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Welcome to the Town of Ledesma, one of the most relevant Historic Sites of Salamanca, which is surrounded by a solemn atmosphere, steeped in centuries of history. Its walls have fostered the creation of a number of palaces and dwellings beautifully by their inhabitants, all the better to look Modern Times in the eye and to honour the visitor.

To disseminate this, we have created **the Interpretation Centre of the History of Ledesma BLETISA**, which looks after and maintains an **Urban Route**, carefully traced on its streets. A tour embellished by a few mini-stories hidden in its magnificent heritage, which will lead us on a unique walk where every day and every hour seem ever more lovely.

**And with the purpose of enabling this to be understood and enjoyed by a wider public, the Interpretation Centre provides the possibility of doing the Urban Route in English or French, via QR codes.**



## THE PLAZA DE LA FORTALEZA SQUARE Where history strolls on Sunday afternoons...

Talking about a **medieval fortress** immediately brings to mind the **lack of security** for the population and the **authority** and **power** of the feudal estates at the time.

The first to hold that power were the second-born princes in the Castille crown, until the King bestowed the county of Ledesma to the family of his favourite, Don Beltrán de la Cueva. From then onwards and until the 19th century, the counts would govern Ledesma and its territory from the court, keeping an epistolary relationship with the local representatives, who were in charge of administering justice and collecting taxes in their name.

Similarly, it is not difficult to imagine this **Plaza de la Fortaleza** as a **great stage**, where medieval knights used to hone their skills or where, centuries later, grave, stern generals reviewed their troops in different languages - Portuguese, Spanish, French or English - and even imagining this place full of neighbours who had left their homes to take part in the civilian defence.

If we look at it from an urban planning point of view, we can see this square as an open space, associated with the most important **military construction** in Ledesma: its **fortress**. A **fortification** built to protect the southwest side of the walls, which is least protected by the mountains; a fortress that had a relevant military role due to the fact that Ledesma was the border with the Muslims and with Portugal. There is evidence that at a certain point in its history, it was considered as a residential palace, which must be the origin of the subterranean tunnels that criss-cross the square.

That may be the reason why they brought the town's **coat of arms** that watches over the entrance, from the Puerta del Puente door, and the **verraco** (ancient pig-shaped sculpture), from the San Pedro door. This **peaceful** zoomorphous granite sculpture was left by the first settlers in this place, the Vettones, and it seems to be a figure related with safety, limited demarcation and the protection of livestock.



### **BLACKSMITHS' DOOR** **The black locksmith's trade**

Since their invention at the dawn of time, city walls have been a clear limit between urban areas and countryside, between order and chaos, us and them. The connection between such radically different realities are the doors.

Ledesma's city walls, which are about 2 km long, was first built before Roman times, and were consolidated in the 15th century, when they had eight doors. known as **del Puente, de los Toros, del Caracol, Pozo de Nieve, San Nicolás, San Juan, de los Herreros** and **San Pedro**, open during the daytime and closed for everyone at night, when the circumstances demanded it.

Little remains now of the **Puerta de los Herreros**: fragments of the original archway and, a little further away, the only two semicircular towers in the wall, built in the least protected part of town. Its name evokes the nearby neighbourhood of the blacksmiths and locksmiths, whose trade was also locally known as **cerrajería negra** (black locksmith's trade).

In the 18th century there were two hundred men in Ledesma who worked in trades and crafts, transforming the agricultural produce into merchandise or creating work tools, mostly sold in the local market.

Doors and locksmiths belong to the same family.



### **SAN MIGUEL SQUARE** **Plazuela de los Barberos Square**

This square, formerly known as “Toral (or Plazuela) de los Barberos”, embodies one of the most relevant aspects, from a social and economic point of view, of the town’s history: the fusion of the noble Ledesma, born in the medieval re-population, and that represented by the new property owners, the children of the 19th century revolution, who acquired land and houses in public auctions.

Those were times of change when the local noblemen, the aristocrats and the great landowners of all sorts became part of the same class, that of the property owners under the liberal regime. Despite the differences amongst them: some were noble and some were not, they were all rich.

And, little by little, since they had to mingle, they began to marry into one another, thus creating family alliances, new houses were built and the existing ones were renovated, often showing off their new status. There’s a good example of that in this square, represented by the Chaves and Escudero families.

Not far from this square, on the left, is the street named after Father Petisco, the man who spoke a thousand languages, a Jesuit priest born in Ledesma in 1724, who translated the Bible into Castilian Spanish. He was quite a character, a polyglot who had an outstanding knowledge of classical languages. He died in 1800 and his grave is in the nearby San Miguel church.



