

THE BLOOMERIES IN TOKEN OF THE BLOOMERY-MASTERS: AN EXAMPLE OF POWER ELITE IN THE 17th CENTURY BISCAY.

The case of Lea-Artibai.

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Introduction

The so-called “Lea River’s trail” project was started two or three years ago. The path crosses the narrow valley from south to north, starting in Gerrikaitz, – a small town located at the bottom of the mountain Oiz – and ends up in the port town de Lekeitio, where the Lea flows into the Atlantic Ocean. The project seeks to boost the economic dynamics of rural areas by incorporating them into the traditional tourist itineraries developed along the nearby coastal regions, focusing on the local heritage as a potential source of sustainable development. The choosing of this river as the core of this paper is closely connected with the industrial past of the valley, in so far as it is in the riverside where the signs of this characteristic proto-industry remain, by means of dams, channels and old buildings’ ruins.

In fact, since the Late Middle Ages the river has constituted the main thoroughfare of the communities that have inhabited the valley. 13 bloomeries – a particular type of ironworks commonly found in the Basque Country -, operated in the 17th century thanks to the water power provided by the river Lea, that is, one every two km. In the adjoining Artibai Valley, the weight of the iron industry was even bigger, with 21 manufacturing hubs along the river, a situation that must have been similar in the rest of the Manor of Biscay, where it is estimated there were around 240 bloomeries in the 1640s.¹

The aforementioned figures support the opinion adopted by historians regarding the region, that “the iron industry was the most brilliant and characteristic economic

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¹ URIARTE AYO, Rafael: *Estructura desarrollo y crisis de la siderurgia tradicional vizcaína (1700-1840)*. UPV, Bilbao, 1988. Apéndices estadísticos nº 4 y 5.

activity of the Basque Country”.² This central place of iron-making has to be understood in connection with the special economic framework of the Basque Provinces, where the development of industry and commerce was significant in comparison with the agricultural weakness, a fact which made grain importation necessary. In this context, iron production,³ fortunes derived from public service, together with military and colonial “careers”, as well as the development of a tertiary or service sector, of which all were natural economic avenues given the geographical predisposition, would act as a counterweight to foodstuffs imports, in an economic structure that justified the tax concessions and commercial prerogatives of the land, the privileges on which the identity of the Manor of Biscay was built.

However, the significance of this industry was not only derived from its role as compensation of the balance of payments, but also from its potential as an economic booster and revenue catalyst. The dispersion of the foundries over the rural areas, combined with the seasonal nature of iron-making that coincided with farming seasons, and its capacity to mobilize resources – as a result of raw material supply and finished product’s commercialisation requirements – helped in the opening of the currency market to farmers that performed the indirect forms of employments generated by iron manufacturing as a complementary source of income. Thereby, woodcutters, charcoal producers, miners, iron ore transporters and muleteers were placed within the limits of the industry,⁴ as these professions were products of the bloomeries’ demand for raw material, charcoal, labour and transport services.

In a parallel fashion, the iron-manufacturing’s backward linkages had a similar effect on town councils, which profited from the exploitation of the community properties by means of *el montazgo*. The latter was an income based on the sale of the forest’s by-products that were usually destined to charcoal production, a significant economic aspect as it was one of the main revenues for corporations and an essential

² BILBAO, Luis María y FERNÁNDEZ DE PINEDO, Emiliano: “Auge y crisis de la siderurgia tradicional en el País Vasco”, in TEDDE, Pedro (Ed.): *La economía española al final del Antiguo Régimen*. Alianza, Madrid, 1982. Vol. II. p. 135.

<<... es publico y notorio – reza un texto documental de 1545 – que el principal trato y granjería de la Provincia de Guipuzcoa y Senorio de Vizcaya es la labor de las herrerías con las quales se sustenta y entretiene la mayor parte de la gente dellas...>>, *cit. en* BILBAO, Luis María: “Crisis y reconstrucción de la economía vasca en el siglo XVII”, in *Saioak. Revista de Estudios Vascos*. Nº 1, 1977. p. 162.

³ BILBAO, Luis María: “Transformaciones económicas en el País Vasco durante los siglos XVI y XVII”, in VVAA: *Historia del pueblo vasco*. Erein, Donostia, 1979. Tomo II, pp. 111-143.

⁴ AFB. N 0309/0249. Escribanía de Martín de Narea. Año 1609; JCR 2679/086. Escribanía de Juan de Ceberio Guezala. Año 1641; JTB 0200/199. Escribanía de Pedro Ibáñez de Zubialdea. Año 1615.

fuel for bloomeries, as countless legal suites concerning the surrounding mountains report.⁵

Despite the fact that the iron industry's development throughout time and its strategic role within the Basque economy have been the subject matter of many researches, the social aspects of this activity are yet rather unknown. Until now, medievalists have been the primarily concerned with the subject, but have always analyzed it in connection with the great noble families, in order to better understand the impact of the iron production benefits in feudal income.⁶

Therefore, very little is yet known about bloomery-masters in the Early Modern Age, except for references that can be derived from certain studies of individual families which happened to own bloomeries. This is a group of people that controlled the production of goods that were of a particular strategic importance, and even had its own law-code – *Fuero de Ferrerías* – but still has not been of concern to prosopographical research.

The Bloomery as a Cornerstone

As is stated in the paper's title, some old bloomery walls, along with water channels and dams are the only material evidence that has survived to this day. Thanks to these ruins and the continuity of site-names, we are able to know exactly where all the bloomeries that were operating in the Manor of Biscay in 1644 were located. This allows us to make a map of the iron industry that reflects not only its geographical dispersion and the principle manufacturing zones, but also the areas of influence of each family that formed the bloomery-master's universe.

The next step lies in finding out the identity of the foundries' owners, using notarized documentation and judicial papers that hold records of raw material supplying

⁵ AFB. JCR 3241/004. Año 1731; JCR 3333/006. Año 1718; JCR 1812/006. Año 1740.

