



1957

The Basques

Henry Camille Blaud
University of the Pacific

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THE BASQUES

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of History
College of the Pacific

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Henry Camille Blaud
June 1957

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Expressions of gratitude and appreciation are made at this time to Tully Cleon Knoles, D.D. and LL.D., Chancellor and Professor of History of the College of the Pacific, without whose generous assistance and stimulating influence this thesis would never have been attempted.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE SUBJECT

Although the frontiers of knowledge in most fields have been pushed to the point where many people feel that the genius of mankind has solved all, an enigma still confronts the contemporary anthropologist and philologist: the riddle of the origin of the Basques and their language.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. To divest this subject of some of its mystery by bringing to light some of its more obscure aspects is the main objective of this study.

In order to achieve this end many references will necessarily be made to the courses of Professor René Lafon, authority on Basque language and literature, studied by the writer at the University of Bordeaux. Also, inasmuch as most of the personal investigations in this study were made in the region surrounding Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, many of the observations will be peculiar to the province of Basse-Navarre.

Importance of the study. In such times as the present in which men and nations attempt to separate themselves by artificial barriers and boundaries, the natural corrolla-

ries of distrust and hatred seem to be rampant. Inasmuch as ignorance of others seems to be a prime requisite of social dissension and misunderstanding, it is felt that any study, no matter how minute, which crosses national frontiers and emphasizes mankind's historical contiguity and interdependence is entirely justifiable.

II. PROBLEM OF METHODOLOGY

The problem of the origin of the Basques is threefold, bringing together the anthropologist, the ethnologist, and the linguist:

1. What is the origin of the Basques, "plus précisément de la race basque"?
2. Whence stem their institutions, their beliefs, their customs, their songs?
3. Whence comes the Basque language? To what other language is it related? Are there existing languages related to it?

In the past thirty years, there have been important studies made on the anthropological and linguistic aspects of the Basque problem, and today much more exact comparisons between the Basques and prehistoric types of man can be made. Moreover, scientific developments in the field of blood classification and types have given new and more valid bases for comparisons of the Basques with members of

¹Notes from the course of René Lafon, University of Bordeaux, France (1953-54).

other races. Despite the important ethnological works which have been published,

. . . on ne peut pas encore procéder à l'étude comparative des multiples aspects de la vie du peuple Basque et des peuples qui ont été ou ont pu être en rapport avec lui dans les temps lointain . . .²

Professor Lafon emphasizes the importance of a linguistic approach to the problem. However, he stresses the need for men of research who are singularly qualified, who are well-versed in the languages compared, and who take particular pains not to draw hasty conclusions on the bases of superficial similarities. The following popular legend pertaining to the alleged connection between the Basque and Japanese languages illustrates this point:

Formerly it was popularly believed that there was a definite relation between Basque and Japanese. This belief was derived from a certain resemblance in the sonority of the two languages, as well as a resemblance in some words even though the words often had different significance in their respective milieus. The belief was carried to the point where it was often asserted that Basque missionaries sent to Japan encountered little difficulty in learning Japanese, and even that by speaking Basque these missionaries could make themselves understood by their

²Ibid.

Japanese hosts. However, no one seems to be able to furnish the name or address of any of the missionaries to whom these stories allude. The following comical incident is said to have arisen from the popular presumption of the affinity between the two languages:

At the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), a Japanese warship entered the port of Saint-Sébastien in the Spanish Basque province of Guipuzcoa. Upon hearing of the arrival of the ship, several of the natives of the region decided to learn for themselves whether or not the Basque language could be used as a medium of communication with the Japanese sailors.

After obtaining permission to visit the vessel, the visitors boarded the ship and in their native Basque began questioning two sailors. To their great astonishment, the sailors not only understood the questions, but also replied in perfect Basque. The anti-climax to the episode came when the visitors discovered that in order to facilitate their visit, the Japanese captain had arranged for them to be received by two Basque sailors enlisted in the Japanese navy.³

As the foregoing illustration exemplifies, many of the early linguistic researchers, probing the origins of

³Ibid.

Basque, did much of their work in a haphazard manner. As in all sciences the "trial and error" method marked the early stages of the linguistic investigations, and many of the early hypotheses were inexact and misleading. However, from these early attempts a more exact and systematic technique of determining the origins and the affinities of languages evolved; this is referred to as the "comparative method."

In utilizing the comparative method, there are definite rules of procedure which must be learned and applied. Merely finding similar words and grammatical forms in the compared languages is not enough; the comparisons must be on a more precise and subtle level. For instance, when an identical word is found in several languages, it must be established that a definite vowel or consonant sound relationship exists in each case. The same principle applies in comparing similar grammatical forms. In this case, the plural of nouns, pronouns, and diverse persons of the verb, their tense and mode, must correspond in each language.⁴

In applying the principle and procedures of the comparative method to a study of the Basque language, new difficulties are encountered. The first "stumbling block" is the fact that there is no known language more ancient

⁴Ibid.

than Basque. Furthermore, as yet there can be no irrefutable argument that Basque is a transformation of another language in the manner that French is a transformation of Latin. In one of his works published several years ago, H. G. Wells refers to the problem in his illuminative style:

We find strange little patches of speech still in the world which do not seem to be connected with any other language about them . . .

One language group that has been keenly discussed is the Basque group of dialects . . . Their language, as it exists today, is a fully developed one. But it is developed upon lines absolutely different from those of the Aryan languages about it.⁵

The problem is further complicated by the lack of historical documents or inscriptions in Basque. Some inscriptions dating from approximately the beginning of the Christian era have been found in the regions of Auch (Gers) and Luchon (Haute Garonne). These inscriptions contain the names of persons and divinities in a language strongly resembling Basque. Without a doubt the dialects of the original Aquitanians of these areas resembled that of their Basque neighbors. To add to the difficulty, the evidence of classic place names remains largely in the conjectural stage due to the fact that "these have gone

⁵H. G. Wells, The New and Revised Outline of History (New York: Garden City Publishing Company, Inc., 1931), pp. 153-54.

through phonetic developments which are imperfectly known."⁶

Today there is but an infinitesimal amount of literature in Basque, and this is hardly known beyond the confines of the country. Copies of these works are difficult and often impossible to obtain, and the existent translations, besides being extremely rare, are of dubious quality.

This dearth of literature does not stem from a lack of talent or genius among the Basques, but rather from the fact that most educated Basques have written in Spanish or French in order to reach a wider, more cultivated audience. Lafon, quoting in part from another authority, sums up the situation thus:

'La portée d'une langue tient au nombre et au degré d'éducation de ceux qui la pratiquent.' Or, la population dont le basque est la langue propre se compose, dans l'ensemble, de paysans, de bergers et⁷ de marins peu instruits souvent même illettrés . . .

Mists of fanciful suppositions and conjectures have also shrouded the anthropological approach to the problem of Basque origins. Philippe Veyrin, author of one of the most complete recent works on the French Basques, brings

⁶William J. Entwistle, M. A., The Spanish Language Together with Portuguese, Catalan and Basque (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1938), p. 27.

⁷Lafon, loc. cit.

attention to the difficulty of finding individual Basques possessing a number of the ascribed racial traits or characteristics. However, he adds that some Basques "d'allure exceptionnellement caractéristique" exhibit certain traits inherited from ancestral types according to the laws of Mendel.⁸ Veyrin maintains that exterior racial traits such as the color of the hair, eyes, etc., are of a relative value and stresses the importance of statistics derived from measurements of bodily dimensions and, particularly, cranial structures.

One of the earlier investigators, Broca, who studied remains in the coastal areas of Zarauz and Saint-Jean-de-Luz, regions of racial heterogeneity, lacked validity in his findings because of too great a geographical limitation.⁹ Subsequent research by Aranzadi, carried out over a more extensive area, gives more reliable data. According to these more recent investigations, the largest percentage of subjects manifesting traits most typical of the Basque group (more than 50%) were found in the province of Basse-

⁸Philippe Veyrin, Les Basques de Labourd, de Soule et de Basse Navarre, Leur Histoire et Leurs Traditions (Collection du Musée Basque, Arthaud, Bayonne, 1947), p. 84.

⁹Georges Lacombe, "Trois Lettres inédites de Hugo Schuchardt à don Arturo Campion," Gernika, Eusko-Jakintza, Revue des Etudes Basques, (Imprimerie Darracq, Bayonne, France, 1947), p. 25.

Navarre, However, this is not surprising, inasmuch as this region has remained the most isolated, and is considered to be the "berceau historique" of the early Vascons.¹⁰

The interpretation of available anthropological data seems to corroborate the linkage between the contemporary Basques and the people of the Primitive Pyrenean Era. However, although this hypothesis is further confirmed by pre-historic archeology as well as recent blood tests,¹¹ it is still necessary to discover additional human vestiges in order to arrive at conclusive deductions.¹²

¹⁰Veyrin, op. cit., p. 85.

¹¹"Rh Factor Clue to Race," Science Newsletter, 54:149, September 4, 1948.

¹²Veyrin, loc. cit.

CHAPTER II

GEOGRAPHY, POPULATION, AND THE TRADITIONAL PATTERNS OF LIFE

In the opening chapter on methodology, the difficulty of compiling accurate data and formulating conclusive deductions about the Basques was delineated. As one delves further into the subject, two factors stand out: the past isolationism of the people, and their stubborn adherence to old traditions. A geographical study of the region, referred to in Basque as Eskual-herria, seems to provide a clue to this situation.

From the captivating seaside splendor of Saint-Jean-de-Luz and Biarritz to the rising majesty of its interior peaks, Eskual-herria appears as a land in which God and nature collaborated in order to preserve intact an ancient and enigmatic group of people. Bountifully endowed with charm and beauty, the region seems to be engulfed in a flood of benevolent elements: The climate, although often fickle and capricious, is seldom harsh or severe, and the average temperature of the coastal village of Saint-Jean-de-Luz ranges between 47 and 69 degrees Fahrenheit the year round;¹ the kaleidoscopic sky presents an almost

¹P. Dop and H. V. Savaglio, Saint-Jean-de-Luz, The Pearl of the Basque Coast (Syndicat d'Initiative of Saint-Jean-de-Luz, no date), p. 13.

quotidian panorama of shifting clouds, with the skies clouded or overcast for two hundred sixty days of the year, and completely clear on only the remaining hundred days;² the terrain is lavishly covered with a mantle of succulent grass and herbs and the remnants of once ample forests. Formerly the forests of the region were noted for their oak trees. In addition to serving as convocation sites for the ancient local assemblies, the oak trees furnished acorns utilized as food for hogs; the delicious flavor of the renowned "jambon de Bayonne" is attributed to this use of the acorn.³ The beauty of this assemblage is made complete by the picturesque peaks of the interior, peaks neither awesome nor challenging, but on the contrary serving as sites for the colorful homes of the inhabitants as well as lending their precipitous slopes to cultivation.

To define the geographical boundaries of the Basque country, particularly the four provinces on the Spanish side of the frontier, involves sifting through much controversial material. In an article found in one of the early editions of The National Geographic Magazine, the author limits the area of the Basque country to the three Spanish provinces of Vizcaya, Guipuzcoa, and Alava.⁴

²Veyrin, op. cit., p. 31. ³Ibid., p. 33.

⁴Harry A. McBride, "The Land of the Basques," The National Geographic Magazine, XLI, No. 1 (January 1922) p. 66.

Thus he completely ignores the French and Spanish sections of Navarre, alleged to be the "berceau historique des Vascons," as well as the French Basque provinces of Labourd and Soule, strongholds of the ancient language and traditions.

It appears that originally the Basques distinguished themselves from their neighbors on a linguistic basis. They refer to their language as euskara, or eskuara, and to themselves as Eskual-dun, which translates as "those possessing eskuara." Extending this linguistic emphasis further, the Basques designate their country as Eskual-herria; this translates as "the country of eskuara."⁵

One author presents an interesting sidelight on the derivation of the term eskal, or eskual; he maintains that it probably evolved from the word ezkur, meaning acorn, thus indicating the important role of the oak tree in Basque tradition.⁶

Today the use of Basque has greatly diminished on the Spanish side of the frontier. One of the reasons for the decline of euskara stems from political developments in Spain since 1936. L'Abbé Pierre Lafitte, Professor of Basque at the Petit Séminaire D'Ustaritz, describes the

⁵Veyrin, op. cit., p. 1

⁶George W. Elderkin, Zagreus in Ancient Basque Religion (The Princeton University Store, Princeton, New Jersey, 1952), p. 8.

situation in the following manner:

En Pays Basque peninsulaire la conjoncture politique a été des plus funestes. Depuis 1936 le basque y a été persécuté avec une véritable rage: il a été interdit dans la presse à l'école, à l'église et jusque dans la rue . . .⁷

This same writer adds that although this situation has been somewhat ameliorated in recent years, it still remains "pénible."

In France the Basques have been more successful in maintaining their language, and one writer affirms that the linguistic frontiers have remained practically unchanged since the Middle Ages.⁸

Today the region in which the Basque language persists extends west from Mauléon, France, through the French department of the Basses-Pyrénées to the eastern frontiers of Bilbao in Spain. From north to south the area of Basque speech stretches from the French resort city of Biarritz southward to the frontier region north of Pamplona, Spain. This linguistic sphere measures approximately 170 kilometers (roughly 106 miles) from east to west, and about sixty kilometers (roughly 37 miles) from north to south. Formerly Basque was spoken much more extensively, but through

⁷Pierre Lafitte, "La Langue basque de 1939 à 1947," Gernika, Eusko-Jakintza, Revue des Etudes Basques, (Imprimerie Darracq, Bayonne, France, 1947), p. 9.

⁸Veyrin, op. cit., p. 15.

the course of history it has been constricted to its present limits.

Never having been a sovereign state, nor even administered as a separate unit, the Basque country does not possess political frontiers. In France the three ancient provinces of Labourd, Basse-Navarre, and Soule have been combined to form the Department of the Basses-Pyrénées, although more precisely these ancient provinces are actually in the arrondissements of Bayonne and Oloron. In the three French provinces, Basque is still widely spoken, particularly in the rural areas. In the four Spanish Basque provinces, referred to as the peninsular group, the use of Basque has greatly diminished. In the frontier province of Guipuzcoa, Basque is still spoken throughout; however, in the province of Biscaye it is spoken in only three-quarters of the area, in Spanish Navarre it is spoken only in the northern frontier region, less than half of the province, and in the province of Alava, Basque is hardly spoken at all.⁹

During the Fête of San Fermines at Pamplona, the capital of Spanish Navarre, it was noticed that Basque was not spoken by the natives of the city. The only Basque

⁹René Lafon, "Le Pays Basque, La Langue Basque, Les Basques," (notes from the course in Basque at the University of Bordeaux, France, 1953-54).

heard was spoken by groups from the French section of . Navarre and the villages located along the International Frontier. Most of the visitors from the neighboring province of Guipuzcoa, the area around San Sébastien, spoke the ancient tongue, and one could not escape the impression that the natives of Pamplona seemed to regard the visiting Basques as a people ethnically, as well as linguistically, apart; this impression was enhanced while traveling northward from Pamplona. As the distance to the French frontier decreases, one not only hears snatches of Basque currently spoken but also notices subtle differences in the physical aspects of the people. Upon arriving at the Navarrese frontier villages of Burguete and Roncevaux, one almost receives the sensation of entering another country, even though the International Frontier has not yet been crossed.¹⁰

As to the population figures of the Basque country, one author, writing exclusively of the French Basque, estimates that there are approximately 112,000 inhabitants in the three French Basque provinces. He gives the following population figures for each province: Labourd 50,000; Basse-Navarre 40,000; and Soule 22,000. Despite the emigration pattern of the Basques, the population figures of the three French provinces have remained almost constant

¹⁰Observation of the author.

since 1718, the date of the first census of the region.¹¹ According to the 1940 census, the average population density per square mile for both the Spanish and the French Basque provinces was about 348.8. In the same year the census for California indicated a population density of about 44.1 persons per square mile.¹²

With the exception of the coastal regions, where industry and resort activities have led to concentrations of population, the bulk of the Basque population is dispersed in rural areas or small villages. The small industrial centers of Mauléon and Hasparren each have only from four thousand to five thousand inhabitants, while the other interior population centers of Saint-Jean-pied-de-Port, Saint-Palais, and Tardets have only about two thousand inhabitants each. From the foregoing the Basque country is seen as a land with few areas of heavy population concentrations and an abundance of homes isolated or loosely gathered in remote districts, each group enjoying a quasi-independence.¹³

In the four Spanish Basque provinces, it is esti-

¹¹Veyrin, op. cit., p. 48.