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## LÓPEZ CHAVES FAMILY HOUSE

The process this great house-palace, one of the most distinguished and representative of the town, has gone through can be read as a story.

It begins in 1650, when, due to the war with Portugal, Don Pedro López de Chaves, lord of Villavieja de Yeltes, saw his old family home destroyed and devastated, which led him to move to Ledesma and have this palace built to live in.

A second chapter shows us his son, Don Juan López de Chaves, who boasted the title of perpetual Alderman and who married Doña Antonia Niño in 1656, and his grandson, Diego, who had the family coats of arms sculpted on the façade, which are a sort of ID for houses and which always tell more that we can see now.

Later, in a third phase, and after several family unions between the new rich and the noblemen had taken place, the house was substantially enlarged, becoming one side of this square as we can see it today.



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## **AGUSTÍN ESCUDERO DE DIOS'S HOUSE**

Built in 1850, it is probably the house that better reflects -along with that of the López Chaves family- the social change that had taken place in the town during the 19th century with liberalism and a new social class.

It was later acquired by Agustín Escudero de Dios, a rich man with many properties in the area, who was also a learned man, interested in science and architecture.

The house has a number of rooms, quarters, stables, pens and even a slaughter room, a dovecot and an internal garden that leans against the Romanesque apse of the San Miguel church.

One of his granddaughters married a member of the López Chaves family, who lived in the same San Miguel square, thus joining the two lineages. The house was bought in 1975 by another member of the family, Don Mariano Arenillas, marquis of Gracia Real.

Comings and goings, houses and households.



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## MANUEL GARCÍA GODÍNEZ DE PAZ'S HOUSE

This was the house where the nobleman Manuel García Godínez de Paz lived, who is also remembered for his position as one of the five Aldermen of the town in the 18th century. Their designation was responsibility of the Count of Ledesma, whom also designated other municipal positions, such as the Magistrate, the Attorney, the Clerks, etc.

But this enterprising nobleman probably deserves to be remembered most for owning one of the five watermills that there were in town at the time, on the River Tormes bank, and which helped provide bread to the population.

Not far from this house was that of Josepha Vicente, a typical petit bourgeois merchant who, along with the cloth merchants and the liberal professionals, slowly became a small but very wealthy sector that settled in the old part of town, next to the nobility and the clergy.

In 1870, the house was derelict; later, it was acquired by the Trilla family, along with many other properties in the town.



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## **PADUA HOUSE**

The palace-like plan of this stately house is the result of many transformations carried out by the de Padua family, later continued by the Torres Madrazo family, in the 18th and 19th centuries. The building is made up of a group of houses and outbuildings in which lived Alderman Diego Centeno, a priest, and the only master weaver in town, Agustín Mesonero.

This is a unique house for several reasons. The grille lets the inner courtyard be seen from the outside. The courtyard is designed as an Italian garden with cypresses, promenades and waterways, which is unusual in Ledesma, and the products that bear its name -the OIeo de Padua oil and the Vino Sacro wine- lend Ledesma a bit of Italian style which, according to the tradition, arrived here in the 18th century via Portugal with Doña Manuela de Padua, who brought it to the Salamanca dehesa.





### **SAN NICOLÁS SQUARE** **Doors, viewpoints and boilermakers**

No city has two squares that are alike. The experiences they generate, the activities developed in them, their location, little by little make up their shape and character. This **small San Nicolás square**, which leans against the city walls with its irregular shape, looks like a play area or a place for an impromptu market. It is the starting - or finishing - point (depending on your direction) for the door of the same name.

The **arco de San Nicolás**, right beside it, is one of the doors that connected the centre with some of the out-of-walls neighbourhoods and parishes. There were a total of seven of them: Los Mesones, del Mercado, Ventas, San Jorge, San Pablo, Santa Helena and Huertas. The names of these **outskirts** gives us a clue about the predominant activity of their inhabitants.

This door was also known as **Puerta de los Caldereros** (boilermakers' door), a very well-organised union which carried a lot of weight in Ledesma, and that in the 18th century had fifty-one members. Boilers, pans, farming tools... anything that had to do with metals and their use, construction or repair was their business.

And from here, on our left, we come to the **Adarve viewpoint**, on the city walls, from where the visitor can appreciate Ledesma's dominant position over the surrounding territory. This privileged location facilitates the existence of viewpoints and balconies, ideal for vigilance in times of old, and nowadays, just perfect for observation, imagining or simply taking a breath of fresh air.