⁶ GARCÍA DE CORTÁZAR, José Ángel; ARIZAGA BOLUMBURU, Beatriz; RÍOS RODRÍGUEZ, Mari Luz y VAL VALDIVIESO, Isabel: *Bizcaya en la Edad Media. Evolución demográfica, económica, social y política de la comunidad vizcaína medieval*. Haranburu, Donostia, 1985. Vol. II, pp. 117-169; DÍAZ DE DURANA, José Ramón: "Aproximación a las bases materiales del poder de los Parientes Mayores guipuzcoanos en el mundo rural: hombres, seles, molinos y patronatos", in DÍAZ DE DURANA, José Ramón (Ed): *La Lucha de Bandos en el País Vasco: de los Parientes Mayores a la hidalguía universal. Guipúzcoa, de los Bandos a la Provincia (ss. XIV a XVI)*. UPV, Bilbao, 1998; pp. 235-261. As Arsenio Dacosta puts it out in "El hierro y los linajes de Vizcaya en el siglo XV: fuentes de renta y competencia económica", in *Studia Histórica. Historia Medieval*. Vol. 15, 1997. pp. 69-102, – one of the few works about the iron-manufacturing's social meaning –, <<El estudio de la producción del hierro ya cuenta con importantes estudios, pero no sucede lo mismo con el destino de sus beneficios>>.

bonds, leasing contracts, work agreements or the occasional management accounts. These documents allow us to derive the names of the bloomery-masters, and delimit the group to be studied.⁷ Notarized and judicial funds also retain marriage settlements, dowries, wills and inventory of goods, which provide us with information about the interaction of the individuals in terms of family and marriage, showing the house's strategies for procurement of wealth over time. The combined analysis of the new family links established through the marriages of each generation, and that of the development and characteristics of the sources of revenue, reveals not only the underlying motivations behind certain political marriages, but also the power structure of each family, the geographical extent of their sphere of influence or their adopted paradigm by which they rose to affluence.⁸

Going back to the cornerstone of the dissertation, symbolized by the bloomery, the research into the historical ownership of the properties reveals two phenomena which shaped each bloomery as well as the regional industry as a whole. The first factor came from changes in demand brought on by volatility in the iron market, which could seriously affect the development of the industry. The second was the variation in the individual owner's particular situation; family, political, economic and strategic. These two factors contributed to major changes in the iron industry between the 16th and 17th century. The first change took place during the second half of the 16th century when a significant number of production hubs were abandoned,⁹ most of which were shared property or *parçoneria*, a tendency that continued throughout the next century, when they nearly disappeared in eastern Biscay. Some, due to decline in production while others were bought out by a single owner.

The second occurred towards mid-seventeenth century where a change is observed within the bloomery-masters from Lea-Artibai, as some well established ironworking families were replaced by new ones, a process that is clearly noticed in the

⁷ STONE, Lawrence: *The Past and the Present*. Routledge, 1981. pp. 45-73.

⁸ ARANDA PÉREZ, Francisco José: "Prosopografía y particiones de bienes: una propuesta metodológica para el estudio de las oligarquías urbanas castellanas en la Edad Moderna", in *Cuadernos de Historia Moderna*. nº 12, 1991. pp. 259-276; FARGAS PEÑARROCHA, Mariela: "El estudio de las élites de poder urbanas desde la óptica de la familia en la historiografía modernista española actual. Análisis y perspectivas", in *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez*. T. XXX-2, 1994. pp. 131-138.

⁹ BILBAO, Luis María: "Protoindustrialización y cambio social en el País Vasco (1500-1830), con la influencia de la Guerra Carlista", en *Letras de Deusto*. Vol. 14, nº 29, 1984. pp. 41-60"; "La industria siderometalúrgica tradicional en el País Vasco (1450-1720)", en *Hacienda pública española. Homenaje a Ramón Carande*. Nº 108-109, 1987. pp. 47-63.

Artibai Valley. In this area, four bloomeries changed ownership. Three of them were bought by new families, and the fourth changed hands as a result of a lack of an eligible heir coupled with the inbreeding behaviour developed by the bloomery-masters, that tended towards a single heir to ensure concentration of inheritances.¹⁰

These changeovers also had an effect on the industry settled in the adjoining Lea Valley, although not in the same way. An example of which is the borough of Gerrikaitz, the first town in the river's course, which saw great changes to 4 of its 5 surrounding foundries that were running in the 16th century. One was abandoned towards the end of the century. Two *parçoneras* underwent significant changes in ownership and passed to one single owner, who had previously been a co-owner together with other bloomery-masters, who had lost their rights to the ironworks. The fourth bloomery's proprietor's economic problems forced its sale, an opportunity that was taken by the same family that had acquired the two aforementioned *parçoneras*.¹¹

The analysis of these two phenomena suggests that since the last quarter of the 16th century, the social participation in the iron business was declining. From a quantitative point of view, the main reason would stand on the decrease of the manufacturing hubs which led to a higher rate of unemployment. From another point of view, the fact that the collective property was nearly inexistent among the bloomeries that were still in operation during the sixteen hundreds, becomes of great importance due to the reports of the consolidation process that the iron industry was undergoing.

Whereas in the 16th century the division of the bloomeries' possession amongst several individuals, made it unnecessary to invest big amounts of money for the co-owners, what explains the wider social participation in the above-mentioned economic activity, this had changed for the next century since there were fewer bloomery-masters but more powerful.

It could be said, therefore, that the identification rate between bloomery-masters and power elites had increased in comparison with the previous century, as if a symbiosis between gentry and bloomery-master had come about.

¹⁰ AFB. JCR 1557/014; JCR 0284/050; JCR 0307/001.

¹¹ JTB 0200/200. Escribanía de Pedro Ibáñez de Zubialdea. Año 1615; JCR. 2679/058. Escribanía de Juan de Zeberio Gezala. Año 1641; JCR 0448/018; JCR 1937/012.

