

## PORTAL

**Western Portico**

The western portico of Saint Mary's Cathedral is one of the greatest artistic achievements of 14th-century monumental sculpture in Spain. It was completed under the reign of Alfonso XI, in line with the French tradition of Gothic churches. As in Chartres, its iconographic content is arranged over three large portals. The main portal is dedicated to the glorification of the Virgin Mary, the titular figure of the temple, the right-hand portal to the Last Judgement and the left-hand portal to the martyr saints and confessors, in this case to the life of Saint Giles, associated with the royal patronage of the work. The ensemble is complemented by images on the jambs and archivolts that are related to their respective tympana and the overall purpose of the work. Visitors have undoubtedly felt and continue to feel captivated by this marvellous sculptural backdrop, which enthral and welcomes them before entering the church. It thus becomes a transit point between profane and sacred space.

The passage of time has meant that its original appearance has been somewhat altered with respect to the original project. The Chapel of Our Lady of Mercy was founded in the 16th century, promoted by Abbot Diego Fernández de Paternina and occupying the area of a rudimentary gateway to the city. The openings of the portico were sealed in the 18th century to avoid the rigours of winter. They were reopened during the last restoration, replacing the wall with safety glass that allows light to enter, but not inclement weather .

An interdisciplinary team of specialists also worked on the restoration of the entire ensemble over several years. Every nook and cranny was examined and studied in detail, which revealed that the portico had been polychromed and intervened on several occasions over the centuries. Thanks to this painstaking work, it was possible to produce an audiovisual reconstruction using digital video projections of the polychromes that covered the Chapel of Paternina and the portico. We have called this spectacle of light and sound "The Portico of Light", thereby helping us to convey to society in a simple and informative manner the results of years of research and work.



*Author: Anonymous*

*Date: Second third of the 14th century*

*Technique: Polychrome stone carving*

*Place: Saint Mary's Cathedral (Vitoria-Gasteiz)*



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## *A Living Treasure*

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