### THE ADARVE VIEWPOINT

#### Landscapes to discover the essence of things

Once the Ledesma meander is behind us, the River Tormes shows us a new landscape.

There we can see, along with the granite rocks of the hills, the alluvial plane with its orchards, its tilled fields and the memory of the fishing in the past. However strange it may sound nowadays, gardeners and fishermen were well paid trades in the 18th century, due to the rich lands and the abundant fish, which in this stretch of the river was council property.

Below, like a sign of the weight of history, **the shrine to Nuestra Señora de la Concepción** rises as if it has sprouted from the valley where the old Romanesque church of San Polo once was.

A little further away, the visitor can see the bathing area and the island, which is still full of the bustle, the adventures and the small rituals of those who spend their leisure time there .

On the banks, the ruins of the old watermills are still visible. There were five watermills in the 18th century, providing work for millers and bakers, who shared the river banks with some of the twenty tanneries for tanning leather, the wool industry and for shoemaking.

Before this vision, it is easy to understand why artists like **Iturrino** and **Milcendeau** - who lived between the 19th and the 20th century, between Paris and Ledesma - came from their distant lands to inhabit these **landscapes**, where it seems possible to grab the essence of things.



### **SAN NICOLÁS DOOR, ALSO KNOWN AS MARTYRS 'OR BOILERMAKERS' DOOR** **The intertwined threads of history and legendy**

The Romanesque style of this beautiful, well-preserved door suggests that it was built during the re-population of this area, when the city walls were built, in times of Fernando II of León. Solid, built in granite blocks and rough ashlar, it has a half-barrel vault and it is defended externally by two semi-circular masonry towers.

When studied in detail, there are signs suggesting that, century after century, **history** has passed through it: **big history**, that of kings, counts and dukes; but also **small history**, the subtler one, the history made by boilermakers, farmers, fishermen and lovers, travellers and soldiers.

It is said that crossing this door slowly, stealthily, can lead, especially at night, **into legend**:

"They say that in the year 745, at the height of the Muslim domination, Galofre, the local Wali, had his son Ali - who had been Christened as Nicolás - killed by slitting his throat, then stoned and burnt, along with priests Nicolás and Leonardo, for having converted to the Christian faith. And they say that the father was at this door, watching his son burn, when a ray hit him and killed him as well".

With this traditional story about Saint Nicholas, we can say that history and legend go well together, probably because they are the two sides of a single reality.



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## THE SAN MARTÍN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE About the origins

**Digging in an archaeological site** is exciting, yet delicate work. The objective is rebuilding part of the great “mosaic” showing how life was in times long gone, using just small fragments.

There is proof that there were **megalithic settlements** in Ledesma dating as far back as the 3rd millenium b.C. The so-called Ledesma “menhir”, which stands by the river, can be considered as one trace of the said settlements.

We have many **pre-Roman testimonies** that refer to Bletisama, the first name for this place of Indo-European root: the verracos and the oldest remains of city walls, which belong to the Metal Age.

But it is in this square, under the site of the former **San Martín** parochial church, the highest point in the town (780 m), where during the digging in 1989 and 1990 many traces showing a constant settlement since at least the late Bronze Age.

In the deepest levels, the typical **round adobe huts** of an Iron Age settlement were found and, in other levels, closer to the surface, Celtiberian painted pottery and Roman “terra sigilata” ceramic, elements that have contributed to create this collective narrative that is archaeology, which helps us to discover a bit more about who we are today.



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## HOUSE OF THE HEADS

This street, known as Calle de los Curas, is one of the most medieval-looking in the town. It was the street where most of the many priests (curas) who lived in Ledesma had their homes.

Among their houses is this one, known as "the house of the heads", which belonged to the Archpriest Antonio Vicente del Águila. Don Antonio, as he was called, was the main ecclesiastic authority in his time, and he rented the house to Lorenzo Torrente, an employee of the Royal Revenue.

The name of the house is due to the stone heads on its façade, about whose significance and age there are many theories. Some say that they are related to pre-Christian rites, of Celtic origin, the ritual sacrifice of the defeated, whose heads were cut off and hung or sculpted on the house's entrance for protection. Other theories maintain that these heads have to do with saints, or that they may be the portraits of the ancestors, exhibited with familiar pride.