Families and Areas of Influence

El caballero infanzón, hidalgo en Bizcaya, poseía, en primer término, su casa solar, en la cual había erigido su torre, y entre los adherentes a ella contaban lagares para la sidra, cubas, arcas, horno próximo, otro para *franir* el trigo, molino con su casa, presas y calces o ferrerías, o ambas cosas según sus medios, campos de manzanales, montes de castaños, bosques de robles y jarales para carbón, tierras de labranza y seles para pastos.¹²

This expressive quotation from a classical Basque author, accurately describes the nature of the power of a good part of Biscayan elite class, among which were the Adan de Yarzas, Auleztias, Ugartes, Barroetas o Aranzibias, lineages that the Otaoleas, Kareagas, Bidartes, Angiz, Munditibars, Munibes, Ansotegis, Mugartegis, Andonaegis and Beingoleas families joined at different periods of time during the course of the Modern Age.

Starting with the foremost mentioned house, the *Adan de Yarzas* were one of the most important clans in the Manor of Biscay. They descended from the ancestral home of Zubieta, located beside the Lea River's mouth, bordering Lekeitio, wherein they were perpetual Provosts.¹³ Up the river, within the jurisdiction of Amoroto, they owned the mill and two bloomeries of Bengoerrotea,¹⁴ as well as ½ of the bloomery of Hereza, located in the town of Gizaburuaga.¹⁵ Apart from their industrial hubs, they were large landowners, possessing seven farms and three more mills in the area surrounding of their palace.

Records of the marriage settlement that preceded Antonio Adan de Yarza and Teresa Brigida de Zaldibar's wedding show that in 1686 the aforementioned estates yielded 1.600 ducats plus 139 *fanegas*¹⁶ per year, to which should be added the 2.000 ducats that the family had invested in *censos*¹⁷ and cattle. Despite their significant

¹² LABAYRU Y GOICOECHEA, Estanislao Jaime: *Historia general del Señorío de Bizcaya*. Biblioteca de la Gran Enciclopedia Vasca, Bilbao, 1968. Tomo III, p. 549.

¹³ The Provost – *Preboste* – was usually the king's representative in the *Villas*, urban settlements that were organized by their own Law Code. In the Manor of Biscay, these *villas* were founded by the Lord of Biscay, and the *Preboste* was his delegate. It was an office of medieval origin, created to represent the founder Lord, and to manage the possessions and rights that the founder had withheld for himself within the privileged territory established in the *villa's* Law Code. The *Preboste* was a permanent member of the town council and the executor of the Mayor's sentences, inasmuch as the Mayor served as trial judge within the *villa's* district. As payment for his services, he had authority over some of the *villa's* incomes, what made the office interesting for noble families.

¹⁴ AFB. N 0311/0032. Escribanía de Martín de Narea. Año 1621. The mill and bloomeries of Bengoerrotea are described in the 17th century records with the name of Zubieta, the ancestral home of the family.

¹⁵ AFB. N 0391/0601. Escribanía de Fernando Sánchez de Gorostiaga. Año 1589.

¹⁶ The *fanega* was a grain measure. 1 spanish *fanega* = 1.58 bushels.

¹⁷ A type of loan that did not have any time limit, for which the borrower only paid the interests

economic value, these goods were recorded in a second place when writing the marriage settlement,¹⁸ being preceded by patronage rights, which were not as profitable. However, the patronages were named right after the family seat, the main symbol of the lineage as this was a significant identity factor in the social framework of the Ancient Regime.

The Adan de Yarzas received one third of the tithes from the parent church of Santa María de Lekeitio and its dependent parish churches from Ispaster, Mendexa, Amoroto and Gizaburuaga, as the salary for being the perpetual Provost of Lekeitio. But their sphere of influence extended beyond the Lea's valley towards the west, as they were also patrons of the churches from Ereño, Bedarona, Ea, Natxitua and Ibarangelua. The influence appears to be a key concept in understanding the reasons that led a family to highlight patronage rights in lists of income and property, to the extent that the patronages value did not lie in the wealth they could generate, so much as in their social significance.

The patronage of a church conferred to its holder the authority to appoint the incumbents that would serve in it, the right to both sit in a special bench during liturgy and stand in a pre-eminent position in processions, as well as to receive a distinctive treatment in his funeral, one of the most meaningful ceremonies in the social and religious fields for pre-industrial societies.¹⁹ These prerogatives, along with the privilege to possess a preferential grave site close to the altar where the community was symbolized by each grave representing a household, perpetuated the patron's high status even beyond death.

The authority of the family members was complemented by the possession of the *Alcaldías de Fuero* of Busturia and Zornotza, a post that empowered them to act as trial judges in civil lawsuits within their district.²⁰ Public offices as well as the right to name

¹⁸ The order in which a family's possessions were expressed when an important document was written, was in close connection to the symbolic value and availability of the goods that were being recorded. ARANDA PÉREZ, *op. cit.*, p. 266 y siguientes.

¹⁹ DACOSTA MARTÍNEZ, Arsenio: "Ser hidalgo en la Bizkaia bajomedieval: fundamentos de un imaginario colectivo", en REGUERA, Iñaki; PORRES, Rosario: *Poder, pensamiento y cultura en el Antiguo Régimen. Actas de la I Semana de Estudios Históricos Noble Villa de Portugalete*. Eusko Ikaskuntza, Donostia, 2002; DÍAZ DE DURANA, José Ramón: "Patronatos, patronos, clérigos y parroquianos. Los derechos de patronazgo sobre monasterios e iglesias como fuente de renta e instrumento de control y dominación de los Parientes Mayores guipuzcoanos (siglos XIV a XVI)", en *Hispania Sacra. Revista de historia eclesiástica*. Vol. 50, nº 102, 1998. pp. 467-508.