¹²Carol Maria Pagliarulo, "Basques in Stockton, A Study of Assimilation" (Master's thesis, College of the Pacific, Stockton, 1948), p. 1.

¹³Veyrin, op. cit., pp. 48-49.

mated that 600,000 inhabitants still speak Basque.¹⁴ However, one writer affirms that during the last sixty years the provinces in Spain have lost approximately 70,000 speakers due to "a castilianization of the principal towns."¹⁵

After the foregoing sketch of the geographical location and the population figures of Eskual-herria, a study of the modes of living of its people seems apropos. In the French Basque provinces the three main modes of life are the following: (1) pastoral, (2) agricultural, and (3) maritime. The small artisan, such as the sandal-maker, the potter, and the weaver, is usually engaged in one of the aforementioned activities, utilizing his craft primarily as a supplementary source of income.

In resort centers such as Biarritz and Saint-Jean-de-Luz some modification of the traditional patterns of life have occurred due to the parceling and conversion of former agricultural lands into pleasure centers and resorts. Aside from some changes in the small interior villages of Ascaïn and Cambo, the interior regions are relatively untouched by these modifications.¹⁶

¹⁴Lafon, loc. cit.

¹⁵Entwistle, op. cit., p. 26.

¹⁶Veyrin, op. cit., p. 38.

From the prehistoric era to the present, pastoral life has never ceased to play an important part in the life of the Basque peasant. In the elevated sections of the country, vestiges have been found indicating that these lands were used for grazing as early as the period between the Copper Age and the Age of Iron (2500 B.C. - 1000 B.C.). Today these pastures are still serving the same purpose they did in the dawn of history. Perhaps more interesting, it has been established that some of the rudely constructed herders' cabins of today are located on the ruins of huts dating from the Megalithic period. Furthermore, it appears that the existing cabins differ but little from those of the Megalithic era.

Additional evidence that indicates the influence of pastoral life on Basque culture is the fact that many words with purely Basque roots refer to domestic animals, particularly sheep. To illustrate, the word aberata, meaning "rich" in Basque, signifies "those possessing an abundant flock."¹⁷

Even today it is difficult to find a Basque household of any magnitude in which there is not some member of the family engaged in raising sheep. A typical pattern in Basse-Navarre is for one or more of the younger brothers of

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 38-39.

a family to save enough money to start a flock. Although the elder brother, the apparent heir to the family house and lands if he is not preceded by a sister, is mainly engaged in the tilling of the soil and the gathering of the harvests, he frequently aids his brothers with the sheep. Thus a system of rotation of labor is worked out, each of the brothers spending some time with the sheep and some time tilling the soil.¹⁸

In this land of strongly entrenched traditions and unwavering conservatism, even the sheep seem to play a part in maintaining ties with the past. With their long, shaggy fleece, their diminutive stature, and their jagged remnants of horn, they give the impression of a primitive flock grazing in the lulling shadows of the prehistoric Pyrenees. The two species of sheep found in the Basque provinces, known as the Manech and the Basquaise, have little in common with their American counterpart. The Manech, found mostly in the region west of Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port, is a species ideally suited for regions of heavy rainfall. Although its long, coarse wool is suited for little other than mattress stuffing, it is an excellent milk-producer, and its milk serves to make the delicious cheese so popular in the Basque country. On the other hand, the Basquaise,

¹⁸Observation of the author.


known by the Basques as ardichuri (meaning "white sheep"), is a larger, less rugged species whose fine wool has wider commercial uses. This latter species is found for the most part in the region east of Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port.¹⁹

In contrast to the long-established pastoral activities, agriculture has been a relatively new pursuit in the Basque milieu. In a twelfth century tract, Guide du Pèlerin de Compostelle, the following was written concerning the agriculture of the region: "pauvre en vin, pain et aliments de toutes sortes, mais on y trouve en compensation des pommes, du cidre et du lait."²⁰

The apple, formerly cultivated widely in the French Basque provinces, has today almost completely disappeared from the region. Other agricultural products appear to have been introduced at a comparatively late date. Records indicate that prior to the Revolution, the Basques did not grow enough grain crops for their own needs. Furthermore, even though today agriculture is practiced much more extensively, the primary objective of the Basque peasant continues to be the production of meat and milk. It seems that this situation derives from more than merely the problem of markets; ancestral habits and traditions are also

¹⁹Veyrin, op. cit., p. 41.

²⁰Jeanne Vielliard, Le Guide du Pèlerin de Saint-Jacques de Compostelle (Macon, Protat Frères Imprimeurs) p.20.



involved. To the Basque peasant everything relating to livestock is gizon lan, or "man's work." The gardening, gathering of honey, and caring for poultry, as well as housework, is always under the jurisdiction of the women.²¹

To the present time, Basque agriculture has developed slowly, and the small proprietor who produces merely enough to fill the needs of his family continues to prevail.²² Perhaps this factor has also contributed to the great conservatism of the Basques. Today, as in centuries gone by, the more precipitous slopes of Eskual-herria have successfully resisted the inroads of modern, mechanized agricultural methods, rendering the use of modern implements, except in the flat lands, impractical and costly. As they have throughout the centuries, the Pyrenean peaks continue their guardianship of old traditions and methods, yielding their mantle of verdure only to the keen-bladed scythes of the Eskual-dun to be gathered into the primitive orga, a two-wheeled cart drawn by oxen or cows, or, in the case of the more abrupt slopes, into the lera, a wooden sled also drawn by oxen.²³

The Basques, possessing a generous span of coastline, have naturally been attracted to the sea, achieving

²¹Veyrin, op. cit., pp. 42-43.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., pp. 299-300.

notable stature as sailors and navigators. It is recorded that even before Columbus set out for the New World, Basque fishermen were returning from the sea, their ships laden with codfish, a species of fish never caught in European waters. It is highly probable that during these voyages the Basque fishermen had sighted American shores even before Columbus began his famous exploration.²⁴ Furthermore, a Basque by the name of Elcano is said to have been the first navigator to circle the globe, charting unknown seas after the untimely death of his captain, Magellan.²⁵

Although the coastal Basques are racially more mixed than their kinsmen of the interior, it appears that in previous centuries the sea attracted candidates from villages as far inland as Ascaïn and Sare. This pull toward the sea so depleted these inland villages of manpower that in the seventeenth century it was necessary for Basques from the most interior province of Soule to come to the coastal province of Labourd in order to help with the summer harvests.²⁶

²⁴"No Aryans," The Literary Digest, vol. 123 (May 15, 1937), p. 8.

²⁵Pierre Rectoran, "Corsaires Basques et Bayonnais du XV^{me} au XIX^{me} siècle," Gernika, Eusko-Jakintza, Revue des Etudes Basques (Imprimerie Darracq, Bayonne, France, 1947), p. 128.

²⁶Veyrin, op. cit., p. 44.

The Basque fishing industry has gone through three main stages: (1) whaling, (2) fishing of cod, and (3) fishing of sardines. In the Middle Ages, whales were frequently sighted in the Bay of Biscay. Relentlessly pursued by Basque whalers, the whale was exterminated, and 1686 marks the date on which the last leviathan was taken at Biarritz. However, even after this date, Basque whalers sought their quarry off the coasts of Scotland, Iceland, Newfoundland, and Spitzbergen. The Basques made an important contribution to the whaling industry when Martin Sopite of Ciboure discovered the process of melting whale blubber aboard ship.²⁷

With the decline of whaling, the fishing of cod, which had occupied a position of secondary importance, came into prominence, and in 1512 it became an occupation of some consequence at Bayonne.

During the zenith of the Basque fishing industry in the seventeenth century, the fishing fleet, including vessels engaged in whaling as well as those engaged in cod-fishing, numbered approximately forty to eighty ships of from one to three hundred tons. The fleet sailed from the two main ports, Bayonne and Saint-Jean-de-Luz. However,

²⁷Rodney Gallop, A Book of the Basques (Macmillan and Company, Limited. St. Martin's Street, London, 1930), p. 273.

with the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 which ended the War of Spanish Succession, a death blow was dealt to the Basque deep-sea fishing activities, and the eighteenth century witnessed a withering away of this once prominent industry.²⁸

Despite the decline of deep-sea fishing, however, coastal fishing activities continued and developed. Sardine seining attained noteworthy importance, and today Saint-Jean-de-Luz-Ciboure has emerged as one of the most active centers of the sardine industry in France.²⁹

The foregoing material pertains exclusively to the French Basques. It appears that on the Spanish side of the frontier these patterns of life differ somewhat, due to the greater emphasis on industry and mining. As one writer reports, nearly 69 per cent of Spain's explosives and 53 per cent of the merchant fleet come from the Spanish Basque provinces,³⁰ and Bilbao, located in the province of Biscaye, is referred to as the "Pittsburgh of Spain," possessing rich iron deposits which are among the world's most famous.³¹

²⁸Veyrin, op. cit., p. 46.

²⁹Ibid., p. 47.

³⁰Irving Wallace, "The Basques Fight on Alone," Reader's Digest, Vol. 51 (July, 1947), p. 75.

³¹McBride, op. cit., p. 70.

CHAPTER III

EARLY HISTORICAL REFERENCES TO THE BASQUES AND THEIR CHARACTER

In an effort to gain a more exact historical perspective of this mysterious group of people, this chapter will cite and evaluate early historical references to the Basques and their character.

Investigating diligently the meager references made to the ancient Basques, one arrives at a picture which, as one writer states, "for all its lack of detail, is probably not too inaccurate in its main outlines."¹

The early references to the ancient Vascones, assumed to be the ancestors of the present day Basques, gives the following view of this early group:

. . . rude and uncivilized folk who live on acorn bread, clothed themselves in strips of woollen cloth and were shod with boots of twisted hair. Their usual pursuit was war, varied with a little relaxation in the form of hunting and fishing. They fought without helmet or armour and, if worsted, took to their mountains expressing their defiance of the enemy in "wild mocking cries," which no doubt resembled the irrintzina of today, a long, wavering yell, something between a laugh, a shriek, and a horse's neigh, to which the Basques give vent on festive occasions. They preferred death to captivity, it is said, and, if taken prisoner, either killed each other or insulted their captors with the object of inciting the latter to put them to death.²

¹Gallop, op. cit., p. 44.

²Ibid.

Aside from the foregoing material, together with references made to their religious observances, little is known of the ancient Vascones. The religious rites allegedly consisted of honoring a "nameless god" by dancing and feasting under a full moon, and paying tribute to a dead warrior by planting as many lances on his tomb "as he had slaughtered enemies."³

An interesting corroboration of the war tactics of these ancients can be gleaned from a recent account of the famous ambush of the hosts of Charlemagne at the pass of Roncesvalles in 778 A.D. Roncesvalles is a frontier village in the province of Navarre, a region referred to as the "berceau historique" of the early Vascones,⁴ and it was the site of one of history's most crushing defeats. Here the hordes of Charlemagne were annihilated to a man. Twenty thousand troops lay dead, "stripped of their precious armor and weapons, their bones crushed by the rocks that had been hurled down upon them from above . . ."⁵ These seasoned troops were wiped out by a "band of undisciplined shepherds who did not even have armor,"⁶ a band who disappeared "so completely that they left behind them

³Ibid., p. 45.

⁴cf., p. 9.

⁵Richard Winston, Charlemagne: From the Hammer to the Cross (Indianapolis, New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1954), p. 119.

⁶Ibid., p. 116.

not even a rumor of their whereabouts."⁷

That the Basques had earned a reputation for "violence and ferocity" remarkable even for the Dark Ages can be deduced from the singular unanimity of the accounts of early writers. Prudence, a fourth century A.D. observer, describes the "pagan brutality of the Vascones," and another writer alludes to the dubious distinction of the Basques in "having made more than their fair share of Christian martyrs."⁸ Further evidence of this reputation for violence can be seen even as late as the twelfth century A.D., when in 1179 the following sentence of excommunication was pronounced by the Third Council of Latran:

As regards the Brabançons, Aragonese, Navarrese, Basques (Bascoli), Cotereaux and Triaverdins, who inflict such cruelty on the Christians, sparing neither churches nor monasteries, widows nor young girls, old men nor children, age nor sex, but destroying and laying waste everything like pagans, the Synod condemns them . . . to the same anathema as heretics; and orders that sentence of excommunication be published in the Churches on Sundays and other special days.⁹

A twelfth century account of a pilgrimage undertaken by Aimery Picaud of Parthenay-le-Vieux gives the following descriptions of the Basques:

Dans ce pays il y a de mauvais péagers, à savoir auprès des Ports de Cize, dans le bourg appelé Ostabat, à Saint-Jean et Saint-Michel-Pied-de-Port; ils

⁷Ibid., p. 117.

⁸Gallop, op. cit., p. 10.

⁹Ibid., p. 12.

sont franchement à envoyer au diable. En effet, ils vont au-devant des pèlerins avec deux ou trois bâtons pour extorquer par la force un injuste tribut, et si quelque voyageur refuse de céder à leur demande, ils le frappent à coups de baton et lui arrachent la taxe en l'injuriant et en le fouillant jusque dans ses culottes. Ce sont des gens féroces et la terre qu'ils habitent est hostile aussi par ses forêts et par sa sauvagerie; la férocité de leurs visages et semblablement, celle de leur parler barbare, épouvantent le coeur de ceux qui les voient. Bien qu'ils ne dussent pas régulièrement exiger un tribut d'autres que des seuls marchands, ils en perçoivent injustement sur les pèlerins et tous les voyageurs. Quand l'usage voudrait qu'ils perçoivent sur un objet quelconque une taxe de quatre ou six sous, ils en prennent huit ou douze, soit le double.¹⁰

The author concludes the preceding uncomplimentary description of the Basques by adding, "Pour un sou seulement, le Navarrais ou le Basque tue, s'il peut, un Français."¹¹

Subsequent centuries have seen a change in the earlier unsavory reputation of the Basques, and in 1528 a Venetian historian, Andrea Navagero, wrote the following account of the people he had encountered in the Basque country:

The people of this country are very gay and are quite the opposite of the Spaniards, who can do nothing save gravely. These people are always laughing, joking, and dancing, both men and women . . .¹²

Over a century later, another observer wrote of the Basque

¹⁰Vielliard, op. cit., pp. 21-22.