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## SANTA MARÍA LA MAYOR CHURCH The stairway to heaven

The Santa María la Mayor parish church, the river and the bridge make up the visual and symbolic image that stays in the memory of those who visit Ledesma.

Robust, yet slender, the church holds within its walls **nine hundred years of life**, with its simple, single nave architectural structure. Originally built as a **Romanesque** church for the re-population, back in the 13th century, it gradually evolved following the new spiritual sensibilities - **Gothic, Renaissance or Neoclassical** styles - until it reached, around 1580, its current architectural state. During the 17th and 18th centuries, it was adorned with altarpieces, tombs and statues, which often came from older churches and shrines that don't exist anymore, as is the case with the famous Cristo de las Aguas. In this church, the visitor can perceive, as if it was in a beautiful old book, the **history and the faith of this town** throughout history.

Inside, the ambience is serene, among the graves, altarpieces and chapels. The choir and the Baroque organ bring to mind the choir school and the music master that served in this church. It also hides a small, but highly valuable, **treasure**: crosses, reliquaries and the silver platform used in the Corpus procession, a true event of popular religious feeling, when everything is covered in flowers, drapery, music, incense and faith.



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## TOWN HALL

On a cold December day, in the late 14th century, the members of the Council met in the portal of the Santa María la Mayor church for the public reading of a Royal Exemption. A hundred years later, the Council decided to get some “houses” for their seat.

For this purpose, they acquired, along with other properties on the square, this palace that belonged to the Trasmiera family, and which has since then been the Magistrate’s house, the Courtroom and the Royal gaol, but nowadays this is the Town Hall: the seat of the citizens’ power.

A power that, in the 18th century, it was represented by the Magistrate, who was the head of the Council, the Aldermen, who held their meetings here, the Villa y Tierra Attorney, five clerks and one Prosecutor for the Royal Court.

Regarding the building, it was originally built in the 15th century, but its ground floor was renovated in the 16th century as we can see it now, when was built the courtyard with its ten columns -which is well worth a visit - and the first floor, renovated in the 19th century, boasts stained glass by José Delclaux and a long balcony with a wrought iron balustrade.



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## DOÑA MARÍA BELTRÁN'S HOUSE

This house, despite belonging to the Beltrán family, was rented in the 18th century to the Attorney for the Villa y Tierra Community in Ledesma, the maximum representative for a territory that had been designated for re-population in the Lower Middle Age, and which included the town and many hamlets.

In those troublesome years, the new fortress-cities that were built to populate the land conquered from the Muslims are, like Ledesma, walled urban areas that become the head of a territory (also known as "alfoz") and surrounding hamlets, which by the 13th century was already well consolidated, including fourteen villages, each one of them with their church.

The town was divided for its management in parishes, and the land in "rodas" or districts; their representatives were known as "roderos". They were under the rule of the Attorney, who from this house dealt with the main businesses affecting the neighbours of the villages near Ledesma.





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## AUGUSTUS BOUNDARY STONE AND SANTA MARÍA LA MAYOR Of small details and great deeds

Sometimes, details say more about us or our cities than the great declarations or monuments.

And so, a **small stone** plaque, set on the church's wall and dated on the **year 6 b.C.**, can represent the great place Ledesma (Bletisa) had in the Roman Lusitania. It reads:

"Emperor Caesar Augustus, XXVIII Maximum Pontiff of the Tribune Authority, XIII Consul, Father of the Country. Boundary Stone between Bletisa, Miróbriga and Salmántica".

The plaque is an agreement establishing **the land demarcation** between Ledesma, Ciudad Rodrigo and Salamanca, which was needed to define the boundaries of fields, set milestones and guarantee the peace and economic development of these lands.

It is not by chance that this relevant, famous stone plaque is set on this church that is almost a cathedral, where the grave of the Infante Don Sancho is, and which was once the seat of the **town's clergy**, a group of twelve priests "like the twelve apostles" presided over by an abbot.

The **church** boasts an impressive size, but it has also a strong role as a social, cultural and spiritual agent of change. The heritage value is given by the artists that worked on it, the best of their time, who often had to combine their work here with other jobs in Salamanca or the King's Court. Regarding its style, work began on the church in Romanesque times, during the 12th century, but it was finished in the 16th century, during the transition between Gothic and Renaissance styles.

The church and its tower, when seen from afar, look like a stairway towards heaven.



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## THE PLAZA MAYOR SQUARE The heart of the town

Few squares show as clearly as this one the powers in the town: the ecclesiastic, citizens', political and economic powers. Also, in few square it is possible to read and understand so clearly the alliances, tensions and balances between them that are the town's history and politics.