²⁰ The Manor of Biscay was divided in seven districts called *merindades* – Busturia, Zornotza, Uribe, Bedia, Arratia, Markina and Durango – where the *Alcaldes de Fuero* were trial judges. Their authority was limited to the civil actions that could arise among the inhabitants of the *Tierra Llana*, the land that was not attached to the *villa's* Law Code. MONREAL CIA, Gregorio: *Las instituciones públicas del*

the incumbents were used by the elites as a way to establish new bonds with families of importance from the same geographic area, and to reinforce the existing ones, in order to strengthen the links with the community over which their sphere of influence extended. For example, around 1674 Cosme Fernández de Mugartegi became the *Alcalde de Fuero* in Busturia, due to his marriage to Maria de Lariz Olaeta, the widow of Joan Jacomo de Cavela, an individual with whom the Master of Zubieta had various business dealings.²¹ Two decades later, that post was held by the *Capitán*²² Bernardo de Arrieta, period during which the office was also performed by the *Capitán* José Ibáñez de Gallate, a man from Lekeitio that was a regular witness in the documents signed by the Adan de Yarzas, and whose son was also named *Alcalde de Fuero* by the end of the century.²³

The power connections of these families spread both vertically and horizontally, as those of the latter dimension were developed by means of marriages. The family members' weddings throughout time, suggest that during the 17th century the Adan de Yarzas recovered from the stagnant situation they found themselves in during the 16th century, when the heiress of the house had to marry a *Capitán* from Lekeitio. However, in the next generation, the first-born's bridegroom belonged to a family that had risen thanks to the Inquisition. Antonio Navarro de Larreategi himself, – the new Master of Zubieta – was a *familiar* of the Inquisition and had relatives holding important offices in *el Santo Oficio*, who might have used their influence to favour the designation of the Master of Zubieta as Royal Secretary and archivist of the Royal Archives of Simancas.²⁴

This marriage renewed the prestige of the lineage of Zubieta to the point that they once obtained a title of the Military Order of Santiago for their three year old heir. Years later, Antonio Adan de Yarza II married Maria de Axpe Munibe, Doctor Juan García de Axpe y Sierra's grandchild, an *Oidor* in the *Chancillería de Granada* – the

Señorío de Vizcaya (hasta el siglo XVIII). Publicaciones de la Diputación de Bizkaia, Bilbao, 1974. pp. 141-167. MONREAL CIA, Gregorio: *Las instituciones públicas del Señorío de Vizcaya (hasta el siglo XVIII)*. Publicaciones de la Diputación de Bizkaia, Bilbao, 1974. pp. 141-167.

²¹ AFB. N 0152/0276. Año 1674.

²² To become a *Capitán de Infantería* in the Spanish army, it was necessary to have spent ten years as an outstanding private, or six years if three of them had been as second lieutenant. QUATREFAGES, René: *Los tercios españoles (1567-1577)*. Fundación Universitaria Española, Madrid, 1979.

²³ AFB. N 0442/0075. Año 1702. About the social status of the *Capitanes* in the Modern Age, *vid.* ZABALA URIARTE, Aingeru: "Negocio y poder en el XVII vizcaíno. Los capitanes de Lekeitio", en *Individuos, familias y grupos: prácticas mercantiles y poderes en la Monarquía hispánica (siglos XV-XVIII)*. Coloquio celebrado en 26 y 27 de enero de 2006. Casa de Velázquez. (sin publicar)

²⁴ PARES. AHN. OM-CABALLEROS_SANTIAGO, EXP. 59.

Supreme Court for southern Spain, located in Granada – and member of the *Council of Finance*²⁵. She was the daughter of Martin de Axpe, head of the lineage of Axpe and an important bloomery-master, and the niece of Martin de Munibe, head of one of the most powerful households in eastern Biscay, and a bloomery-master as well.

As time progressed, the family ties forged through their descendents' weddings, where each marriage served different, but at the same time, complementary purposes. The first-born son was married to the *Capitán General de la Real Armada de la Carrera y Guardia de las Indias*' daughter, so as to reinforce the bonds that his grandfather, the Royal Secretary, had established among the Spanish empire's ranks.²⁶ This marriage propelled the Adan de Yarzas family's influence beyond that of local and Biscay government and into the national arena. Likewise, one of his sisters married Pedro Francisco de Sarricolea, a bloomery-master that was the future heir of the entailed-states of Agirre y Rivas and Zurbaran y Arizmendi, – located in the surroundings of the important *villa* of Bilbao – whose combined income was more than 4.000 ducats each year.²⁷ Through this marriage, the Adan de Yarzas were connecting with a household on exceptional standing within the Biscay sphere of influence, extending thus the network that they had been building with Biscayan nobility as the Axpes or Munibes. Into this power elite was now entering the Sarricolea's lineage, a family that ten years before had married a daughter with the Master of Munditibar, the owner of three of the four bloomeries that were operating in the upper Lea River Valley.²⁸ Finally, the wedding of a third sister with the Uribe Puertos from Lekeitio served to deepen the relationship that the Adan de Yarzas had with this territory, where they held influence and considered to be their ancestral home.

Each wedding had been conceived to establish links within different levels: the first on the imperial level, the second in the Biscayan level and the third on the local level.

The 17th century was also the age of the Munibes, despite the fact that they rose to prominence through different means than those of the Adan de Yarzas. Descendants of the ancestral house of Munibe, located close to the *villa* of Markina in the Artibai

²⁵ VIDAL-ABARCA, Juan: "Historia genealógica de los Condes de Peñafloreda", en *Boletín de la RSBAP*. Vol. XLI, 1985. p. 614.

²⁶ AFB. N 0153/0220. Escribanía de Francisco de Garro. Año 1687.

²⁷ AFB. JCR 3440/013.