¹¹Ibid., p. 29.

¹²Gallop, op. cit., p. 46.

country, "joy begins there with life and ends only with death." He comments also on the popularity of Basques as servants because of their "unusual agility."¹³ Despite these sixteenth century descriptions depicting the Basques as a "gay and lively" people, there is some question as to whether or not this concept of the Basque was largely "a concession to a prevailing fashion." In commenting on this Gallop affirms that while the Basques are not a "doleful race, their natural liveliness tends to be concealed by their dignified demeanour, and it is not the side of their nature which they are most prone to exhibit before strangers."¹⁴

With the advent of the nineteenth century, the century of Romanticism, the popular conception of the Basques underwent still another metamorphosis. In lieu of being regarded as "gay and lively" people who, as Voltaire remarked, "jump and dance on top of the Pyrenees," the Basque came to exemplify the "noble savage" of Rousseau. This popular concept was given further impetus by the writings of Augustin Chaho, a Basque from Soule. In 1835, referring to the Basques, Chaho writes of the "dignity of a free man" and the "sentiments of his original nobility." These fanciful, romantic observations were subsequently

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 47.

seized upon and developed by tourist agencies and managers of Syndicats d'Initiative to be later eagerly accepted by generations of gullible tourists.¹⁵

However, there is a certain truth in Chaho's evaluation, for the Basque country has produced world explorers, intrepid soldiers and sailors, administrators, athletes, artists, and great religious leaders. Le Comte de Troisvilles, first captain of the King's Musketeers in 17th century France and a relative of Athos and Aramis of "Three Musketeers" fame, was a product of the Pyrenees.¹⁶ The ancestors of Simon Bolivar, Liberator of South America, were inhabitants of the Basque provinces of Spain,¹⁷ and the great French king Henry IV came from the Basque province of Navarre. Further, Saint Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, was a Basque, as was Saint Francis Xavier, renowned 16th century missionary.¹⁸

The Basque Character

In most undertakings of this type, the delineation

¹⁵Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁶"The People Who Came from Nowhere," Science Illustrated, III (September, 1948), p. 69.

¹⁷Gerhard Masur, Simon Bolivar (Albuquerque, The University of New Mexico Press, 1948), p. 28.

¹⁸Francois Duhourcau, "L'Enigme basque," Mercure de France, CCIXVII (Mai, 1936), p. 454.

of a racial character is normally difficult to achieve, and is rendered doubly so in this particular case by the existence of many erroneous generalizations concerning the Basques. The preceding résumé outlines the three main phases which the popular conception of Basque character has undergone. Yet, writing in 1930, Gallop affirmed that "the completely successful Basque novel has not yet been written."¹⁹ Ramuntcho, Pierre Loti's popular novel, is filled with vivid, realistic descriptions of the Basque countryside. According to one critic, however, Loti failed, his chief error being that of endowing Ramuntcho with a "prodigious imagination" combined with a flair for "philosophical speculation." This, said the critic, is far from the "clear-thinking, practical mentality" which characterizes the Basque.²⁰ A more recent writer, Dr. Jaureguiberry - himself a Basque - gives the following description of his countrymen:

Le "Basque moyen" est rien moins que triste. Point tant fataliste qu'épicurien. Patient, flegmatique, peu pressé, d'une sérénité inaltérable devant les circonstances imprévues de la vie. Volontaire au point d'être souvent têtu. Parfois sujet à se mettre en colère et peu enclin à la magnanimité envers ses adversaires. Tout à fait indifférent à la politique, "Il possède un sens supérieur de la liberté qui l'a tenu aussi éloigné du servage que de l'anarchie . . ."²¹

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., p. 50.

²¹Veyrin, op. cit., p. 65.

Gallop gives the following evaluation of Basque character:

. . . loyalty and rectitude; dignity and reserve; independence and a strong sense of race and racial superiority; a serious outlook tempered by a marked sense of humour and a capacity for enjoyment; deep religious feeling; and a cult of tradition amounting almost to ancestor worship: all these correlated and directed by a deep-rooted simplicity and a courageous, objective view of life.²²

The author emphasizes the lack of imagination in the Basque racial character, speculating as to whether this springs from the deeply devout nature of the people.²³

Exhibiting an impenetrable reserve toward strangers and a marked obstinacy toward change, the Basque often presents a dour exterior to the outsider. However, underneath this stern facade there exists a "light-heartedness" and a "sly, whimsical humour." This is exemplified by the anecdote recounted by Mayi Elissague, authoress of Silhouettes Basques:

One day while she was watching a pelote match she fell into conversation with an old man beside her who was following the game with intense interest and appreciation of all its finer points. Having told her his name, which she recognised as that of a famous player of bygone years, he proceeded to recount to her all the victories of his youth. "Did you never have any defeats then?" she asked him slyly. "Defeats?" he said; "ah, it is my opponents who tell the story of those!"²⁴

²²Gallop, op. cit., pp. 52-53.

²³Ibid., p. 54.

²⁴Ibid., p. 64.

Inasmuch as the majority of accounts concerning Basque character seem to either laud or idealize the subject, Gallop's enumeration of some of the less desirable aspects of their character gives a more complete picture, as well as added objectivity, to this study.

Heading the list of these shortcomings is the streak of hardness inherent in the Basque character, which is devoid of the "more cultivated virtues of compassion and altruism." However, Gallop asserts that this hardness is of a negative rather than a positive order, springing "rather from the natural outlook of a race which has never apprehended modern ethical conceptions than from any defect in their moral composition." Lack of consideration for others, contempt for weakness and deformity, and indifference toward human and animal suffering are some of the manifestations of this hardness.²⁵ This latter trait is illustrated by the Antzara Jokoa, or Goose Game, formerly engaged in by the Basques. The object of the game was for mounted men to race by a pole on which a goose was hung head down. Riding as fast as possible, these men attempted to pluck off the head of the goose with their bare hands.²⁶

Added to this list of shortcomings as enumerated by Gallop is the lack of sporting spirit, an unexpected trait

²⁵Ibid., p. 67.

²⁶Ibid., p. 249.

to find in a race so endowed with taste and aptitude for outdoor sports. The Basque, so reserved on most occasions, will, if he is losing on the pelota court, manifest his anger with "all the expansiveness of a pettish prima donna."²⁷ The accounts given by the generation of Basques who were contemporaries of their outstanding pilotari, Chiquito de Cambo, present a picture of a phenomenal player who on occasions hurled his chistera in anger when losing a point.²⁸ Gallop also cites the Basque practice of wantonly netting great quantities of pigeons flying through the Pyrenean passes and of dynamiting streams for fish as further examples of the Basque lack of sportsmanship.²⁹

One recent novel appears to have captured to a large extent the subtleties of the Basque character. This work, written by a Bearnais, the immediate neighbors of the Basques, brings to light certain aspects of the Basque character which can only be gleaned through residence among the people in their natural habitat.

In contrast to the philosophical Ramuntcho, the main character of the Bearnais' novel, Jean, a young Basque who migrates to the United States as a shepherd,

²⁷Ibid., p. 67.

²⁸Observation of the author.

²⁹Gallop, op. cit., p. 68.

personifies the practical, independent, and unimaginative Basque immigrant who follows the traditional pattern of his group: migrating to the New World with the hope of earning enough money to return to the land of his birth, purchase the home of his dreams, and marry his waiting sweetheart.

Jean's abortive attempt to read a local news publication, as well as certain other passages, serve to show, in the opinion of this writer, the Basque peasant's general reaction to literary endeavors.³⁰ The description of Jean's mother stoically concealing the debilitating effects of age by stopping to regain her strength while walking up the mountain path to her home shows clearly the Basque attitude in regard to physical discomfort, as well as shedding light on the role of the woman in Basque society.³¹

Inasmuch as the Pyrenean habitat of the Basques extends on both the French and Spanish sides of the frontier, some of the generalizations concerning the character of the Basques on the French side do not necessarily apply to their kinsmen in Spain. As one writer expresses it:

Racial generalizations are pleasant to make but they rarely fit the case. One would suppose, for example, that the French and Spanish Basques are alike, but in fact the French Basques are a poor and backward race

³⁰Joseph Peyré, Jean, le Basque (Paris VIe, Flammarion Editeur, 26, Rue Racine, 1953), p. 49.

³¹Ibid., p. 68.

of peasants and fishermen; the Spanish Basque are prosperous and those in the cities are active, well off, and progressive in the material sense.³²

Gallop, in his comparison of the French and Spanish Basques, goes to the extent of affirming that not only is there a political frontier between these two factions, but also a "spiritual gulf nearly as wide as that which exists between the Old World and the New . . ."³³

The differences between these two groups of Basques stem not only from the varying cultural patterns of the nations into which they have been incorporated, but also from geographical factors, the northern slopes of the Pyrenees being less productive than the southern slopes as well as lacking the mineral wealth found on the Spanish side. Thus the French Basques have, to a large extent, remained "a handful of small farmers and fishermen tilling the earth and fishing the seas . . . in glorious anonymity," a more conservative element retaining much of the traditionalism of their ancestors.³⁴

In contrast, the Spanish Basque provinces are so imbued with the spirit of progress and commerce that one early writer describes the inhabitants as the "Yankees of

³²V. S. Pritchett, The Spanish Temper (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1954), p. 28.

³³Gallop, op. cit., p. 23.

³⁴Ibid., p. 25.

Spain."³⁵ However, a corollary of this modernization and progress has been the discarding of many of the traditional patterns of life.³⁶

Since the Middle Ages group solidarity between these two halves of the Basque race has diminished. During that time both French and Spanish Basques remained neutral during times of crises between France and Spain. This neutrality was given legal sanction under the terms of treaties known as Traités de Bonne Correspondence, numerous examples of which can be found during the period between 1294 and 1694. Furthermore, these treaties were respected by both French and Spanish rulers, who felt that "the Basques could not afford the luxury of war."³⁷ Today this union of spirit has dwindled considerably. During World War I the French Basques, who had gained considerable prestige as soldiers in the French army, often criticized their Spanish neighbors for aiding the Germans by replenishing submarines and by sheltering French deserters in Spain.³⁸ During the writer's recent sojourn in the French province of Basse-Navarre, it appeared that this rift between the French and Spanish Basques subtly manifested itself even in such frontier villages as Arnéguy and Valcarlos, areas in which many

³⁵ McBride, op. cit., p. 63. ³⁶ Gallop, loc. cit.

³⁷ Ibid. ³⁸ Ibid., p. 24.

of the Basques on both sides of the border are bound by family relationships. In the opinion of the writer, it could be possible that the totalitarian policies of the present Spanish government have played a substantial part in contributing toward this situation.³⁹

³⁹Observation of the author.

CHAPTER IV

SOME HYPOTHESIS CONCERNING THE ORIGINS OF THE BASQUES AND THEIR LANGUAGE

The perplexing problem of the origins of the Basques and their language has ever been a Gordian knot to ethnologists and etymologists, and even today one is still confronted by a bewildering array of fanciful and conflicting theories when first approaching the subject. However, by dint of exhaustive studies and investigations some of the earlier theories have been found untenable, and a current authority describes the present situation in the following manner: "Aujourd'hui on peut dire que le problème basque a gagné en profondeur ce qu'il a perdu en extension."¹

To summarize some of the earlier hypotheses, one author divides them into three periods based on the three stages of human evolution as outlined by Auguste Comte: (1) l'ère théologique, (2) l'ère métaphysique, (3) l'ère positive.²

To the Bascologists of the first period, the Basques were held to be the descendants of Tubal, son of Japhet and grandson of Noe, who, coming from Armenia exactly thirty-one years after the Flood, settled in the

¹Veyrin, op. cit., p. 78.

²Ibid., p. 79.

Iberian Peninsula. These theorists concluded that eskuara, or Basque, was the original language of humanity; the language bequeathed to Man by the Creator.³

This theory had its greatest extension in the eighteenth century and was championed by such Basques as Perocheguy of Ainhoa, Dominique Lahetjuzan of Sare, and Iharce of Bidassouet.⁴

The métaphysique period commenced with the publication of Guillaume de Humboldt's book, Recherches sur les habitants primitifs de l'Espagne à l'aide de la langue basque in 1821. During this phase, the theorists were mainly engrossed in proving or disproving a relationship between the Basques and the ancient Iberians. The principal exponents of the Iberian theory were Louis Lucien-Bonaparte, Luchaire, Campion, and especially Schuchardt; this group espoused and further developed the views expressed by Humboldt.

In opposition to the Iberian theory were Blade, Van Eys, and Julien Vinson.⁵ Vinson, regarded as the dean of Basque studies, believed that "from earliest times the Basques have never been more than a small tribe dwelling in a few valleys of the Western Pyrenees."⁶ To corrob-

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 80.

⁶Gallop, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

orate their points, both sides went to great lengths to establish affinities between Basque and various other languages, such as Finnish, Japanese, American Indian, Berber, and Eskimo dialects.⁷ However, as mentioned in the first chapter, many of these studies were based on superficial resemblances between the compared languages.

From these earlier efforts, the necessity for more exact and detailed investigations became obvious, and about 1890 the third, or positive, phase in the study of Basque origins began. This period was characterized by the rejection of many of the over-simplified suppositions concerning Basque origins, and specialized investigations - anthropological, linguistic, etc. - became the mode. Fanciful generalizations could no longer be supported, and the principle that "la race et la langue d'un peuple ne sont pas nécessairement liées" became evident.⁸

In the attempt to establish a Basque-Iberian relationship, one of the hotly contested aspects of the linguistic problem, research suffers from a lack of investigators sufficiently well-versed in the Iberian dialects. Professor Lafon sums up the situation in the following words:

⁷Veyrin, loc. cit.

⁸Ibid., p. 81.

On a beaucoup discuté, et pendant longtemps, sur la question de savoir si le basque était ou n'était pas issu de la langue des Ibères . . .

Un fait a depuis longtemps frappé les chercheurs: le nom de ville, Iliberri, qui signifié en basque "ville neuve", se rencontre dans des régions qui ont été peuplées ou colonisées par les Ibères . . . De ce fait et quelques autres faits analogues, mais moins net, certains ont conclu que le basque était issu de l'Ibère. On possède des inscriptions en langue Ibère, dont la plus anciennes, est du Ve siècle avant Jésus-Christ. Aujourd'hui, grâce aux travaux du grand archéologue espagnol, Don Manuel Joines-Moreno, on les lit d'une façon sûre. Mais on ne les comprend pas bien que quelques mots ressemblent curieusement à certains mots basques. Le basque ni aucune autre langue connue, ne permet d'en saisir ni même d'en deviner la signification. Le basque est peut-être apparenté à l'Ibère, mais il n'en y est pas sûr. Pour savoir d'où il vient (le basque), il faut chercher des langues auxquelles on puisse la comparer méthodiquement.⁹

In order to demonstrate a relationship between the Iberian dialects and Basque, Schuchardt diagrammed the declensions of Basque and Iberian words, and although this investigation indicated a parallelism between Iberian and Basque, Schuchardt's findings have not been accepted as conclusive.¹⁰

Other writers in the controversy disagree as to whether the ancestors of the Basques were Iberians from North Africa or those from the Caucasus. The following excerpts from two conflicting articles illustrate this

⁹Notes from the course of René Lafon, University of Bordeaux, France, 1953-54.

