven generations there will be no lack of dumb and blind people in that house.)

They say that the next morning the residents of Aizarna climbed the hill in search of the items moved by the angels. They built there, following the celestial mandate, the chapel under the invocation of Saint Engratia. It is said that the curse of the angel was also fulfilled in the two villages mentioned above. That's how the locals told it.

Additional information



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Herri txiki bat, denontzat