²⁸ AFB. JCR 1937/012.

valley, the members of this family were professionally dedicated to commerce with the American colonies in the second half of the 16th century, through which they became considerably wealthy. The architect of this profitable business was the merchant Juan de Munibe Otaola, the oldest of the seven children of Juan de Munibe Basabe and María Ortiz de Otaola.²⁹ In one of his numerous voyages to Sevilla, Chile and Peru, where he would ship and sell the iron goods that were produced in the Artibai valley,³⁰ he took his younger brothers, Lope and Fernando, with him, as he would many years later with his nephews Fauste and Pedro de Oronzua.

Once settled in Sevilla, Lope became an officer of the Inquisition and earned a considerable fortune³¹ which he contributed to the family estate, while Fernando handed out his money among his nieces so as to increase their dowries. Meanwhile, Juan, aware as he was of his position as head of the family, invested his benefits in real estate that would constitute the base of the Munibe's future entailed-estate; and once he had achieved a certain economic status, he married Jordana de Sasiola Aranzibia, the daughter of the Master of Aranzibia, a medieval lineage from the adjacent town of Berriatua, wherein they were patrons.³²

While the men of the family were involved in the colonial commerce, the women were intended for the game of forming matrimonial alliance, with the aim of establishing profitable relationships in the name of social and economic interests. In this way, María Pérez de Munibe Otaola was married to Pedro Lopez de Oronzua y Markina. Their children continued the colonial mercantile business that their uncle had

²⁹ The Otaolas were bloomery-masters that belonged to the gentry, and were related to some illustrious families from the area.

³⁰ <<Otro si suplica leaga mrd de darle liçençia para q pueda llevar aquella tierra dos mill Ds. enpleados en espadas dagas cotas y arcabuçes y otras armas deque ay grandissima nesçesidad por la continua guerra q ay...>> PARES. AGI. INDIFERENTE, 2096, N.43. Año 1586

³¹ In the will he made in Sevilla in 1618, he ordered 4.000 reales (1 ducat = 11 reales) to adorn the parish church of Markina, as well as 6.000 ducats to found two chaplaincies and a religious foundation. He owned several houses in Sevilla that were richly decorated and possessed a large quantity of money in cash, the total value of which was 12.000 ducats.

³² PARES. AHN. OM-CABALLEROS_SANTIAGO, EXP. 5605. Año 1634. At the beginning of the 16th century, the Aranzibia's were in full decline after having lost the *Prebostazgo* from the port town of Ondarroa and with no legitimate descendants, when the family connected with the Sasiolas, treasurers of the *Condestables de Castilla*, by means of Mariana de Aranzibia's wedding. Mariana had a single son called Martin Ochoa de Sasiola Aranzibia, Jordana's father. Martin Ochoa was dedicated to iron manufacturing in his bloomeries of Obekola – located in Berriatua – and in the ones from Plaza, that he rented. His son Sebastián was *Almirante de la Armada de las Indias*, and his grandson Sebastián II, became an Earl thanks to his marriage with the future Countess of Peñafloreda. Martin Ochoa's great grand son, Sebastián III, moved to Madrid when his mother received the title of nobility, where he married Micaela Hurtado de Mendoza y Ruiz de Bergara in 1633, the daughter of an important person of the Royal Court called Diego Hurtado de Mendoza y Guevara, Knight of the Military Order of Santiago, Steward of the Queen and Ambassador in Flandes, England and France, I Count of Larcozana.

started, and obtained great profits which allowed Pedro de Oronzua to marry the heiress of Barroeta, one of the two chief families of the valley.³³ María Ortiz de Munibe Otaola became Juan Martínez de Kareaga's wife, a bloomery-master from Markina, while the third sister married Domingo de Munibe, the heir of a minor branch of the family.

With María Pérez de Munibe and Pedro López de Oronzua's union, the Munibes reinforced their commercial interests. The marriage of one of the sisters with Juan Martínez de Kareaga³⁴ was planned to intensify their bonds with the bloomery-masters, in so far as their colonial business was based on iron products; and María Juanes' union served to preserve the family's unity. Between all of them, they established an interconnected system by which economic interests and family-ties were combined to strengthen their position in the community, and succeed in their aim to reach the highest levels of power. The network they created in such a way that interdependencies existed between the various branches in which the individuals supported each other, acting as business associates, but also as proxies or witnesses in the partners' life's important moments, in so far as personal actions had an effect on all the members. This "economic and social structure based on personal relations",³⁵ was behind many decisions that were made by the individuals that are being studied, and therefore, helps to understand the documental evidences that otherwise would not make sense.

During the next generation, the main family-line withdrew from the commerce sector and transferred the family's capital into real estate, financial activities and the iron industry, buying in 1623 the tower, bloomery and mills of Arizmendi. Upturn the turn in the Munibe's economic fortunes had already started with Juan de Munibe, who by the time of his death, had added two farms, two houses within the city-walls in Markina and 1/8 of a bloomery to the original inheritance. He had invested in *juros* – similar to public debt – as well, in accordance with the prevailing tendency among the families that were engaged in commercial activities. The propensity to invest in

³³ In the marriage settlement that preceded the wedding, the possessions that the groom was contributing to the union are described as capital goods, investments in merchandise and silver household equipment; readily available economic resources with which the groom was forced to pay the bride's family's existing debts. It is an example of an unequal marriage – hypergamy –, in which he brought wealth while she was offering as dowry her household's status; a very common social phenomenon that was a base for social promotion. SORIA MESA, Enrique: *La nobleza en la España Moderna. Cambio y continuidad*. Marcial Pons, Madrid, 2007. Capítulo cuatro.

³⁴ The Kareagas as well as the Otaolas were families that rose during the late 15th – early 16th century by means of the iron industry, becoming part of the gentry.