¹⁰Veyrin, op. cit., p. 82.

dispute: One writer affirms that the Hebrews were part of the Iberian race and that certain Basque words offer "d'indiscutables possibilités d'identification avec les langues du groupe semito-hamitique." Citing examples of words in the Hebrew holy books having Basque counterparts - e.g., the word makel meaning stick in both Hebrew and Basque - the writer concludes that the Basques are descendants of the Iberian peoples who came from North Africa, and that the Basque language is a mixture of words from the Mongols, the Phoenicians, the Celts, the Greeks, the Romans, the Arabs, and the Germanic tribes.¹¹

In an article written at approximately the same time, another reporter makes the following comment concerning Basque antecedents:

Les Basques descendants des anciens Ibères - ce qui est aujourd'hui prouvé - les Basques sont des Sémites, j'eclatai de rire . . . L'erreur de ce qu'alors on considérait seulement les Ibères sémitiques venus d'Afrique.¹²

This author then cites several authorities: the Russian professor, Nicolai Marr; the Germans, Winkler and Hoffman; and René Lafon, linguist at the University of Bordeaux.

¹¹O. V. de L. Milosz, "Les Origines de la Nation lithuanienne," Mercur de France (Avril, 1937), p. 80.

¹²Francois Duhourcau, "L'Enigme Basque," Mercur de France (Mai, 1936), p. 456.

The account adds that these men have proved that the Basques are Iberian; however, rather than being descendants of the Iberians who came from North Africa they are descendants of the Iberians who came from the Caucasus, a region in southwest Russia which now comprises the modern state of Georgia. He substantiates this by enumerating the similarity of words employed and customs practiced by the Basques and the Georgians.¹³

A more recent article gives further weight to the theory that the ancestors of the Basques wandered to their Pyrenean habitat by European rather than by African migratory paths. The later treatise produces evidence indicating that the Basques must have at one time come into contact with the languages and cults of ancient Greece. This researcher affirms that "lexical evidence" indicates that the Basques were influenced by the "religion of ancient Greece, or what became the religion of Greece, quite apart from such religious influence as may have been exercised upon them during the Roman domination of the Basque country." According to this source contact was probably established in southeastern Europe sometime during the Minoan-Mycenaean Age, a period in which the ancestors of the Basques were making their westward trek.¹⁴

¹³Ibid., p. 464.

¹⁴Elderkin, op. cit., p. 1

To give validity to his hypothesis, the writer undertakes a detailed study of the influences of the ancient Greek cults on the Basque language, asserting that Zagreus-Dionysos was the deity making the "greatest contributions to Basque vocabulary."¹⁵ The importance of the oak tree in Basque tradition is regarded as a carry-over from ancient Greek cults, and even the names of the seven Basque provinces are, according to this theorist, "susceptible of an explanation with the help chiefly of Zagreus."¹⁶

Drawing from a still more remote source, the aforementioned writer avers that additional "confirmation of an eastern origin of pagan Basque cult is furnished by Irish traditions."¹⁷ One of these traditions maintains that the "remote forefathers" of the Irish were Scythians who migrated from Spain. The researcher cites Keating's statement to the effect that the Milesians arrived in Ireland about 1300 B.C., "a date which may prove to have an important bearing upon Basque relation to Dionysiac cult in the east." He then attempts to show a relationship between the Basques and the Scythians by explaining a metaphor common to both languages: In Basque luma means feather, as well as flake of snow; the Scythians also designated snow flakes as feathers.¹⁸

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁸Ibid.

Another theory of Basque origin which is occasionally encountered is that linking the Basques with the ancient inhabitants of the legendary continent of Atlantis. In a recent novel about the Basques the legend is recounted in the following manner:

A la place de l'Océan, il y aurait eu dans les temps anciens une terre, dont faisant partie la montagne basque, de la Rhune au pic d'Orhy, tandis que le Béarn, et tout le reste de la France, n'étaient eux-mêmes qu'une mer. L'immense terre avait été, dans la suite des âges, ensevelie par l'Océan. Il n'en restait que la montagne basque, et les Basques étaient les témoins de ce vieux monde disparu. C'était pourquoi ils ne ressemblaient à aucun autre peuple, pourquoi ils étaient liés entre eux par leur langue magique . . .¹⁹

However, one objection to this theory is that most geologists believe that the continent of Atlantis, if it existed at all, was flooded during the Tertiary period, while - at least up to the present time - no trace of man has been found on the earth before the beginning of the Quaternary period.²⁰

Aimery Picaud, the twelfth century pilgrim quoted in a previous chapter, advances the theory that the Basques have issued from the same race as the Scots. In his account, Picaud maintains that these two groups resemble each other by "leurs coutumes et par leurs traits." His assumption is that in order to extort tribute from the

¹⁹Peyre, op. cit., p. 25.

²⁰Veyrin, op. cit., p. 80.

people of Spain, Julius Caesar sent three groups of men to that country: "les Nubiens, les Ecossais et les pusillanimes gens de Cornouaille." Caesar then ordered his imported brigands to put to death all Spanish males, sparing only the lives of their women.

Coming from the sea, these representatives of the Emperor put to fire and sword everything from Barcelona to Saragossa and from Bayonne to Mount Oca. They were deterred from extending their orbit of carnage by the Castilians, and were held in the region which now roughly comprises the Basque country. Here they killed all indigenous males and begot children by their women. The offspring of this union between the invaders and the women of the devastated area became known as Navarraia, which according to Picaud is a distortion of the words non vrai, "car ils ne sont pas issus d'une race pure ou d'une souche légitime."²¹

Another school of thought in respect to Basque origins stresses a relationship between the Basques and the Indians of North and South America. During a sojourn in France, the writer heard this theory discussed by a priest who had been a professor of ancient languages. According to the priest, the Basques originated from the same ancestral stock as the American Indians, the branch giving issue

²¹Vielliard, op. cit., pp. 31-33.

to the Indians migrating eastward while the group whence sprang the Basques migrated west. This theory is summed up in the following manner in the previously quoted novel on the Basques:

. . . les deux races étaient les débris des premières populations de la terre. L'une et l'autre, à son dire, procédaient des hauts plateaux asiatiques: les Basques s'étaient gardés intacts dans leur massif pyrénéen, les Indiens, passés par l'Alaska, avaient peuplé le continent Américain. Les deux peuples, qui dataient de la nuit des temps, s'étaient rencontrés enfin dans la Prairie, reconnus à leurs langues soeurs, à leurs cris, irrintzina . . . Il était regrettable que les bergers basques n'eussent pas emmené leurs pottoka, frères des mustangs des guerriers peaux-rouges.²²

One authority, who goes to great lengths to establish a relationship between the Basques and the American Indians, gives the following account of the early migrations of the groups who subsequently became the progenitors of the Basques and the Indians of the Americas:

Sincrónicamente con el hundimiento de Auste-erria bajo las aguas del océano austral obligando a nuestros padres a emigrar al sur de Asia, a Ekitu, a Eskal-erria, i América . . .²³

He bolsters this theory by citing the linguistic similarities between Basque and Indian dialects, continuing:

Hallaréis las pruebas evidentes de que nuestro idioma eskara es el genitor, la raíz etimológico del Copto o

²²Peyré, op. cit., p. 166.

²³Florencio de Basaldúa, Prehistoria e Historia de la Civilización Indígena de América (Buenos Aires: Editorial Belgrano, 1925), p. x.

Egipcio, del Samskritz, del Maya, del Piruario, i de la mayor parte de las palabras del antiguo Griego e idiomas derivados²⁴

Another writer, discussing the resemblances between Basque and certain dialects of the Canadian Indians, writes of "l'étrange ressemblance phonétique qui existe entre l'euskara et certaines langues des anciennes tribus sauvages du Canada." He cites proper names, particularly in the Huron dialect, that have "un air basque très marqué." However, he adds that many of these names have a different significance in Huron than in Basque.²⁵

Later investigations have shed new light on the subject of Basque origins, and with the development of new scientific and technical processes, additional avenues of approach to the problem have been opened. In a blood study made by Professor J. B. S. Haldane of England and Dr. A. S. Wiener of New York on a group of four hundred Basques it was revealed that nearly all of the subjects were Rh negative. The researchers were led to conclude that inasmuch as "all European racial groups have an estimated mixture of sixty per cent Rh positive and forty per cent Rh negative genes" (pointing out that the original Europeans were all Rh negative, the positive Rh factor having been brought to

²⁴Ibid., p. xii.

²⁵Pierre Lhande, S.J., *L'émigration Basque* (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1910), p. 48.

Europe by invaders from Asia), "the Rh negative Basques probably inhabited Europe longer than the mixed or positive Rh peoples."²⁶

Another writer pursues the theme in the following manner:

Anthropologists like to feel that the Basques are really not so mysterious after all, that they are merely the remnants of pre-Indo-European days in Europe, and that they are related either to Mesolithic or Neolithic European men who entered the continent from Africa and Asia Minor in the wake of the last glacier.

These writers feel that the Basque language, like the people, is a remnant of the Stone Age.²⁷

Veyrin, in his detailed study of the Basques, refers to another aspect of the problem of Basque origin verified by blood classifications. He writes that blood typing of Basque subjects indicates that an extremely high percentage of the group entered the classification of O or A, whereas there is an almost complete absence of B or AB types. He concludes that inasmuch as blood types are invariable and hereditary, the Basque race must be "très pure; la plus occidentale et la moins asiatisée de l'Europe."²⁸

²⁶"Rh Factor Clue to Race," Science Newsletter, 54:149, September 4, 1948.

²⁷"The People Who Came from Nowhere", loc. cit.

²⁸Veyrin, op. cit., p. 85.

Hypotheses Concerning the Basque Language

Most attempts to unravel the riddle of the Basques have emphasized the linguistic approach, a fact readily seen in the preceding summary of conjectures anent the Basque origin. Professor Lafon, under whom the writer studied, also stressed the linguistic aspects of the problem, hence much of the material quoted in the following paragraphs has come from notes taken at his lectures.

Today the Basque language continues to defy classification, and, as mentioned at the beginning of this paper, one even encounters such speculations as the relationship between the Basque and Japanese languages. One account quotes a former Archbishop of Tokyo, S.G. Mgr. Mugabure, as exclaiming, "Je fus très frappé," déclarait-il, "d'entendre une phrase presque basque dès mon arrivée au Japon . . ." Upon his arrival in Japan, the Archbishop asked a Japanese domestic for several sheets of writing paper. In a few instants, the domestic returned with a single sheet of paper, uttering the Japanese phrase "kore bakari da," a phrase having a Basque counterpart in "kori bakarrik da." The archbishop explained further that he noted more than eighty terms "presque identiques dans les deux langues." From his observations he concluded that the missionaries of Basque origin had a much easier time learning Japanese than the missionaries from other

parts of France; "ils saisissent beaucoup mieux, notamment, l'accent si particulier des Nippons."²⁹

Going further afield, George Borrow in his work, "The Bible in Spain," attempted to show a resemblance between the vocabularies of Basque and Hindu.³⁰

Also, as previously stated, a not insignificant number of researchers have devoted much time to studying the relationship between Basque and the Indian dialects of both North and South America.³¹ Lhande cites Le Comte de Charancy, John Reade, and Sir William Dawson as outstanding "américanistes consciencieux," who have done important work in this field. However, Lhande states that despite the important contributions of these men, "ces honorables savants n'ont pas encore établi leurs thèse assez solidement pour les faire triompher."³²

The theme that Basque is a remnant tongue of the Stone Age also finds many supporters, and Professor Lafon emphasizes the point that "aucun texte rédigé dans une langue actuellement déchiffrée ne nous montre une langue plus ancienne que le basque . . ."³³ Further substantia-

²⁹Lhande, op. cit., p. 128.

³⁰Gallop, op. cit., p. 85.

³¹cf. p. 48.

³²Lhande, op. cit., p. 49.

³³Notes from the course of Professor René Lafon.

tion of this point of view can be gleaned from the fact that the terms for most sharp-edged or pointed instruments possess the common root aitz, which means "stone" in Basque. This could easily indicate the antiquity of the language, a language conceivably retaining words dating back to neolithic times. The following is a list of such words:

- Aitz-urr: lit., stone for pulling to pieces;
i.e., pick, or mattock.
- Aitz-hortz: lit., stone-tooth; i.e., bill-hook.
- Aitz-kor: lit., raised stone; i.e., axe.
- Aitz-koltu: lit., small raised stone; i.e., hatchet.
- Aitz-tto: lit., small stone; i.e., knife.
- Aitz-tturr: lit., small stone for tearing;
i.e., scissors.
- Aitz-kon: lit., stone-point; i.e., dart.³⁴

Although the Basques have incorporated many borrowed words into their language, there are still a large number of terms of purely Basque origin which bear no resemblance to any known language. Words such as buru, "head"; handi, "large"; ikusi, "to see"; nor, "who"; and zazpi, "seven" have no Germanic, Latin, or Slavic correlative; in fact, they cannot be classified with any other words of Indo-European origin.³⁵

In discussing origins of the Basque language, Professor Lafon emphasizes application of the comparative method. From his research he concludes that Basque not

³⁴Gallop, op. cit., pp. 84-85.

³⁵This and most of the following material is taken from notes of Professor Lafon's lectures.

only defies classification within the Indo-European group of tongues, but that despite the Basque words which resemble Hebrew, Arabic, or the Berber dialects, "on peut affirmer que le basque n'appartient pas à la grande famille que toutes ces langues constituent et qu'il'on appelle la famille chemito-semitique . . ."

One of the main difficulties in undertaking a comparative study of the Basque language is the complexity of the language itself. In this assertion the writer must admit that he is taking issue with a statement made by Professor Lafon. During one of the opening lectures of his class, Lafon stated that in the past, students of language have resigned themselves to failure in the study of Basque by overemphasizing its difficulty. It must be admitted in support of his contention that Professor Lafon himself learned Basque as a student; furthermore, relatives whom the writer visited in the Basque country maintained that several German soldiers learned to express themselves in Basque during the occupation of France.³⁶

In leaving the question of facility or difficulty of the Basque language to the decision of the reader, it should be pointed out that to think in Basque requires an attitude of mind totally different from that of thinking in

³⁶ Interview with family P. of Mendive, B. P.

any other European language. To convey different shades of meaning in Basque, suffixes and internal particles are merely plastered onto root words. For example, to translate the simple sentence, "I give the book to the boy," into Basque would require the following transposition of words:³⁷

Book-the boy-the-to in-the-act-of-giving I-have-to-him
Libura mutilari ematen diot

Another peculiarity of the language is that often a single word may mean a whole sentence; this arises from adding suffixes and internal particles to key words. This results in such lengthy words as the following:³⁸

Azpilcuelagaraycosaroyarenberecolarrea - in English:
"the lower field of the high hill of Azpicuelta."

To add to the complexity of the situation, the Basque language varies in the different provinces and regions, and often a Basque traveling from one valley to another in his own country will find it difficult to understand his neighbors.³⁹

Comparatively little progress has been made to date in the classification of the Basque language. Professor

³⁷"The People Who Came From Nowhere," op. cit., p. 68.