The **Santa María la Mayor church** is the highest place in terms of ecclesiastic and spiritual power in a town that once had six churches, two convents, five shrines and even nineteen brotherhoods.

On the east side of the square, beside the house that in the 18th century was known as the **Casa del Regidor** (the Alderman's house) is the **Palace of Don Beltrán de la Cueva**, representing the power of nobility. Its three balconies on the square were the lords' favourite ones to watch public shows and parades. The coats of arms on the façade, which belong to Don Francisco and Don Beltrán, counts of Ledesma married to two daughters of the dukes of Alba, may have been forged during the First Republic.

This same property was also known as **Casa de los Roderos**, since it was, at least since the 18th century, the seat of the **Villa y Tierra community** and, therefore, the meeting place for the political representatives of the hamlets in its territory (roderos). The house also gives its name to the **Arco de los Roderos**, an archway beside which are other council institutions that provided supplies for the population: the bakery, the butchers and the weigh house.

The **Council**, which today represents the civil authority and the citizens' victories, until the 18th century was in the hands of the count of Ledesma, who designated the most important positions: at its head, the Magistrate and with him, five Aldermen, all of them noblemen, along with other delegates of the feudal system, like the Villa y Tierra Attorney. The Council also had a literacy teacher, a bailiff, a courier, a salt administrator, a gravedigger, three clerks and a governor, among others.



### **THE ALHÓNDIGA** **The generous granary**

Ledesma's alhóndiga, built around 1580, is one of the council buildings devoted to providing the population with produce, and which were located mostly on the east side of the Plaza Mayor square.

The alhóndiga was **much more than a cereal granary**: from there, the peasants obtained grain in advance, on account of the future harvest, thus guaranteeing the supply for bakeries and the bread for the village's inhabitants. It also had a charitable purpose: part of the benefits obtained were destined to help those in need, which led to the nickname "the poor people's solace".

**Its keys were under the custody of three people**: the village's Magistrate and two members of the Town Council, designated by the Count. One of them, the Mayordomo (administrator) was forced to mortgage his goods to be able to take the position.

Not far from it was the largest inn in the village, which was owned by the Council, and behind it, one of the two cellars in the municipality, thus guaranteeing the wine provision for the population.

The most surprising features in this building are the **Council coats of arms**, in which a bridge, a river and an animal are represented, and whose aspect brings to mind that of other villages on the banks of River Tormes. Inside, the most remarkable architectural feature is the granite masonry of the arches.

This building, partially destroyed during **the French invasion** in 1808, is currently under restoration in an effort to recover its original configuration, with the purpose of using it in accordance with its historical, economic and social relevance.



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## ALONSO ANDREA PROMENADE Opposing points of view

Two elements that are key to understand Ledesma come together in this place: the heritage, with a sense of social usefulness, and the landscape that surrounds it. If we look around, we will find one of the two ancient hospitals in the village. It is known as Hospital “de la Capilla de Gonzalo Rodríguez de Ledesma”, after the local gentleman that founded it in 1420. It was devoted to assisting the needy and it was initially located beside the arch of the Santa María church. In the current building, designed by **Joaquín de Churriguera**, one of the most noteworthy details is the group of sculptures representing the Sacred Family on the façade.

The hospital was supported by the income generated by two snow pits, among other properties, for which rental the Council paid, in 1752, the sum of one hundred and twenty reales. Going on in our walk along the promenade, we will see three landscapes that deserve our attention.

First, we will see **the cliff and the bridges**, an essential perspective to help us understand the reason for this village. From this point of view, the town looks like a creation of the River Tormes, especially considering the importance it has had in defence, economics and life in general.

Below is the medieval bridge with its five arches, which was renovated at different times in history, and the new one, built in the 1950s, joined by the roads and illustrating that traditional idea of Ledesma as being set on “crossroads”.

A bit further away it is possible to see the **Salamanca dehesa**, one of the best preserved and sustainable land-locked ecosystems, with fields traditionally used for livestock breeding although in different proportions. In the 18th century, the predominant livestock were sheep, because there was a large industry related with wool. At the time, pigs were essential in the everyday diet of common people, and it was considered the food of the poor. Nowadays, the dehesa is a good place to breed fighting bulls.