³⁵ ATIENZA HERNÁNDEZ, Ignacio: "Pater Familias, señor y patrón: oeconómica, clientelismo y patronato en el Antiguo Régimen", en PASTOR, Reyna (Comp.): *Relaciones de poder, de producción y parentesco en la Edad Media y Moderna*. CSIC, Madrid, 1990. pp. 411-457.

financial sources of income, such as *censos y juros*, was especially acute in the Munibe's case, who in the entailed-estate's foundation document, included a clause to force the heir to invest a portion of the profits in *censos y juros*.³⁶

The documents seem to suggest that the advancement stratagems adopted by the Munibes and the rest of the bloomery-masters were different, among which, even if the loans over goods and people of the surrounding area were fairly common, the investments in *juros* were rare. It is the opinion of this researcher that these differences in the use of the money are a result of different spheres in which the families existed, the economic advancement models they adopted and the type of strategies that they developed to reach a predominant status within the community. While the Munibes intended for some of their descendants to enter into public service, one of the most important means of social promotion in the Modern Age, the majority of the gentry families from Lea-Artibai kept linked to the possibilities that were offered by the iron industry and the land, establishing profitable bonds for their economic and social interests by means of marriages with other bloomery-masters from the area. In other words, while the Munibe's wealth resources were primarily located outside of the Manor of Biscay – we can not forget that they earned their wealth through colonial commerce and that they always kept linked to the state bureaucracy –, the rest of the families' influence was rooted in the valley, for that authority over the local communities was the base of their presence among the power elites of Biscay.

Whatever their strategies were to become part of the power elite, the Munibes did it achieved it in the 17th century. In 1627 the King Felipe IV bestowed on Martin de Munibe the patronages of Xemein and Mendata, in gratitude of his services to the Crown. The conferring started a long lawsuit with the Ugartes and Barroetas, who had possessed the patronage of Xemein since the Late Middle Ages, an action that ended in 1669 with a sentence in favour of the former patrons. However, the fact that the King wrested the patronage from two families of the “old nobility” in favour of a new house that was, to a degree dedicated to the public service reflects, on one hand, the changes that were happening within the power elites, while in the other hand, the mechanism through which the Munibes were raising in the social rank.

Decades later, Martin de Munibe managed to obtain from the Pope a Bull through which appointed his son Lope Antonio chief abbot from the Abbey of Zenarruza. Lope

³⁶ AFB. Fondo Familias. Munibe-Urquijo. Registro 50.

Antonio was only 21 years old and not a member of clergy, but the influence of his family in the power spheres expelled the Irusta's dynasty from the Abbey's management, which they had occupied for half a century.³⁷ In 1654, Martin de Munibe received from the King Felipe IV, the right to collect the *Alcabalas* – a type of tax – from the town of Ausenjo; and during the 1660s, he inherited the Aranzibia family's belongings, among which there were for entailed-states and the title of Count of Peñafiorida.

While Martin de Munibe, head of the household, devoted himself to the prosperity of the family name, his brother Pedro de Munibe, dedicated himself to public service, as many other “younger sons” did in the Modern Castile. He reached the highest administrative office when he was named as a member of the Council of Castile, the most important council in the government of the Spanish Empire. It can be assumed that the Munibe family-ties with the Axpes and Aranzibias had an influence on this stunning promotion, as they were well established within the bureaucratic structure.³⁸ However, Pedro's marriage to the courtesan Úrsula de Roxas Varona y de la Serna, a member of the Queen's Chamber and whose family was a permanent fixture within the Royal Court, must have carried significant weight as well.

Before being appointed to be a member of the Council of Castile, he had studied in the college of Santa Cruz, had been *Fiscal y Oidor* in the Supreme Court of Valladolid, and member of the Council of the Military Orders. He became a man of such influence, that his illegitimate son grew up to become the Canon of the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela and Vicar-General of the Archbishopric. The key to understanding how someone from a small Biscayan town, such as Etxebarria, managed to develop such a successful career, lies, as Professor Enrique Soria Mesa suggested “in that powerful machinery for social promotion called Empire”³⁹.

³⁷ Four members of the household of Irusta had been chosen as abbots of Zenarruza since the 16th century, a family that was related to important bloomery-master's lineages from the Lea-Artibai, as the Munitibar and Bolibar-Jauregi. In 1625 the abbey's chapter named Diego de Irusta Egurrola as chief abbot, but the King Felipe IV appointed Juan Ortiz de Zarate abbot, against the chapter's will. The Council of Castile supported the chapter's election and Diego de Irusta remained in the post until his death in 1651. The Munibes, aware as they were of the problems that had emerged in 1625, took advantage of the uncertainty, and managed to obtain a Bull of the Pope in favour of his son. ITURRIZA Y ZABALA, Juan Ramón: *Historia general de Bizcaya y epítome de las Encartaciones*. Librería Arturo, Bilbao, 1961. Vol. II, p. 269.

³⁸ VIDAL-ABARCA, *op. cit.*, pp. 584-596 y 614-616.

³⁹ SORIA MESA, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

In the next generation the same scheme was repeated again. The first-born son, Juan Francisco de Munibe, married Isabel de Ugarte y Zaldibar,⁴⁰ Gonzalo de Ugarte's daughter, the head of one of large, far reaching, medieval family from eastern Biscay, as well as patron of Santa María de Xemein. The marriage had as incentive the reputation that came from the kinship with the ancient, illustrious families, and was always present in the weddings of Martin de Munibe's descendants. Thus, he planned for his daughter Jordana Manuel to marry the head of the household of Barroeta, the foremost family of the *merindad* de Markina, who were owners of the patronages of Etxebarria and Xemein. In the same way, Gertrudis de Munibe was married to José de Ubilla, a member of the gentry of Xemein that was dedicated to iron-manufacturing in his family's bloomery, located next to the mills and palace of Ubilla. The witnesses of this wedding, celebrated in the Palace of Munibe, show the high standing of the two families that were being united, in so far as the men who signed the marriage settlement belonged to the regional power elite.⁴¹ The three houses, with whom the Munibe's had established family ties, were the only ones that, having belonged to the dominant class during the 16th century, had survived the changes that the power elites had undergone in the first half of the following century.