³⁸Lothrop Stoddard, "Those Mysterious Basques," The Christian Science Monitor (December 9, 1936), p. 8.

³⁹Charles Wertenbaker, "A Reporter at Large," The New Yorker, XXVI (November 11, 1950), p. 108.

Lafon, still in the process of establishing his hypothesis concerning the etymology of Basque, summarizes the results of his present research as follows:

On peut dire aujourd'hui que les seules langues qui prétendent à une comparaison methodique avec le basque sont des langues parlées à l'autre extrémité de l'Europe, sur les deux versants du Caucase et de ces plaines evoisnantes, et que l'on appelle pour cette raison langues Caucasiques ou Caucasiennes . . .⁴⁰

One of the difficulties in making a comparative study between Basque and the Caucasian language stems from the diversity of the latter. Lafon sets the number of Caucasian dialects at approximately forty, adding that these differ to such an extent that only in the last thirty years has a relationship been established between the languages spoken in the northern and southern sections of the Caucasus.⁴¹

The situation is further complicated by the fact that some of the Caucasian languages are themselves subdivided into dialects yet imperfectly understood. Starting from the coast and going east, the Basque language is divided into the following dialects: "le biscayen, . . . le guipuzcoan . . . le haut navarrais (septentrional et meridional); d'autre part le labourdin, puis le bas-navar-

⁴⁰Notes from the course of Professor René Lafon, "Le Basque et Les Langues Caucasiques."

⁴¹Ibid.

rais (occidental et oriental), enfin le souletin;" their common origin is obvious.⁴² Conversely, the Caucasian languages manifest an extreme diversity in their phonetic systems, their morphologies, and their vocabularies. For example, some possess a great number of suffixes, others relatively few; certain have words, apparently related, which assume such a variety of forms that the specialist and non-specialist alike are often completely baffled. The word for heart, as an illustration, has the following forms in various languages of the Caucasian group: gu, duog, urki, and rik.⁴³

The first attempt to establish a systematic relationship between the Caucasian languages and Basque was undertaken by Alfred Trombetti in 1925. During this year his treatise, Le origini della lingua basca, appeared at Bologna. Although Trombetti was not a real specialist in any of the compared languages, he was the first to demonstrate similarities in vocabulary and grammar between the Caucasian tongues and Basque.⁴⁴

Other early writers attempting to establish the above theory were Hugo Schuchardt, Heinrich Winkler, and

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³René Lafon, "Le Basque et Les Langues Caucasiques" Gernika, Eusko-Jakintza, op. cit., p. 41.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 42.

Nicholas Marr.

Another important work on this subject is Georges Dumézil's Introduction à la grammaire comparée des langues caucasiennes du Nord et des Recherches comparatives sur le verbe caucasien, published in 1933. In this dissertation Dumézil dedicates a chapter to the comparison of the languages spoken in the northern Caucasus with Basque. According to his theory, Basque, the Caucasian languages of the north, and the Caucasian languages of the south constitute the three sole surviving branches of the family, "ibéro-caucasien."⁴⁵ In comparing these languages Dumézil goes so far as to affirm, "Je crois pouvoir affirmer que la comparaison du caucasien du Sud avec le caucasien du Nord ne pourra se faire avec quelque sûreté qu'après la comparaison du caucasien du Nord et du basque."⁴⁶

Following are some of the points of rapprochement between Basque and the Caucasian languages:

1) Almost all the personal pronouns in Basque have a corresponding form in some of the diverse languages of the Caucasus, similarities which cannot be explained by the borrowing process or by coincidence. One outstanding example is the Basque pronoun for you, written as zu. In var-

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 43.

ious Caucasian dialects this takes the form of se or su.⁴⁷

2) The Basques possess a plural suffix, -tzu; this has a corresponding form in the Caucasian languages of the northwest. One dialect of this group uses the suffix -thawa to form the plural of words designating conscient beings.⁴⁸

3) The Basque word for fire, su, has a counterpart in all of the Caucasian groups in the form of eu or ov, or in analogous forms such as substantives denoting fire, or as roots signifying to burn.⁴⁹

4) The opposition of the patient, or subject, and the agent, so important in the Basque verbal system, is similar in the Caucasian systems. Certain Caucasian languages also contain morphological elements identical with those so important in Basque conjugations. The prefix ra-, which forms the causative verbs in Basque, the past participle suffix -i, and the relative suffix -n are found in the Georgian dialects.⁵⁰

Although the vocabularies of Basque and the Caucasian languages do not lend themselves to as precise an

⁴⁷Notes from the course of Professor René Lafon.

⁴⁸Gernika, Eusko-Jakentza, op. cit., p. 43

⁴⁹Lafon, notes, loc. cit.

⁵⁰Gernika, Eusko-Jakentza, op. cit., p. 44.

analysis as the morphological structure, there do exist certain points of similarity which can be validly compared as to sense and form, agreements which cannot be attributed solely to interborrowing. The following is a short list of such words:

- 1) Otso, meaning "wolf" in Basque, has a correlative, botso, in a language of the northeastern Caucasus.
- 2) The Basque word for "forest", baso, assumes the form of vatsa in two languages of the northeastern Caucasian group.
- 3) Lodi, denoting the quality of big, large, or heavy in Basque, has a near likeness in the Georgian word lodi, which means "large rock."
- 4) Soka, meaning "rope" or "cord" in Basque, appears to be related to the Georgian word for rope - thoki. In this, and other words, the Basque letter s seems to correspond to the Georgian th. It appears that the Spanish have also borrowed the word, altering it to soga.⁵¹

Although there exist many more words than those in the above list, Lafon admits his early reluctance to accept the theories advanced by Trombetti and Marr concerning the relationship between Basque and the Caucasian languages. However, he expresses his subsequent acceptance of this

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 44-45.

hypothesis in the following words:

Il me paraît impossible d'expliquer autrement que par une origine commune un pareil ensemble de correspondances régulières portant sur des mots, des éléments morphologiques et des sons . . .⁵²

Uhlenbeck, another linguist of note, in 1923 acknowledged the similarities in vocabulary and structure between Basque and the languages of the Caucasian group, yet expressed doubt as to their common origin. He later recanted his early skepticism, and in 1947 wrote, "il devient de plus en plus évident qu'au point de vue historique et génétique, on ne doit pas séparer le basque des langues du Caucase."⁵³ As to the degree of relationship, Uhlenbeck maintains that although evidence indicates a relationship between these languages, this does not necessarily mean that Basque is a Caucasian language, belonging exclusively to this group. Rather, Uhlenbeck feels that Basque is related to the Caucasian group of languages in the same manner that Greek, without being a Germanic language such as English or German, is related to that group of Germanic tongues which together form the Indo-European group. However, one marked difference in this relationship lies in the fact that there are many more languages than the afore-

⁵²Ibid., p. 45.

⁵³Notes from the course of Lafon, op. cit.

mentioned which comprise the Indo-European group, whereas no other languages related to Basque or the Caucasian group have yet been found. Thus, according to Uhlenbeck, the Basque and the Caucasian languages together constitute the family designated as "euscaro-caucasique."⁵⁴

A new problem arises when attempting to relate the family "euscaro-caucasique" to other languages. As Professor Lafon expresses it:

Il est impossible de dire, dans l'état actuel des recherches, s'il existe ou non un lien de parenté entre la famille euscaro-caucasique et la famille indo-européenne. D'autre part, il est possible que les langues parlées au refois dans le vaste intervalle qui sépare le Pays basque du Caucase soient apparentées au basque et aux langues caucasiennes, tout en ayant plus d'affinités les unes avec celles-ci, les autres avec celui-là. Mais on ne peut encore rien dire, à ce sujet, de sur et de précis, car il s'agit de langues qui sont encore mal connues, comme l'étrusque et certaines langues anciennes de l'Asie antérieure dont nous avons des textes en écriture cunéiforme . . .

Recent attempts have been made to demonstrate rapprochements between the family "euscaro-caucasiques" and certain languages spoken in Siberia. There have been words found in the languages of northeastern Siberia which are analogous to, and even have the same meaning as, Basque words. However, definite conclusions cannot yet be deduced from these extraordinary likenesses.⁵⁵

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid.

CHAPTER V

THE BASQUE: PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS, TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS

Although in Chapter III allusions were made to the early reputation of the Basques and recent evaluations of the Basque character, it may be helpful to the reader to learn in more detail about the physical make-up of the people of the Pyrenees, as well as their "manners, morals, and customs."

The Basques as a group appear to possess certain distinct physical characteristics. Dr. Carleton Coon, an American anthropologist, states that the Basques are generally of moderate height, "lightly built, with broad shoulders and narrow hips." According to Dr. Coon the Basques strongly resemble the Iron Age people of Britain; both of these people appear to be characterized by a round-headedness, a characteristic of Alpine people in the Celtic group. The Basque is further described as generally possessing a straight, or very slightly sloped, forehead; a thin, aquiline nose; and a narrow, pointed chin.¹

The Basque facial type appears to be particularly distinctive, and one writer makes the following comment on

¹"The People Who Came from Nowhere," op. cit., p.69.

this point:

It is said that one Basque can spot another on sight . . . This may be due to the fact that the Basque tend to possess a highly distinctive facial type. The typical Basque head is broad and bulges at the brows, but the face beneath narrows to a sharply pointed chin. The result is a curiously triangular cast of countenance.²

The Basque is noted for his hardy physique and exceptional stamina. Frequently encountered are descriptions like the following: "Sturdy and usually barely of medium height, the Basques are the most athletic race of the Peninsula."³ "The Basque is no Spaniard; his powerful physique alone distinguishes him clearly from his Spaniard neighbors."⁴ The great French playwright, Molière, makes Basque stamina proverbial by having a character in one of his plays comment, "You made me run like a Basque until I am dead." Charles Wertenbaker, a journalist who wrote a report on his sojourn in the Basque country, describes watching a Basque jump fifteen feet from a mountain ledge and go bounding down the steep mountainside "like an antelope."⁵ At this time his companion, a Basque priest, made

²Stoddard, op. cit., p. 8.

³W. A. Hirst, "The Discontented Basques," The Contemporary Review (December, 1934), p. 678.

⁴Paul Werner, "Euzkadi - Land of the Basques," The Living Age, Vol. 352 (June, 1937), p. 290.

⁵Wertenbaker, op. cit., p. 124.

the statement:

He will run four or five kilometres to his village to play pelota for an hour before dark . . . He has been up since three or four o'clock this morning, but on a day like this he doesn't get enough exercise.⁶

Physically the Basques seem ideally suited for the fast-moving sports in which modern man burns out rapidly.⁷ One can readily appreciate Basque agility and endurance by observing their national game, pelota.

The game is played either bare-handed in a court with only one wall (this is the original form of the game), or with a wicker glove in a court with four walls. The latter is the more popular and professional version of the game, and is called pelota by the Spanish, partie au rebot by the French, and jai-alai by the Cubans, who have adopted the game as a national sport.⁸

In both versions of the game the scoring system is similar to tennis, but based on a 1-2-3 progression of points. The wicker glove used in the faster version is referred to as a chiatera, and is described as a "leather gauntlet strapped on with leather thongs. This glove terminates in a sickle-shaped scoop of wickerwork . . . over

⁶Ibid.

⁷"The People Who Came from Nowhere," op. cit., p. 65.

⁸Alice Curtis Desmond, "Speed Kings of the Pelota Courts," Travel (December, 1932), p. 19.

two feet long and curved at the end." The object of the game is to send the ball into the opposing side's area "so swiftly or at such an angle that it will fall in the required space and yet be unreturnable."⁹

The chistera adds such momentum to the speed of the returned ball that it is almost impossible to observe the ball in flight.¹⁰ The following quotation (made by a tourist in an article entitled "In Pelota men are old at twenty-five"), appropriately describes the game:

In a French village near Biarritz, I watched a championship pelota game . . . It looked as easy as an American handball game to me. So when the match was over, I asked the referee if I might try a game. Although I'm only 30, he said I was too old . . . that men learn to play pelota when they're boys. I was skeptical; so he smiled and said, "If M'sieu doesn't believe me, try it . . .!"

I tried on the chistera, a curved basket attached to a glove. The ball is caught in this contraption and flung back to the fronon, or wall. Since the court is two-thirds as long as a football field, it's strenuous for a beginner!

I played with the two local champions, the Unhassobiscay brothers. They warned me that broken wrists are not uncommon - and that the hard ball can fracture a man's skull. In half an hour, I decided that I was too old for pelota.¹¹

If Basque men are different from Spanish men in physical stamina, so are Basque women different from Span-

⁹Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 56.

¹¹Pagliarulo, op. cit., p. 56.

ish senoritas, being considered lacking in grace when compared with the women of Madrid or Seville, or the lovely Malaguenas. However, Basque women do possess well-cut features, large eyes, and thick chestnut or black hair, which, combined with a simple and effective style of dress, "their stately walk and healthful bloom," results in a certain distinctive charm.¹² Excerpts from articles such as the following, a news report covering the Spanish Civil War, cast an interesting sidelight on these mountaineer women:

Mount Solluve was captured and so was Bermeo on the seacoast, but before it finally fell the prestige of Italian soldiers is said to have received another dent when robust Basque fisherwives threw dozens of them into the sea . . .¹³

Although the physical characteristics mentioned in the foregoing paragraphs are generally held by authorities to distinguish the Basque as a group, it is difficult for the layman to distinguish individual Basques from people of other European ethnic groups. In describing the Basques of the Stockton region, one writer states that "The majority have brown or brown-green eyes, but still there is a noticeable number who have blue eyes. The color of hair ranges from blond to black with medium browns in predominance . . . It would be impossible to select those of

¹²Hirst, op. cit., p. 678.

¹³"Still Bilbao," Time (May 31, 1937), p. 26.

Basque ancestry from a group."¹⁴

One of the keystones of Basque character appears to be an intense love of liberty.¹⁵ This, coupled with their conservatism and their self-respect, has probably been one of the reasons why "the Basques are a relatively unmixed strain of people."¹⁶ Veterans of Caesar's armies in campaigns two thousand years ago told of "proud, fierce warriors they had encountered in the Pyrenees," and even in the 19th century the armies of Isabella II required forty-three years to subjugate the Vascongados, or Basques.¹⁷

This same love of liberty and independence probably prompted the Basques to obtain written agreements, called fueros, with their French and Spanish feudal magnates in the Middle Ages. The fueros were elaborate charters that stipulated what was expected of either party. Whenever the overlord violated his terms of the agreement, "the stubborn Basques would not give him a penny or a single men-at-arms."¹⁸ The Basque fueros had the following provisions:

¹⁴Pagliarulo, op. cit., pp. 4-5.

¹⁵Stoddard, op. cit., p. 8.

¹⁶"The People Who Came from Nowhere," op. cit., p. 69.

¹⁷"Spain: Basque Gesture," Newsweek (May 19, 1947), p. 43.

¹⁸Stoddard, op. cit., p. 9.

