

# Cross of Kurutziaga


**Town:**

Durango.

**Location:**

Kurutziaga kalea.

**Access:**

On the edge of the old quarter of the town, close to the church of Santa María.

**Other places of interest nearby:**

Church of Santa María de Uribarri. Durango.

Casa Consistorial (Town Hall). Durango.

Church of Santa Ana. Durango.

Arch of Santa Ana. Durango.

Palacio Etxezarreta. Durango.

It is no exaggeration to say that the Cross of Kurutziaga is unique. Besides the size and sheer quality of its execution, the probable significance of the cross in the late Middle Ages when it was built also needs to be taken into careful consideration. Although, in general, crosses, like trees in earlier times, were used to delimit boundaries and, occasionally, to sanctify a crossroads or a particular place, it is by no means unlikely that the Kurutziaga cross has a specific significance in the town's history. Its symbolism is almost certainly connected with the Begard heresy that swept like wildfire through the whole area around Durango in the 15th century, and the repressive measures that followed it.

Sculpted in dark sandstone, the cross is 4.3 metres high. Although not the original, the existing plinth is completely in character with the rest of the piece. The 1.15 metre mast rests on the plinth. Around it winds the serpent of Paradise, here depicted with the head of a woman. Above is a cube with sides measuring 0.9 metres. One side shows the tree of Good and Evil with the Fall from Paradise on the opposite side. The other two sides show the Temptation of Eve and the Sin of Adam respectively. All the Apostles are carved in the cylindrical section immediately above this; some of the symbols identifying each one are still recognisable.



Above this is the upper section, at once the most important and the one of highest quality. Paradise is represented on one side, showing Mary seated with the Child and flanked by St. Barbara (with her

serrated wheel) and two other saints not easily identifiable. Above them are stylised vegetable

growths, organ tubes and angels playing instruments. The other side depicts Calvary with all the usual elements, including the Crucified Christ, Our Lady of the Sorrow, St. John, the skull and bones of Golgotha, Adam's sepulchre and four angels collecting the blood from Christ's wounds. But perhaps the most exceptional feature of this relief is the presence, over the Crucifixion scene, of two embossed shields on which are depicted the Sun and the Moon. Two angels hold up the shields while another two crown the two astral bodies. Although clearly Pagan in origin, the Sun-Moon pairing is not unusual in mediaeval art; here however, it takes on extraordinary significance through being directly related to the Crucified Christ. The Sun/Christ, Moon/Church symbolism blends with that of the Redemption through Christ. The light of Christ and the light of the Church (which is the light of Christ reflected) triumph over Heresy.

The Cross of Kurutziaga has remained in the district of the same name ever since it was erected. Originally sited next to the hermitage of the Vera Cruz (True Cross), it is now in the middle of a garden. It is the best known late mediaeval Cross of its kind anywhere in Bizkaia.


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