Finally, if we let our imagination run away, we can evoke **the story of Don Alonso Andrea**, a Ledesma-born nobleman, co-founder of Caracas (Venezuela) and of whom the chronicles say that, when he was an old man, he faced the English pirates that were attacking that village, alone, on a thin horse and a rusty suit of armour. The pirates killed him with a single shot but they honoured his bravery. It is said that Cervantes, who lived at the time in Seville, a place where all the stories from beyond the sea arrived, may have found inspiration in this one to create his Don Quixote.



### **THE TORMES VIEWPOINT** **Our lives are like the rivers...**

With its source in the Sierra de Gredos mountain range, 235 km away, the **River Tormes** becomes part of the Ledesma landscape as a calm waterway. The stretch between this town and Salamanca is particularly rich in terms of nature, culture and with great tourist interest. On its bank is the Hacienda Zorita, a property with a historical link with Ledesma. It was once the summer residence of the Dominican monks and, according to the tradition, there Columbus persuaded the Queen's confessor to fund his trip to the Indies. There is, of course, a nature interpretation centre and the ancient Baños de Ledesma, which were already being used in Roman times, due to the healing and magic power of its waters.

Once Ledesma and its meander, known as "the doorway to the Arribes", have been left behind, the river flows towards one of the most spectacular pieces of scenery in Spain, where it joins the River Duero and, together, patiently carve the cliffs and canyon walls until they become so high they make you dizzy. But before that, the river does not know that, soon, it will become the Almendra reservoir and that later, it will fall into the void at Villarino, the highest fall in Western Europe with a hydraulic station at its foot.

Below, totally hidden from view, there are the remains of a little Roman-looking bridge that used to be part of the old road to Carnaceda. That was the way to arrive, to leave or to flee, everything was possible in the history of Ledesma.

Undoubtedly, the Tormes, at once god, providing father and river, has been and still is the greatest enterprise in Ledesma.



### **SAN PEDRO DOOR AND CHURCH** **The mystery of the intangible**

**The San Pedro door.** One of the oldest among the eight doors in the Ledesma city walls, was located on this site. Dating back to the 13th century, this door went from the Santa Elena quarter, full of popular life, to the centre of the village.

Its existence can be traced in archives and documents, although after its demolition, only the ruins of one of its towers can still be seen. But beyond these certainties, there are people who simply feel the door when passing by. For them, a door is not just a way to pass through something, but a symbolic element of such importance that it will never disappear completely.

The **San Pedro church**, one of the five churches built within the walls during the repopulation, was located right beside the door. It was demolished during the sale of the Church properties in the 19th century, but its masonry was reused to build a new church on the other bank of the river, in the Mesones quarter: the San Pedro and San Fernando church.

In the course of some work carried out in the latter, in 1965, they found a leather trunk with three small skeletons, and a piece of paper that mentioned **Ysacio, Josef and Jacob, the shepherds of Bethelhem**, who were witnesses of the birth of Jesus.

Once again, Ledesma: history and legend.



### **PACES FAMILY ENTAILED HOUSE**

Ledesma's stately houses, built mostly between the 16th and 17th centuries, seem to want to go unnoticed. Externally, they look sober, their stone façades mostly undecorated, apart from little details: coats of arms, windows, arches with keystones, balconies and grilles. However, inside they are spacious, well-kept and they have gardens, promenades and even labyrinths and although they are not currently inhabited, they seem to be full of life.

This house, located on a street formerly known as "calle del Estanco", in the 18th century belonged to the richest nobleman in Ledesma, Don Cristóbal de Paz y Díez, who owned, directly or by his right of entailment, twenty-three houses, one thousand three hundred heads of stock and the Mesón del Gallo inn.

The house belonged to the family known as los Paces (the Paz family), which arrived in Ledesma in the 13th century, at the same time as the Díez family, popularly known as los Díezes. Both families, along with the Nieto de Paz family, became the three most distinguished lineages in Ledesma which, along the centuries, have become family amongst themselves through marriage.



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## THE CASINO

Ledesma's Casino was originally built to house the Order of Malta, because it was the seat of the San Juan de Zamayón commandry - which in turn had belonged to the legendary Knights Templar order - but after the reason for its creation (the fighting of the infidels) had ceased to exist, it gradually went in decline.

It is known that at the end of the 18th century the house was rented to an apothecary and that after the sale of the Church property, it was bought by a member of the up-and-coming rich bourgeoisie.

More recently, it became a Casino, actually a social club for men, an institution we look at nowadays with a Machado-style melancholy, but that had an important place in the life of small towns. These were spaces exclusively for men, where they met, held their cultural or social gatherings, conducted their businesses or concocted local politics while smoking their cigars and playing cards or dominoes.