- 1) Every pure-blooded Basque to be counted as "noble"
- 2) No central government officials except postmen
- 3) No central government official ever to collect taxes. (They accepted a quota for their provinces, however, and assessed and collected their own taxes.)
- 4) No Basque ever to be conscripted for the army¹⁹

The French Basques were not as successful in maintaining these historic rights as their Spanish brethren; 1789 marks the period in which the French Basques lost their special privileges by entering "the melting pot of a centralized national state."²⁰

In 1839, however, Spanish Basque independence suffered a similar blow as a result of the lost Carlist Wars. At this time they were deprived of their autonomous status. (The Basques had sided with Don Carlos, who had sworn to uphold their traditions.) In 1870 the Basques were defeated in the Second Carlist Wars, and as a result, lost their historic rights.²¹ As late as the 1930's Basque independence reasserted itself, and in 1936 the Spanish Basque provinces enjoyed an autonomous status for approximately ten months. At this time they adopted their own flag, raised their own army of 100,000 men, and, from converted fishing trawlers, developed a navy of three thousand men. Furthermore, during this same period they organized

¹⁹"No Aryans," op. cit., p. 8.

²⁰Stoddard, op. cit., p. 9.

²¹Ibid., p. 9.

their own police force, constructed their own schoolhouses, promulgated their own laws, levied their own taxes, and printed their own textbooks and currency. Madrid handled only the foreign and customs affairs. However, inasmuch as 69 per cent of Spain's explosives and 53 per cent of the merchant fleet came from this area, Franco soon curtailed Basque independence. In the same article the Basque attitude toward the Spanish is summed up in the following words:

The Basque openly regards his Spanish neighbor as a crafty, dishonest, lazy intriguer, and himself as an industrious, simple, humane, stubborn, trusting free-man.²²

Democracy appears to be an almost inherent trait among the Basques, and "the Basque knew liberty and practiced a classless democracy hundreds of years before Columbus discovered America."²³ In fact, as far as their history can be traced they have always been governed by unwritten, democratic laws.²⁴ To this date class distinctions and titles are abhorred in the Basque country, and a native Basque hesitates to address anyone as "Mister".²⁵

Commensurate with the Basque appreciation of independence and democracy is his adherence to his laws. As

²²Wallace, op. cit., p. 75.

²³Ibid., p. 74.

²⁴Werner, op. cit., p. 291.

²⁵Pagliarulo, op. cit., p. 14.

one writer expresses it:

The Basque rarely breaks laws, but when he does, the penalties are severe. His property is so precious that if someone chops down his fruit tree or damages his mill, he may ask the death penalty for the criminal.²⁶

One powerful incentive to the individual Basque for staying within the framework of his own laws may be his sensitivity to group pressure. The inflexibility and severity of the Basque mores is illustrated vividly in the example of community treatment of adulterers. In a situation of this kind the offenders are so openly and publicly ridiculed by their fellow villagers that they find their position in the community almost untenable.²⁷

The independent spirit of the Basques has even molded their religious customs. Although almost one hundred per cent Roman Catholic,²⁸ the Basques have not passively submitted to all the dictates of the Mother Church. Either competitive examinations or parish elections are the methods by which the Basque parish priests are chosen. Furthermore, the Basques refuse to allow their Bishops to mingle in secular affairs,²⁹ and as a crowning assertion of their independence, some of the Basque services are con-

²⁶Wallace, op. cit., p. 75.

²⁷Interview with family P., Mendive, B. P.

²⁸Wallace, op. cit., p. 74. ²⁹Stoddard, op. cit., p. 9

ducted in the native tongue rather than Latin.³⁰ During the Spanish Inquisition of the 15th century, the Basques were so obdurate in their resistance to the movement that the Inquisitors were forced "to flee from this historic region in Northern Spain by crowds of enraged fishermen and vintners who threatened the priestly searchers after heresy with boat hooks and pruning knives."³¹

In more recent times, a Basque priest wrote a letter to the Bishop of San Sebastian in which he indicted the Spanish hierarchy "for its failure to hold the Franco dictatorship to moral accountability."³² Following is a translation of the letter:

Without fear of exaggeration and without fear of contradiction, we can assert that the representatives of the national (Franco) movement perpetrated far more crimes in the four Basque provinces than did the Republicans. Not only priests and monks but the people were cruelly tortured. Decent people were shot to death and punishments of all sorts were imposed on countless individuals for the most part without legal procedure . . . The Spanish episcopate, which so severely condemned the crimes of one party, did not pronounce a single syllable concerning the crimes of the other. Why this difference in judgement on the two parties in the Civil War? That is the question our people are asking.

The tenacity with which the Basques have maintained

³⁰ Interview with Mrs. L., Stockton.

³¹ "Basque Priests Protest," The Christian Century, (June 6, 1951), p. 678.

³² Ibid., p. 679.

their independence is equalled by the persistence with which they have adhered to some of their ancient customs - customs which to us seem strange and primitive. One practice has occurred every August for the past seven centuries. During this period French and Spanish border officials verify the boundary posts on the Spanish Frontier, and "after a mutual exchange of greetings, a signed report is drafted as to the number of boundary stones found demolished. This is pure formality, as nothing is ever done about it."³³

Another custom occurs annually on the thirteenth of July. At this time the French Basques donate three heifers to the Spanish Basques as rent for grazing rights in the communes belonging to Spain. A ceremony accompanies the transaction, three Spanish and three French delegates taking part. These delegates meet at a boundary stone called La Borne St. Martin, and on this stone they place their hands one on top of the other in a gesture of mutual friendship and respect. A feast follows the ritual at which the Spaniards traditionally furnish the boiled mutton, while the French furnish roast ducks.³⁴

Another activity which has become almost traditional

³³A. M. Tyler, "With the Basque Peasants in the Pyrenees," Travel (February, 1937), p. 34.

³⁴Ibid.

among the Basques is that of contrabanding. Pierre Loti in his informative novel of the Basque country dedicates much of his plot to describing this activity so intensively carried on in the Pyrenees. He sums up the Basque proclivity to smuggling in the following sentence: "Contrebandier et joueur de pelote, - deux choses d'ailleurs qui vont bien ensemble et qui sont basques essentiellement."³⁵ Wertenbaker wrote of an incident in which Don Bernardo, the Basque priest, explained that he had been up since three o'clock in the morning holding Mass for early morning hunters, and "after that I had to say Mass for the smugglers . . . They begin coming in as the hunters go out."³⁶

It should be pointed out in regard to contrabanding that this evasion of the civil law is not inconsistent with the previous reference to Basque adherence to laws, since the laws in the first instance are the group laws of the Basques themselves and not restrictions imposed by an alien or external power.

A more personal activity of the Basques is the wedding feast. One writer describes a Basque wedding which took place in a barn converted into a banquet room. This "hall" was made spotless, and long benches and tables for

³⁵Pierre Loti, *Ramuntcho*, C. Fontaine, ed., D. C. Heath and Company, Boston, c. 1903, p. 7.

³⁶Wertenbaker, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

more than one hundred guests were set up "under the stalls of eight browsing cows who looked down upon the scene with calm indifference."³⁷ Most Basque weddings are expensive affairs costing several thousand francs and lasting for hours. Much food and wine is consumed, and two professional rhymesters, called Koblaris, engage in an impromptu contest of wit. Each verbal volley is acknowledged with bumpers of wine by the guests.³⁸ After the wedding ceremony, a procession of guests follows the bride to her new home. There she is received by her in-laws, after first going through a mock ceremony in which she stands on the outside of the threshold and answers questions put to her by in-laws on the other side of the barred front door. To her new home the bride always brings the traditional implements of farming which signify her station in life: a straw sunbonnet, a wooden rake, and a spade.³⁹

The modern weddings differ somewhat from those of former days. In the ancient ceremonies

The bride's trousseau was driven in great pomp to her fiance's house on a chariot drawn by gayly decked cows, the rake, distaff and bedspread well in evidence. Behind walked four young men carrying the mattress on long rods, followed by the shepherd and his flock. After the wedding and a brief halt at the cemetery (the Basques always associate their departed

³⁷Tyler, op. cit., p. 50.

³⁸Ibid., p. 50.

³⁹Ibid.

in all rituals), the procession went to the bride's new home.⁴⁰

After her marriage, the Basque woman plays a humble role in her home until the time that she becomes either a mother-in-law or a widow; when she attains either of these stations she becomes the head of the household. Prior to this time, however, "she waits on her husband, never even sitting down at the table while he eats. The Basque man always has precedence, whether in church, home, or play."⁴¹

Although in her domestic role the Basque woman is subordinate to her husband, her legal status is high. If she is the eldest child of her family, she inherits the ancestral property. Furthermore, she is generally treated with respect among her contemporaries, and "in the folkways an insult in the presence of women is punished much more severely than a similar offence among men."⁴²

Another illustration of the secondary position of the married Basque women in relation to their husbands can be observed at funerals. The funerals accorded husbands are generally much more elaborate than those accorded to wives. Described below is an example of the ceremony that follows the death of a Basque husband:

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 35.

⁴²Pagliarulo, op. cit., p. 16.

After death at the stroke of twelve, the widow goes to the barn, and the cattle and the livestock are made to stand as she pronounces the ritual words: "Arise, the master is dead." A funeral repast is subsequently held. Basque funerals like weddings are times of revelry. Lambs and calves are slaughtered and wine barrels are opened, and there is often laughter and song.⁴³

In their church services the Basques adhere to another unique custom. Rather than attending Mass as a family unit, Basque men and women follow a definite seating arrangement. The women, who go to church draped in veils like nuns, occupy the main floor of the church and are grouped around the organ, while the men sit in the galleries. Seated in this fashion, the women sing the Basque hymns while the men sing the refrains. After the services are concluded, the priest customarily divests himself of his sacramental robes and engages in a game of pelota with the village youngsters. At the stroke of twelve the game is halted, and the players reverently bow their heads, berets in hand, while the priest intones a prayer.⁴⁴

Another Basque custom which seems unusual in Western European cultures is that to which the Basques refer as trachasia.⁴⁵ This is the practice of swathing newborn infants in bandages until they resemble miniature mummies. The babies are wrapped twice a day in this manner until

⁴³Tyler, op. cit., p. 50.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 34.

⁴⁵Interview with Mrs. L., Stockton.

they are six months old. At the end of this time their arms are freed, although the rest of their bodies remain bandaged. When the child attains the age of one year, the practice is discontinued altogether. This custom may partially account for the erect carriage and the straight back and legs of the Basque, and may be compared with the binding of papooses by the North American Indians. The practice of trachasia is being abandoned in the present day, however. According to a Basque informant in this country there has been very little observance of the custom in the last fifty years.⁴⁶

To conclude this brief summary of some of the more bizarre Basque customs, it seems only proper that amplification be made of the term irrintzina, reference to which was made in an earlier chapter. Irrintzina is the Basque yell, a cry used by the Basques long before the era of recorded history. As one author states, it corresponds to a large extent to the war whoop of the North American Indians, with the exception that among the Basques the cry is usually voiced to express great joy. One can hear the irrintzina at festivals or at successful hunting expeditions, and it is also used by the Basques to express their relief after going through periods of great stress. Loti

⁴⁶Ibid.

describes the yell in the following words:

Un cri s'élève suraigu, terrifiant . . . Il est parti de ces notes très hautes qui n'appartiennent d'ordinaire qu'aux femmes, mais avec quelque chose de rauque et de puissant qui indique plutôt le mâle sauvage; il a le mordant de la voix des chacals et il garde quand même on ne sait quoi d'humain qui fait davantage frémir . . . Il avait commencé comme un haut cri d'agonie, et voici qu'il s'achève et s'éteint en une sorte de rire sinistrement burlesque, comme le rire des fous.⁴⁷

⁴⁷Loti, op. cit., pp. 46-47.

CHAPTER VI

BASQUE LITERATURE

From the foregoing chapter which delineates some of the complexities of the Basque language, one can readily understand why the literature of this obscure group of people is little known outside the linguistic boundaries of Eskual-herria. Furthermore, due to the variety of Basque dialects - eight spoken in seven provinces whose combined population is less than 800,000 - the written material in Basque is never readily understood by all the inhabitants of the Basque country itself. As l'Abbé Pierre Lafitte describes the situation in the preface to his Grammaire Basque:

. . . le basque n'est pas une langue unifiée, mais un ensemble de dialectes et de sous-dialectes, qui d'ailleurs se compénètrent inextricablement; les limites sont difficiles à déterminer, sauf si on se place à un point de vue très particulier, comme par exemple la conjugaison . . .¹

The most ancient book in Basque is Bernard Dechepare's Linguae Vasconum Primitiae. Printed at Bordeaux in 1545, this work was a collection of Basque verse written by the poet Dechepare, who was rector at Saint-Michel-

¹Pierre Lafitte, Grammaire Basque (Navarro-Labourdin Litteraire), (Bayonne, Libraire "Le Livre", Rue Thiers, 9, 1944), pp. 5-6.

le-Vieux in Basse-Navarre. Unfortunately, little is known of Dechepare outside of what he, himself, disclosed to his readers. In his poetic works, Dechepare did not hesitate to mix the pious expressions of a robust faith and the love songs of a "jeunesse orageuse," with diatribes against political adversaries. There is now only one copy extant of this work, and it is at the Bibliothèque Nationale in France.²

The second Basque work of note was a translation of the New Testament, the catechism of Calvin, and divers other Protestant texts.³ Written by Jean de Liçarrague, a priest converted to Protestantism, this book appeared in 1571 under the title: Jesus-Christ Gure Jaunaren Testamentu berria. Despite its archaisms, this translation is of considerable importance due to the fact that Liçarrague, a native of Briscous, was well versed in Basque. Published at the expense of Jeanne d'Albret,⁴ this work was written mainly in the dialect of Labordin-littéraire. However, it contains verb forms coming from the dialect of Bas-Navarrais and even the dialect of Soule. In his translation of the "Catechisme de Calvin," Liçarrague is less faithful to

²Veyrin, op. cit., p. 213.

³Notes from the course of Lafon.

⁴Veyrin, Ibid.

Basque form and style; this translation is somewhat strained, the phraseology patterned after Greek, Latin, and even French forms rather than Basque.⁵

In addition to his translation of the New Testament, Liçarrague had another Protestant catechism, as well as a calendar, printed in Basque. However, these did not have the literary importance of his New Testament.⁶

Veyrin sums up the importance of Dechepare and Liçarrague in the following manner:

Dechepare et Liçarrague: une brochure de cinquante pages, un gros livre de plus de cinq cents, ces deux oeuvres primordiales remplissent à elles seules tout le XVI^e siècle basque-français. Leur différence symbolise déjà curieusement l'aspect général que conservera la littérature euskarienne tout au long de son développement. Deux courants: Celui de la littérature profane qui s'amorce dans Dechepare, mince ruisseau au flot intermittent; quelques noms à peine suffiront à la jalonner jusqu'à nos jours. Parallèlement, un fleuve d'ouvrages religieux, qui continue - mais dans le cadre de la doctrine catholique - la tradition inaugurée par le huguenot Liçarrague. On ne peut qu'admirer l'abondance de cette pieuse production (où dominant, il est vrai, les simples traductions) si l'on considère surtout qu'elle s'adresse en France à un public de moins de cent mille Basques.⁷

With the advent of the seventeenth century, the amount of material written in Basque showed a marked increase, and in 1643 at Bordeaux a prose work entitled

⁵Notes, op. cit.

⁶Veyrin, op. cit., p. 213.