In this way, the Munibe's built a network within their surrounding region, in which each bond was represented by a family, and each family had control over a particular piece of the power structure, in a territory where a very important iron industry had developed. This economic activity was as well under their authority, for they owned not only the manufacturing hubs, but also a significant portion of the surrounding forests that supplied the wood for charcoal.

At the same time, the Munibes gained control over the Abbey of Zenarruza, a unique institution in the Manor of Biscay that had been socially and economically powerful since the Middle Ages. The abbey was also the parish church of the town of Zenarruza, but apart from its religious significance, the abbey was one of the largest land-owners of eastern Biscay, with plots throughout the Lea-Artibai region. Since the end of the 15th century, many farms were built on the abbey's property so the families

⁴⁰ Isabel de Ugarte brought as dowry 10.000 ducats, a sum of money that is worth noting, considering that, in the case of the wealthy merchants of Bilbao – studied by Jean Phillippe PRIOTTI – the average value of the dowries was 2.500 ducats, the highest being 8.000 ducats. Among the bloomery-masters that I have analyzed, a dowry of 3.000 ducats is the lowest sum this researcher has found among bloomery-masters.

⁴¹ The witnesses of the wedding were: Juan García de Axpe, Antonio Adán de Yarza, Juan de Mugartegi, Pedro de Barroeta y José de Andonaegi Bidarte, all of whom were noblemen and bloomery-masters.

that lived in them, not only had to pay a rent for the piece of property where the house had been erected, but also the tithes, for the abbey had jurisdiction over its plots as if they were part of the parish of Zenarruza. Apart from that, they were patrons of the parish church of Santo Tomás de Bolibar, and they most likely received substantial incomes from forestry, participating inclusive in the iron business by means of companies.⁴²

In 1660 Lope Antonio de Munibe assumed the title of abbot of Zenarruza, who started a dynasty that was followed by a succession of abbots until 1708, when the premature death of the males of the family, forced Francisco José de Munibe, abbot of Zenarruza, to give up the post so as to take over the leadership of his household.

He was the son of Francisco Antonio de Munibe Ugarte and Ana Luisa de Idiákez Egia. His grandfather had died when his father was three years old child, which had left the family in a vulnerable situation forcing them to arrange a marriage for Francisco Antonio de Munibe Ugarte much earlier than was customary at the time. This was because Martín de Munibe – Francisco Antonio's grandfather and Francisco José's great grandfather – was still alive and a potential threat to title of head of the Munibe household. As a result of a number of setbacks, the family had to move to Gipuzkoa in the beginning of the 18th century, where since the 1730s they became as powerful as they had been in the Manor of Biscay in the previous century.

Political Activity of the Bloomery-Masters

The economic power and, most importantly, the high social standing of the individuals who belonged to the lineages about which this paper centers around, define their political standing on the local level as well as on level with Manor of Biscay, who often attended *Juntas Generales* – General Assemblies – assiduously as representatives from the *anteiglesias* and *villas* of their region, and on occasion rising to be elected into government positions.

Before addressing the topic of their standing within the local government administration, it is necessary to differentiate between the two basic types of townships, the *villas* and the *Tierra Llana* – which had two distinct political statuses – into which

⁴² In 1641, the abbot Diego de Irusta, the bloomery-master Andrés de Aranburu Agirre and Domingo de Iturralde founded a company to work in the foundries of the Artibai valley. The abbot and the bloomery-master invested 36.000 reales each, and Domingo de Iturralde, who was named as manager of the company, contributed 12.000 reales. AFB. JCR 2679/159. Año 1641.

the populace of the Manor of Biscay were organized. The first were urban centers which governed themselves according to their own laws. These laws were contained in the town's *Carta-Puebla*, which endowed every *villa* a legal status distinct from the rest of the Biscay region which was called *Tierra Llana* and was comprised of *anteiglesias*, which fell under the jurisdiction of the Biscayan Law Code (*Fuero de Bizkaia*). The regime by which *anteiglesias* were governed, gave to their authorities – *los fieles* – a humble amount of power that was often subject to the *Alcalde de Fuero*, who imparted justice to all of the *anteiglesias* which were circumscribed within a single *merindad*. These *anteiglesias* were controlled by powerful families whose homesteads and estates were located within the village's territory. On the other hand, the *villas* possessed their own government which was run by a mayor who acted as the equivalent to a modern trial court judge over lawsuits which involved citizens from the *villa*. These broad powers, in both legal jurisdiction as well as the management of core economic resources, facilitated the expansion of the families' spheres of influence from the surrounding *anteiglesias* to the *villas*. Significantly, the bloomery-masters are rarely found as *fieles* of the *anteiglesias*, while the positions of mayor of the *villas* were often filled by these men.

So great was the interest associated with the *villas* and their governing, that in the transition to the Modern Age, their councils were monopolized by the local oligarchies⁴³, among which were the owners of the bloomeries. In this sense, the case of the *villa* of Markina is an ideal example, the reason being that since the 1660's, the noblemen of the Artibai Valley monopolized the mayorship, with no more than eight occasions in which a member of the middle class held this position. Previously, the middle class had maintained a powerful presence within the city council, with the exception being between 1576 and 1617 when they were forced to share some of the town's seats with the Bidarte and Ubilla families. These 2 lineages hailed from the neighboring *anteiglesia* of Xemein and were dedicated to the production of iron. Afterwards, there were practically no representatives from the great families occupying this post until the mid-1660s⁴⁴, when the Ansotegi, Mugartegi, Barroeta and Ubilla

⁴³ MADARIAGA ORBEA, Juan José: "Municipio y vida municipal vasca de los siglos XVI al XVIII", en *Hispania*. Nº 143, 1979. pp. 505-557.