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## MERLON HOUSE

The most remarkable features in this beautiful palace-house, as well as its stately air, are its merlons, which in former times gave name to the street, and the coats of arms on the façade, which speak about their owners, their families, their ups and downs and their history.

It was part of the Nieto family entailment, who in the 16th century married into one of the most powerful local lineages, the Paz family. They then became the Nieto de Paz family, who also became powerful by holding the most relevant positions in the municipal government.

However, the interest of these noble families gradually waned, they went to live in other places, closer to the real power, and their possessions were abandoned. So many houses that were nearly derelict ended up in the hands of the richest bourgeois.

In this house, Juan Hernández Saravia was born and lived, an important military character who became Minister of War with Manuel Azaña, at the very end of the Spanish Civil War.

At the back there is a pleasant, beautiful inner garden.



### **HOUSE OF THE CLERK AND THE ATTORNEY**

This large Ledesma house, which like the main houses in town, had halls, bedrooms, stables, pens, barns and workshops, was actually two houses back in the 18th century. One of them belonged to a poor nobleman called Juan Martín, and the other, to a nun, Sister Josepha, both representing the classes - nobility and clergy - that owned most of the dwellings within the city walls.

Its façade follows the austere model that is so often seen in this town, and which often resembles a face, where the wrought iron grilles lend beauty and personality, as if they were jewels.

The house owes its name to its tenants, who were a clerk and an attorney, members of the bureaucratic class. The Cross of Malta on the façade must be understood in that context. It was possibly added by the lawyer José Hernández, who was a member of the said order and who owned the house in the late 19th century, before it was acquired by the López Chaves family.



## **RODRÍGUEZ DE LEDESMA PALACE**

This palace, part of the Nieto family entailment, is one of the most representative in the town. It belonged to Gonzalo Rodríguez de Ledesma, the King's huntsman and baker to the Queen, who founded the hospital and chapel that bear his name, and which still exist.

In the 18th century, its owner was the nobleman Francisco Nicolás Nieto, who lived in Zamora, until in the 19th century it ended up, along with many other houses, in the hands of a new family of property owners, the Tapias.

The building retains many features that are common in these large stately houses, which boast two or three floors, living quarters for the servants and various facilities, often completed with outbuildings and coach houses, much unlike those of the common people, which were often just one room and a pen for the animals.

The sober beauty of its façade is underlined by a few small details: the round arch of the main door, the coats of arms, the grilles and in particular, the scale-like ornament on the window.



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## THE PLAZA MAYOR SQUARE A lively hustle and bustle

Some people think that in one lifetime, there can more than one life and so, applying this idea to squares, one square can be many squares at once.

A town cannot be known without being part of its Plaza Mayor square. Even when the centre, as has happened in Ledesma, has moved elsewhere, this square remains a **symbolic place** for power and representativeness.

All that really matters is celebrated here: popular and religious festivals, bullfighting and Eucharistic plays. All sorts of people have been seen on its **balconies**: the rich, the landowners, the bureaucrats, the poor, tradesmen and kings, such as Enrique IV and his wife did in 1465, when the first Count of Ledesma invited them, and stayed in the Beltranes palace.

And even when the weekly market was held outside the walls, the square was the place where the most important economic decisions were made. Under its **porticos** were located most of its stores (butcher, cellar, etc.), the bakery and the tobacco shop that supplied the town. And at the other end, beside the Arco de los Roderos, there was the place to weigh meat, the butchers and, behind, the alhóndiga (corn exchange or granary) and the large inn that was owned by the Council.



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## ST. NICHOLAS' HOUSE

This house received its name because, during the restoration, a small niche was found in its entrance containing a statue of St. Nicholas with a legend that said:

*"This is St. Nicholas' house, Christened after its male owners. For centuries the home of their ancestors. The small dream of a great man. Living memory of our family, old Christians from Old Castile".*

It is known that in the 18th century, its owner was the priest Joseph Canueto, who lived there with his sister, two nieces and a maid, which was usual at the time; at the end of the 19th century, it was inherited by Don Diego Martín de Juan.

It was one of the many properties that the clergy and the nobility had within the city walls, and which led to a city model that still remains: a scarcely populated, silent centre, mostly reserved for the local administration, for some craftsmen's workshops and a few wealthy people. On the contrary, outside the walls, where the common people lived in much simpler dwellings, there was a constant hum of people, business and activity.