⁷Ibid.

Guero appeared. Written by Pedro de Axular, a native of Urdax in Navarre, this work is considered a Basque classic.⁸ The author's objective in writing Guero, which translates to "after" in English, is explained by the subtitle as an attempt to show "combien on fait mal en remettant à demain de faire son devoir."⁹ In this six hundred page work, Axular, who was also the curé at Sare in Labourd, admonishes his readers against the danger of postponing conversions and other religious duties. The work is, to a large extent, a random compilation of commentaries on the Ten Commandments, together with citations from divers religious works, and although a compilation, is extremely interesting to read because of the personal commentaries of the author. Writing with the thought of his flock uppermost in mind, Axular gives a valuable psychological picture of the Basques of his time. In Guero the principal shortcomings of these people seem to emerge as:

- 1) Gormandica (gluttony)
- 2) Paillardica (wantonness)
- 3) Désir de vengeance (vengefulness)¹⁰

Despite the subject matter, combined with a tendency toward erudition described as "Renaissance," Guero is described as a truly original work with passages possessing "verve savoureuse." The great connoisseur of Basque liter-

⁸Notes, op. cit.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

ature, l'abbé Pierre Lafitte is quoted as referring to Axular's literary contribution in the following manner:

Axular est tout à fait basque, par l'adaptation aux mœurs du pays, l'esprit, la syntaxe, la richesse torrentueuse du vocabulaire. Il est le premier qui ait su, sans torturer, ni guinder, ni faire grimacer le basque, l'élever à des concepts où il n'avait certainement jamais atteint.¹¹

Although the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were prolific periods for Basque religious works, none of them achieved the literary stature of Guero. Some of the principal French Basque writers of this period were Chourio, Haraneder, Larreguy, and Baratciart.¹² However, another seventeenth century writer who deserves special mention is the man from Mauléon, Arnaud d'Oihenart. A magistrate by profession, Oihenart was a student of philology and the first Basque historian and folklorist.¹³ One of his historical works is entitled Noticia Utriusque Vasconiae, while another of importance is his collection of Basque proverbs. The latter, published in 1657, contained approximately seven hundred proverbs with their French translations. Oihenart is also the author of a number of Basque poems. Although the poems are not of particularly great importance, the eleven or twelve hundred known verses are

¹¹Veyrin, op. cit., p. 214.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., p. 215.

interesting for the fact that Oihenart was the only seventeenth century Basque poet to write of love. Although sometimes bordering on preciosity, Oihenart's verse in some passages does not lack in brilliance and freshness.¹⁴

In comparing Oihenart with his poetic predecessor, Dechepare, Lafon affirms that "il est moins original que Dechepare, et les sentiments chantés sont, en tout cas, moins sincères." As to Oihenart's collections of proverbs, the majority of them are Biscayan in origin. Furthermore, due to faulty punctuation, some of Oihenart's writing is difficult to read and translate.¹⁵ However, as Veyrin concludes, "la pureté de la langue et la concision du style témoignent, comme le souhaitait Oihenart, des possibilités littéraires de l'eskuara."¹⁶

Mention should also be made of three linguistic curiosities of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century. The first, published at Lyon in 1620, was a manual of conversation for French, Spanish, and Basque. Appearing under the title of L'Interprect, this manual, written by an author named Voltoire, was modified and re-edited several times at Bayonne with the new title of Thresor des trois langues.

¹⁴Notes, op. cit.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Veyrin, op. cit., p. 215.

Another work, first printed in 1632 at Rouen, was a treatise on navigation entitled Les Voyages aventureux du capitaine Martin de Hoyarsabal, habitant de Cubiburu. Its translation into Basque was undertaken by Piarres Detcherri and appeared in 1677 at Bayonne.

Unfortunately, the third Basque literary curio, entitled Lau-urdiri, remained unpublished due to a lack of funds. Written in 1718 by Johannes d'Etcheberri, a medical doctor of Sare, this work remained in almost complete obscurity until 1908, at which time Don Julio de Urquijo had some copies made. Lau-urdiri, together with Etcheberri's magnificent justification of the Basque language, Eskuararen hatsapenak, established him as a writer equal to the renowned Axular, "maître de la littérature sacrée." In addition to these works, Etcheberri wrote extensively as a grammarian and lexicographer of his native language.¹⁷

The dawning of the eighteenth century brought a marked increase in the number of written Basque song lyrics. Most of the known pastorals were written during this century. However, the period failed to produce any outstanding Basque writers on the French side of the frontier. On the Spanish side the situation was more favorable, and the name of a Jesuit father, Manuel de Larramendi, deserves

¹⁷Ibid.

mention. Although Larramendi exhorted the Basques of the province of Guipuzcoa to maintain their ancient tongue, he himself, paradoxically, wrote little in Basque. His works which concerned the grammar, the geography, and the history of the Basque country were published in Spanish. His celebrated Basque grammar bore the title of El imposible vencido. Still another of his publications was the trilingual dictionary of Spanish, Basque, and French.¹⁸

Although his personal example left something to be desired, Larramendi's appeal to his compatriots to preserve their native tongue bore fruit, and two of his confrères in particular, Sébastian de Mendiburu and Agostin Cardaberaz, rallied to the call. They both wrote numerous works on devotion and morals in their native Guipuzcoan dialect, and although neither achieved great fame as a literary figure, both contributed toward sustaining their native language. In fact, the works of Mendiburu served as linguistic models in Basque from the time of their publication in 1747, and the writings of Cardeberaz have served as source material for other works of devotion.¹⁹

The first important works written in the Biscayan dialect appeared with the advent of the nineteenth century. One of the outstanding Biscayan writers was a former

¹⁸Notes, op. cit.

¹⁹Ibid.

priest, Juan Antonio de Moguel. Besides translating religious texts and passages from Cicero and Pascal into Basque, Moguel wrote Peru Abarca. This work, containing interesting information on fishing and metallurgy, was also translated into Spanish.²⁰

The nineteenth century marked an awakening of Basque literature. From this period on, the sources of inspiration for Basque literary themes enlarged and varied. Publication of Basque journals and revues appeared in France, Spain, and even the Americas. Any study of the literature of this period would be incomplete without a résumé of the following authors:

Elissamburu (1828-1891)

A native of Sare, Elissamburu began his career in the army, where he achieved the grade of captain. His chef-d'oeuvre, an outstanding work of the nineteenth century, was entitled Piarres Adame. Written in a picturesque prose, this short, rustic novel was an original work. In addition to Piarres Adame, Elissamburu wrote love songs (avec grande délicatesse), nostalgic songs, and drinking songs.²¹ Veyrin describes Elissamburu as a poet in the following manner: "homme cultivé, a su pourtant, avec un rare bonheur, exprimer dans un langage d'un naturel

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

remarquable la poésie quotidienne et les sentiments les plus intimes de l'âme basque."²² The following, the famous Nere etchea, which translates to "My Home" in English, is an example of one of Elissamburu's nostalgic songs:²³

<u>Basque text</u>	<u>French translation</u>
Ikhusten duzu goizean	Voyez-vous le matin
Argia asten denean	Lorsque pointe la lumière
Menditto baten gainean	Au sommet d'une colline
Etche ttikitto aintzin	Une maisonnette à façade
churi bat?	blanche?
Lau haitz handiren artean,	Au milieu de quatre grands
	chênes,
Ithurritto bat aldean,	Une petite fontaine à côté,
Chakhur churi bat athean,	Un chien blanc devant la porte,
Han bizi naiz ni bakean.	C'est là que je vis en paix.

However, as in the case with even many modern Basque texts, it is difficult to find copies of Elissamburu's writings.

Iparraguirre (1821-1881)

Born at Villareal in the Spanish Basque province of Guipuzcoa, Iparraguirre lived an exceptionally turbulent life. His dedication to the Basque cause led him to leave his family at the age of fourteen in order to fight in the Carlist Wars. Living several years as an exile, Iparraguirre became a poet and song-writer, publishing not only a number of beautiful Basque airs, but also Gernikako Arbola, the song destined to become the Basque national anthem. He also wrote a love song entitled Maitiarentzat

²²Veyrin, op. cit., p. 224.

²³Ibid.

(For My Beloved), which became famous in Spain.²⁴

Indalecio Bizkarrondo (1851-1876)

Known also as "Bilinch", Indalecio apparently led a life fraught with misfortune. In addition to being a cripple, he was also mutilated by a cannonball during the Carlist War. Although Indalecio's works are difficult to find, they are of literary merit and are described by Lafon as being "remarquables de fraîcheur," but having from time to time "le dent dure."²⁵

Pierre Topet (1786-1862)

A native of Barcus, Topet, known as "Etchahoun," also seems to have been hounded by misfortune. Although most of the details are enveloped in mystery, one can arrive at some idea of his life from his verse. It appears that one of his early love affairs was thwarted by his father, who, wanting his son to make a financially successful marriage, had the young Topet wed a wealthy heiress. Sometime during the course of this loveless marriage, Topet's wife had her husband judged at Agen and condemned to prison. After serving one term, Topet was released, only to be re-incarcerated for the murder of a neighbor whom he believed to have been his wife's lover.²⁶

²⁴Notes, op. cit.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

Finally released for the second time, Topet returned to his native land where he resumed a life described as "errante." Working as a herdsman, he followed the flocks among the picturesque peaks of Haute Soule.

Possessing a marvelous command of the Basque dialect spoken in his native province of Soule, Topet is described as having the gift of writing with a "verve mordante," and those for whom he bore a grudge were sure to feel the piercing quality of his pen. He was particularly caustic toward the priests of his region, who banned him from the church at Barcus for being too miserably dressed. Although a practicing Catholic, Topet did not hesitate to extract a harsh vengeance. In summing up Topet's literary achievements, Lafon states, "Il a écrit des élégies poignantes, ayant une remarquables plénitude de forme. Ce fut véritablement un grand poète."²⁷ Unfortunately, Topet's family burned all of the poet's manuscripts after his death; thus his works, only partially salvaged, have had to survive through oral tradition. Veyrin, in referring to Topet, writes the following:

Enfant malheureux, amoureux contrarié, mari trompé, criminel par jalousie, renié et ruiné par les siens, ce bohème - émule sans le savoir de Villon - a chanté avec un accent qui appartient à lui seul les amertumes et les rancunes de sa triste vie.²⁸

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Veyrin, op. cit., p. 224.

Père Domingo de Aguirre (?-1920)

Aguirre, born in the village of Ondorros in the Spanish Basque province of Biscaye, wrote two novels. The first, written in the Biscayan dialect, was entitled Kresala, which translates in French to L'eau de mer. The second, entitled Garoa, translating in French to La fougère, was written in the dialect of Guipuzcoa. Although the plot of the latter novel is sketchy, it does give the reader a description of peasant life in Guipuzcoa. The language of Aguirre is described as "souple, ferme," with a vocabulary "extrêmement riche." However, Aguirre was not a purist, and in his works one finds pages which are epic in style, particularly one passage in which he describes a combat between wood choppers.²⁹

In order to bring up to date this survey of Basque authors, mention should be made of the following:

Jean Etchepare (1877-1935)

Although born on a farm in Argentina, Jean was brought to France at the age of six years. Settling in the French Basque village of Mendionde, Jean's parents appear to have been able to give their son many advantages in life, and in later years, after embarking on a medical career, Jean wrote movingly of his childhood. In his

²⁹Notes, op. cit.

prose Jean's language was a mixture of the Bas-Navarraais and the Labourdin dialects. A remarkable essayist, Jean's works are described as being written in a Basque "très pur, très élégant et plein de saveur." He published a collection of writings in 1910 which were re-edited between 1940 and 1941.³⁰

From the foregoing résumé, it is obvious that besides being scanty and often difficult to obtain, Basque literature is also limited in its scope of expression. As one authority phrases the situation:

Le répertoire poétique des Basques se compose d'un grand nombre de berceuses et de chansons enfantines, de très rares chansons de métier, et d'une infinité de chansons d'inspiration morale et religieuse paraissent d'une veine moins directement populaire . . .³¹

As previously mentioned, one of the difficulties encountered in compiling an anthology of Basque literary works arises from the scarcity of written material. Furthermore, the works that were published were not written "pour être compris et goûtés en gros."³²

Another characteristic of Basque literature stems from the fact that the Basques are strict traditionalists; consequently their literature is almost invariably at the service of, and imbued with, tradition. Inasmuch as many

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Veyrin, op. cit., pp. 224-225.

³² Notes, op. cit.

of the Basque authors were priests, the bulk of their writings dealt with unabstractive religious ideas prompted by simple, unrefined sentiments. Even the authors who were not priests wrote of love themes in a manner particularly marked by discretion and reserve, and the sensual aspect of physical love is a subject almost completely absent in Basque literature.³³

Inasmuch as it is often interesting to register the impressions and evaluations of a critic who can retain some degree of objectivity by virtue of being a product of another cultural environment, it would appear apropos to quote directly from an English Bascologist's summation of Basque literary endeavors:

A marked lack of imagination and poetical sense is discernible throughout Basque literature, both written and oral. The religious works, of which the former is almost exclusively composed, are characterised by the entire absence of mysticism. These . . . musty tomes exhale a spirit of sound, precise and healthy doctrine, harnessing the practical to the ideal in such a way as to obtain the best positive results. More than any written literature the legends handed down by oral tradition reveal the true spirit of the race. They are medieval in atmosphere, redolent of the Gothic, with all its wealth of fantastic invention, its freshness and its naiveté. But they are entirely materialistic and devoid of allegory or indeed of any abstract thought. Even the words of Basque folksong, sung to airs of the greatest beauty, are usually lacking in the lyrical qualities that are so often found in folk-poetry. When they are not humorous or satirical, only their evident sincerity and lack of self-consciousness save them from appearing trite and commonplace.

³³Gallop, op. cit., pp. 54-55.

It is difficult to decide whether this serene, unimaginative outlook explains or is itself explained by the deeply devout nature of the Basques. In few parts of the world does any faith or creed exercise on its devotees a hold so firm and yet so free from fanaticism. "Qui dit Basque dit Catholique" runs an old proverb, and in the sixteenth century, when Protestantism made so much headway in the kingdom of Bearn, it failed to secure any footing in the neighboring Basque provinces. Jeanne d'Albret is said to have made eleven converts, neither more nor less.³⁴

In concluding this chapter on written Basque literature it would be well to take cognizance of Lafon's statement regarding the literary achievements of the Basques: "La littérature basque compte quelques oeuvres originales et de valeur en vers et en prose. Mais même si elle ne comptait que le petit livre de Dechepare et quelques chansons, elle mériterait une place honorable dans l'histoire universelle des littératures."³⁵

³⁴Gallop, op. cit., pp. 54-55.

³⁵Lafon, "La Littérature Basque," op. cit.

CHAPTER VII

BASQUE MUSIC AND ART

In the preceding chapter, an attempt was made to provide the reader with a frame of reference for evaluating Basque artistic efforts by delineating the Basque mind and temperament as expressed through the medium of written literature. In this chapter another aspect of their literature, oral improvisation, as well as the characteristics of their music and art, will be treated.