⁴⁴ MUGARTEGUI, Juan José: *La Villa de Marquina. Monografía histórica*. Bilbao, 1927; LORENZO VILLAMOR, Felicitas A: *Monografías de pueblos de Bizkaia. Markina-Menein*. Bizkaiko Fpuru Almunia, Bilbao, 1996. pp. 133-134.

families broke into the council's ranks⁴⁵. From 1664 until 1700 the Ansotegi family occupied the mayorship on 6 occasions, the Mugategi family on 8, the Barroeta family on 3, and the Ubilla family on 7, that is to say, these 4 families occupied the post for 28 years over a 36 year period. Furthermore, the mayor for 2 of the remaining 8 years was Juan de Belarroa, a brother-in-law of the head of the Andonaegi household. This family was dedicated to metal forging and was originally from the nearby *anteiglesia* of Berriatua. They settled in Markina during the middle of the 17th century after inheriting the entailed estate of Bidarte⁴⁶. Pedro de Agirre Olabe, owner of a bloomery in the *anteiglesia* of Etxebarria, occupied the title of mayor on 2 other occasions, while Francisco de Armaolea and Bartolomé de Ibarra, both bloomery-masters from the Artibai Valley, were mayor for 1 year respectively. That signifies that from the mid-1660 until the beginning of the 18th century, bloomery-masters held the position of mayor of Markina continuously with the exception of 3 years.

Regarding their presence in the General Assemblies, it is worth mentioning that when representing the municipalities, the great bloomery-masters of the Lea-Artibai River area existed in cohabitation with other families which were also dedicated to the production of iron, even if these lesser ironworkers never achieved the economic level or the social relevance of the greater houses to which we have referred to in this study. Such is the case of the Armaolea family, which owned a tower along with their bloomery in the *anteiglesia* of Zenarruza, an estimated 3 kilometers distance from the town of Markina. The members of this family went to the General Assembly as representatives of their *anteiglesia* on 9 occasions.⁴⁷ A similar case involved the Hereza family of Gizaburuaga, bloomery-masters as well, who represented Gizaburuaga in the General Assembly 10 times, with one member going as far as becoming *Diputado General* in 1674⁴⁸.

On the other hand, important differences existed in the form in which each family participated in the Manor of Bisacay's government. Such is the case of Gonzalo de Ugarte, who despite rarely attending the General Assembly meetings to represent his *villa* or *anteiglesia* was elected to *Diputado General* in 1613-1616 and 1632-1634 as

⁴⁵ El fenómeno de la oligarquización, fue un proceso general que también afectó a los concejos de la Corona de Castilla. DOMÍNGUEZ ORTIZ, Antonio: *Política fiscal y cambio social en la España del siglo XVII*. Instituto de Estudios Fiscales, Madrid, 1984. pp. 171-191.

⁴⁶ AFB. JCR 0307/001

⁴⁷ *Juntas y Regimientos de Bizkaia. Actas de la Tierra Llana*. Tomos VIII-X; *Juntas y Regimientos de Bizkaia. Actas*. Tomos XI-XVI.

⁴⁸ *Juntas y Regimientos de Bizkaia. Actas de la Tierra Llana*. Tomos VIII-X; *Juntas y Regimientos de Bizkaia. Actas*. Tomos XI-XVI.

well as being eligible for *Diputado General* in 1620⁴⁹. The complete opposite happened to Bernardino de Irusta Munditibar and his son Martín, bloomery-masters of Munditibar, who, in spite of regularly attending the General Assembly in representation of the *anteiglesia* of Arbazegi or the *villa* of Gerrickaitz for the better part of a half century were only elected as *Diputado General* twice.

In conclusion, these bloomery-masters constituted the dominant class of the Lea-Artibai district as well as formed part of the power elite of the Manor of Biscay. It is no wonder they were counted among the “cavalleros y personas particulares,” those who the government went to in the 1640s when the costs of war forced the Manor of Biscay’s government to turn to the wealthy and powerful of the region for loans and support.

Don Joan Garcia de Yçoaga y Andonaegui, don Juan de Muguertegui, Nicolas de Ubilla, don Martin de Barroeta, Juan Hortiz de Olaechea Uberoaga, don Ambrosio de Urquiça y Otaolea, Martin Ruiz de Ybarra, el doctor Aldaola, don Cristoval de Vidarte, Miguel Ochoa de Aldaola, Martin Perez de Abaitua, don Martin de Munibe, Martin de Ansotegui, don Diego de Yrusta, Andres de Aguirre y Bolibar Jauregui, don Juan Ochoa de Aulestia, don Juan Manuel de Aulestia, don Martin de Aulestia Yturrioz, Joan Martinez de Albinagorta, don Antonio Adan de Yarça y Larreategui, Joan de Albiz, don Bernardino de Gamboa e Yruxta, don Martin de Gamboa y Monditibar, Pedro Fernandez de Lamiquiz, don Francisco Galindez de Belendiz, Lope Ochoa de la Renteria, Joan Hortiz de Olaeta y Mendieta, Joan Hortiz de Olaeta Ybinarriaga, Joan Hortiz de Olaeta y Arestieta, Joan de Tonelburu y Zarra, Pedro de la Renteria, don Joan de Muxica y Luno, el capitan Don Lope de Aulestia, el doctor Mendiola, Pedro Hortiz de Olaeta, Domingo Hortiz de Dondiz, don Juan de Ybarguen, don Joan de Meceta, don Gracian de Meceta, don Diego de Mendoça, don Manuel de Urdaybay ...⁵⁰

The majority of them, bloomery-masters.

⁴⁹ *Juntas y Regimientos de Bizkaia. Actas de la Tierra Llana. Tomos VIII-X; Juntas y Regimientos de Bizkaia. Actas. Tomo XI.*

⁵⁰ *Juntas y Regimientos de Bizkaia. Actas. Tomo XII. Ayuntamiento con caballeros y personas particulares sobre los empréstitos. Año 1640. p. 280.*

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