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## FRANCISCO JIMÉNEZ NIÑO'S HOUSE

Some of the particularities of this dwelling are the entrance via a large courtyard - a memory of the old pens -, a central well and the bedrooms on the right wing.

It is known that in the 18th century, the house belonged to this foreign priest after whom it is named, who rented it out to the local priests, and that later it became property of the hospital. The influence of the Church at the time was enormous, both economically and socially, in particular its relation with the hospital, brotherhoods and other institutions that carried out a great deal of work in the spiritual and beneficial areas.

Near the end of the 19th century, when the idea of holidays became popular, many palaces and stately homes of Ledesma were used for resting and were often visited by illustrious guests. Apparently, the writer, Miguel de Unamuno spent many summers in one of them, located behind this house. He befriended the artists Iturrino and Milcendeau, "landscape seekers", and also Cándido Rodríguez Pinilla, Ledesma's blind poet, who became Unamuno's loyal friend.



### **SAN MIGUEL CHURCH** **The light that brightens up the visit**

The churches of **San Miguel** and **Santa María la Mayor** are the only two churches still standing within the walls from the repopulation times, in the 13th century.

The granite stonework and its single nave plan, with a semicircular apse and barrel vault, reveal its **Romanesque origin**, linking it to the Santa Elena church. The southern portal, the crowning of the tympanum and the contemporary belfry, however, show us that this is a living building, which has accepted changes and adapted to new times and styles.

Inside is **the Interpretation Centre of the History of Ledesma, BLETISA** (the ancient name given to the town by the Romans) and offers the possibility of doing thirty long, intense centuries of history in a tour just a few metres long, which will help the visitor to understand their visit to Ledesma better. Through images, music, the voices of its inhabitants, a narration is built in a chorus-like manner, rooted in respect and emotion and thinking of the people of today and tomorrow, where the events in which the town built its personality are shown in all their relevance.

History is a mysterious, resistant thread that can always be pulled a little more.



### **SANTA ELENA CHURCH** **And together they built these temples**

Beyond the city walls, the church of Santa Elena remains loyal to the age when it was built, in the late 12th century, at the time of the **repopulation** by Fernando II of León.

The people who came to re-populate the territory in those insecure times, came from León, Portugal, Zamora and, to a lesser degree, Castile, with the dream of a better life for them and their families, while the king secured his power over the re-conquered lands.

However, the monarch eventually delegated his power on the noblemen, which worsened the living conditions of those who had worked so hard to enlarge and re-populate the kingdom, thus weakening the strong spirit of freedom and foundational adventure that had led the re-populators.

**Santa Elena** is a small **Romanesque church**, located beyond the town's walls, and the parish of one of its best known suburbs.

This is a single nave temple, with a semicircular apse, granite masonry and two doors, to the north and the west. On the north door, there are elements that bring to mind Eastern, Byzantine styles, and the highly inspired decoration of the carved corbels, with flowers and fantastic animals. Inside, there is a 16th century San Bartolomé statue from the Berruete school.

But the most noteworthy aspect is its atmosphere which, despite the centuries passed, still evokes a complex, intense, exciting time and space, that of the **border lands**.





### ERMITA DEL CARMEN SHRINE AND MEDIEVAL BRIDGE We build too many walls and not enough bridges

It is worth coming to Ledesma just to see its bridges: the Puente Mocho, the Peñasarracín bridge, the one over the Merdero stream and, above all the Puente Viejo and Puente Nuevo.

The **Puente Viejo** (Old Bridge) is a synthesis of the town's history. Its origin may date back to Trajan's times, although its current structure is essentially medieval. It always had five arches, which were rebuilt at different times, the fourth time was in 1816, after being blown up by the French army.

It had a tower and a small room where the duke of Albuquerque's officers collected the **pontazgo**, a tax charged on the merchandise that crossed the bridge, which remained in force until 1909 when, after long lawsuits, the Council bought the rights and stopped the collection.

On the east bank is the **Ermita del Carmen** shrine, somehow related with the road gods of the Roman pantheon. This has traditionally been a place to stop for a prayer, where people kneeled at the beginning or at the end of a trip, to give thanks for the mercy received, and where the merchants prayer for divine favour when coming to town to do business.

When the **Puente Nuevo** (New Bridge) was built, in the 1950s, the old one was rejuvenated when it stopped being used for vehicles and recovered the relationship with people instead.

Bridges are always places of passage between two worlds, that of the town and its outskirts on one end, and that of the external universe on the other. That's why it is recommended to pass them stealthily: its five eyes are watching us.