Until comparatively recent times, the Basques had no written literature, justifying this by regarding literature as "something with which foreigners strain to beautify their imperfect lives."¹ Being so adept at oral rhyming and improvisation, the Basques felt that their ready facility in this field made it pointless for them to write verse or prose.² In fact, one of the favorite Basque sports during inclement weather is the "poetic duel." In these contests the participants "improvise and sing quatrains at each other, melodic, satiric debates in rime, debates which may last all day and all night and which end

¹"No Aryans," op. cit., p. 9.

²Rodney Gallop, "Basque Songs from Soule," The Musical Quarterly, XXII (October, 1936), p. 461.

only when one of the contestants yields the victory."³ The individuals most gifted at these impromptu versifications are called Koblaris (as with most Basque words there are other spellings and forms of this term), and are in great demand at festivals.⁴

One of the outstanding French Basque Koblaris was Mattin Trabola of Labourd, the coastal province. In 1925 at Sare he competed with another Koblari named Larralde in a poetic joust which lasted an hour and a half. The topic poetically debated at this time concerned the relative merits of long and short skirts. However, one of the longest poetic contests appears to have taken place at San Sebastian in 1935. At this time twenty Koblaris met in a contest lasting ten hours. More than two thousand verses were improvised during the session, the participants hardly stopping to eat or drink.⁵

This talent for improvisation is the basis for all Basque songs. Although music is deeply inherent in the Basques, their musical taste seems odd when compared with our standards and ideals. The Basques utilize 5/4 or 5/8 rhythm in their folk songs; this is a "rare and unusual

³"No Aryans," loc. cit.

⁴Gallop, "Basque Songs from Soule," op. cit., p. 461

⁵Notes, op. cit.

rhythm in European music."⁶ Gallop evaluates Basque folk songs in the following manner:

It might almost be said that the Basque is born into the world with a song on his lips, so great and so intimate a part does song play in his whole life. Among his first impressions will be the tender lullabies crooned to him by his mother . . . There is nothing pretentious in the songs of his race. They are sung without any instrumental accompaniment, in long soaring phrases in which the tune obediently follows the metrical vagaries of the words, and the words themselves are not time-hallowed poems which must be respected, but themes on which one may embroider as one goes along. These songs will be woven into the pattern of his life. He will sing them while he is watching sheep on the gorse-covered hillside, ploughing or stripping the golden maize stalks; leading the patient oxen to market and stopping every now and then to draw his goak across their necks, while the solid cartwheels creak an obligato to his song . . .⁷

In most Basque songs there can be discerned a vein of mocking humor, irony, and wit, replacing emotion. Unable to resist the temptation to banter and caricature his own and other people's intimate feelings, the Basque seems to be afraid of being suspected of lofty sentiments. However, even though evidence of the appreciation of beauty is sometimes lacking in Basque folk song, one can always find humor at hand, the most minute village incident often providing the excuse for a song.⁸

⁶"The People Who Came from Nowhere," op. cit., p. 70.

⁷Gallop, op. cit., p. 110.

⁸Ibid., pp. 123-124.

In discussing some of the characteristics of Basque folk songs, Veyrin emphasizes the following points:

1) Brevity is hardly the rule. Aside from lullabies and children's songs, which do not usually exceed two or three couplets, the folk songs are apt to be lengthy and verbose. Although there is often a conciseness in the expression of details, the development of the main theme may stretch out interminably, couplets being capriciously added without thought to composition. There is also a conspicuous absence of refrain in the more ancient songs, refrains appearing in only the most recent works, and even then rarely. The use of dialogue, particularly in love or satirical songs, is extensive, and often the improviser, or Koblari, takes pleasure in creating the dialogue for the characters in the song.

2) In the language of the Koblari, trite, conventional terms such as flowers, birds, stars, and the like are often used in drawing comparisons. However, the Koblari often evades conventional style, his language evoking such vivid, concrete imagery that the effect is almost brutal. An example of this is the concluding line in the ballad Urzo churia errazu, in which the lover bluntly states to his beloved: The dove is beautiful in the air; she is more beautiful on the table.⁹ One of the most

⁹Veyrin, op. cit., p. 226.

original aspects of Basque lyrics is the frequent juxtaposition in the same couplet of an impression of nature and an almost totally unrelated thought suggested by the scenic imagery. Just as in other symbolistic poems, the comparison or relationship to the original picture is barely established, and is often merely intimated. An example of this can be noted in the following couplet:

<u>Basque</u>	<u>French translation</u>
Othea lili denean Choria haren gainean. Hura joaiten da airean, Berak plazer duenian: Zur' et' ene amodia Hala dabila munduan.	Quand le genêt est en fleur L'oiseau se pose là-dessus. Il traverse l'air, celui-là, Quand il lui plaît: Notre amour à vous et à moi Marche ainsi par le monde. ¹⁰

Or again, we see a more palpable demonstration:

Mendian zoinen eder Epher zango gorri. Ene maiteak ere Bertzeak iduri . . .	Dans la montagne combien belle La perdrix aux pattes rouges. Ma bien-aimée aussi Ressemble aux autres . . . ¹¹
--	--

Isolated from context sometimes languishing and dull, excerpts such as the foregoing "atteignent par leur sobriété même la plus réelle poésie."¹²

3) Although the melody of the music often adds an exquisite charm to the song, disaccord between the words and the notes is more often the case than not. This stems from the tendency on the part of most "chansonniers" to improvise a new song from an old air.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 227.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

4) As to the Basque airs themselves, Veyrin asserts

La music basque, longtemps objet d'appréciations inexactes, commence à être parfaitement connue. Celle des danses - allègre et vivement rythmée, médiocrement originale au surplus - tire son principal charme des rustiques instruments qui la jouent . . .¹³

The dance music has little in common with the airs to which the Koblari lends his talent, the latter melody having a slower beat and often "joyusement sereine ou paisiblement contemplative."¹⁴

From the preceding brief summary of the characteristics of Basque folk song, it would appear apropos to inquire into the origins of the ancient airs which are even today used as reference by the contemporary Koblari in improvising his verse.

In studying the background of Basque folk song, one encounters a maze of fanciful hypotheses. For instance, one author writes of "wild and thrilling marches to the sound of which it is believed that the ancient Basques were in the habit of descending from their mountains to combat with the Romans . . ."¹⁵ Gallop, in writing of these folk airs, affirms that they are neither "savage nor gay nor rhythmic . . ." On the contrary, he describes them as "slow and poignant . . . imbued with a sadness which seems

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 227-228.

¹⁵Gallop, op. cit., p. 142.

to express vague longing and nostalgia rather than sharp sorrow" In contrast to the somewhat "theatrical emotionalism" of the Latins and the "harrowing despair" inherent in Balkan folk song, the songs of the Basques are pervaded with a "placid and contemplative melancholy, serene and detached as is the Basque himself." Inclined to wander and to take little heed of pitch or rhythm, the melody produces a subdued effect "curiously indefinite and immaterial!" This in turn gives rise to an impression of "something infinitely old and infinitely remote."¹⁶

Just as the mists of the unknown obscure the origins of the Basque people and their language, so do these mists shroud even the most recent past of Basque song. It cannot be categorically affirmed whether the Basque airs evolved from the "inner consciousness" of the people or were borrowed from other groups. That the Basques have the ability to adopt art forms from other groups, stamp them with their own "intensely conservative spirit," and retain them long after these forms have been abandoned in the lands of their origins can be seen from the Basque pastorales. These borrowed forms become so completely permeated with the adopters imprint that they take on a definite Basque character.¹⁷ It appears that Basque folk music has not remained free

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

from this tendency to borrow and absorb, and to quote Gallop:

. . . it has been strongly affected by the music of other races. To my mind the material on which most of Basque folk-song is based was probably borrowed,¹⁸ and indeed the borrowing process is still going on.

In their appropriations the Basques apparently turned a deaf ear toward songs which were characterized by "southern warmth and colour." Furthermore, the songs of the Moors and the derivative folk music of Spain, both of which the Basques had many opportunities to hear, seem to have had little influence on the folk melodies of the clan-nish Pyrenean people.

According to Gallop, two very different forms of music have appealed to the Basques, thereby leaving a deep and lasting imprint on Basque song. The first of these influences was that of plainsong. Since the Basques are good church-goers, as even the vituperative pilgrim Aimery Picaud was forced to admit, it was only natural that "the splendid Gregorian chants should have affected the songs which they sang at home . . ."¹⁹

The second influence which affected Basque folk music seems to be a corollary of the Basque expeditions into distant northern seas. During these voyages, and

¹⁸Ibid., p. 143.


¹⁹Ibid., p. 145.

also while observing the foreign armies passing through their country, the Basques heard songs of a more restrained character than those of the Latin races. These songs of the north must have appealed to the Basques, the consequence being that one often finds "a definite resemblance between Basque airs and those of England, Flanders, and Brittany."²⁰

Veyrin, in his scholarly work on the Basques, highlights the characteristics of Basque music in the following manner:

1) Contrary to popular belief, the 5/8 measure, referred to as *zortziko* in Basque, is not the most typical of Basque music, but rather a comparatively recent addition. Examples of music written in this style were rare in the eighteenth century. They seem to have developed during the nineteenth century, at which time they were found almost uniquely in the Spanish Basque provinces. The Basque national hymn, Gernikako arbola, is an outstanding example of the *zortziko* style. The most ancient and fundamental type of Basque music is characterized by a metric structure with slight accentuation. The musical phrase, described as "souple, plastique et hardie," develops in a fashion almost independent of a regular cadence. In fact, the cadence is

²⁰ Ibid., p. 146.



hardly recognizable unless the measure is modified several times during the course of the same couplet.²¹

2) The major scale plays a secondary role in Basque musical compositions. The melody range is confined, seldom exceeding an octave, whereas the tonality is indefinite, wandering from tone to half-tone, often utilizing the quarter-tone during this process. In respect to the quarter-tone, "trait marquant du chant basque," it seems to originate "d'une hésitation inconsciente entre les anciens modes d'église et la tonalité moderne."²²

3) As already mentioned, Basque music appears to have been greatly influenced by the plainsong. The most ancient airs owe much to the Gregorian chants, while more recent melodies seem to mark the transitional point between the plainsong and diatonic music. Although the form of Basque songs assumes a fair amount of diversity - from the simple repetition of one theme to the intergrading of multiple different themes - the most common form seems to follow the ternary pattern: the first musical theme being repeated twice, then followed by a phrase ascending into the upper register, contrasting from the preceding part by a change in rhythm and tonality. At the conclusion of this brief variation, the musical pattern returns to its origi-

²¹Veyrin, op. cit., p. 228.

²²Ibid.

nal theme.²³

4) Much has been written concerning the origins of Basque music, a subject fraught with controversy and misconception. A number of the earlier conjectures have already had to be revised or dismissed. According to a recent authority, a goodly part of their folk melodies were developed by the Basques themselves, the borrowed or adopted melodies being discriminately chosen from among those which appear to have completely harmonized with the Basque spirit or temperament. One remarkable aspect of the borrowing process is that despite their proximity, the Basques "n'aient entretenu aucuns rapports suivis avec la musique espagnole et hispano-mauresque."²⁴ To the contrary, Basque airs resemble the music of their more distant neighbors, the Celts and the Nordics.

Basque Art

From the above résumé of Basque music it is evident that the forms that have been borrowed and adopted by the Basques have become so thoroughly imbued with the spirit and personality of the borrowers that it is often difficult to trace the original source. This tendency to assimilate and modify can also be noted in Basque art. As stated by

²³Ibid., p. 229.

²⁴Ibid.

Gallop, "the originality of Basque decoration lies not in the creation of new forms or in the invention of new motives, but in the individual treatment of borrowed designs."²⁵

Although natural models abound, the Basque artist generally ignores them, utilizing borrowed designs to a great extent. However, in spite of his lack of originality, the Basque artisan manages to endow his work with a "distinctive quality." This distinction is derived primarily from the artist's tendency to weld into a "homogeneous whole the diverse elements" from which he has drawn, rather than from his own "aesthetic sense."²⁶ Gallop lists the following two traits as outstanding characteristics of the "Basque manner":

. . . the rare use of natural subjects which, when they appear, are treated with Gothic naivete or conventionalised to a very high degree; and a marked preference for geometrical patterns such as do not necessitate freehand drawing and can be designed with compass and ruler.²⁷

Poor in archeological works religious or secular, Basque art nevertheless possesses examples of decorative design which is both rich and homogeneous. Unlike the art in the rich provinces of France such as Normandie, Bearn,

²⁵Gallop, op. cit., p. 220.

²⁶Ibid., p. 221.

²⁷Ibid.

or Bourgogne, art styles and forms of which reflect the influences of the "époques françaises classiques," Basque art has stubbornly resisted the incursion of these influences, thus resembling to a greater degree the more archaic forms of the provinces of Bretagne, Auvergne, and the Haute-Savoie. Going further afield, Basque art exhibits certain curious affinities with those found in some of the countries of central Europe.²⁸

Veyrin itemizes the following characteristics of Basque art:

Color plays a minor role. Hardly any of the furniture or art objects are painted, with the exception of a few clock cases dating from the nineteenth century. Embroidered cloth is usually of a single color: red, dark blue, or black. In addition, many of the minor arts - such as weaving, lace-work, gold-smithing, painting - are practically nonexistent among the Basques. Furthermore, their copper and tin works, as well as iron work and ceramics, exhibit hardly any distinctive characteristics.

From personal observation it seems to the writer that Veyrin's analysis is largely correct. Basque art seen in the homes of relatives visited in the province of Basse-Navarre was of the sturdy and simple type suitable to a

²⁸Veyrin, op. cit., p. 302.

mountain abode. As regards color, it seemed the custom for elder and married women to appear in dark and somber shades while the young girls were garbed in gaily colored but simply designed dresses, espadrilles, and head-scarves, the predominant colors being red, green, and blue. For everyday appearance men are always seen in the traditional blue shirt and trousers of the working man of France, but on feast days and holidays the males are decked out in a costume of white shirt and trousers accentuated with a bright sash indicating their particular region.²⁹

In the final analysis, the two materials with which the Basque temperament has best found expression are wood and stone. As can be deduced from this, the Basque artistic sense seems to represent itself best in things monumental of either a religious or domestic nature. Durable objects such as the home, its furniture, the church, and the tomb seem to come closest to the artistic heart of the Basque. Other humble, familiar objects have evoked the artistic tastes of the people, and gracious, primitive designs can be found carved in wood by knife point or by a glowing nail. These designs, often the work of herders during long periods of leisure in the solitude of their mountain pastures, embellish the simple tools of the herds-

²⁹Observation of the writer.

man. The joalte, wooden collar with a suspended bell which adorns the necks of rams, the gazna achal, rounded mould for forming cheese, and other implements, lend themselves admirably to the talents of the Basque artisan.³⁰

Although Basque artistic tastes and preference are clearly manifested in their wood work, they seem to be accentuated to a greater degree in the works of stone. The preference for stone-carving seems to blend naturally with the conservative tendencies of the Basques, and Basque workmanship in this field is incontestably more developed than is that found in neighboring provinces. Designs in stone above the portals enhance the beauty of that edifice so dear to the heart of the Basque, the ancestral home. Examples of this application of the stone-worker's art can be seen throughout the Basque country, particularly in the province of Basse-Navarre.³¹

The rustic beauty of the village church is also emphasized, albeit to a lesser extent than the homes, by the art of the stone-carver. Unusual holy-water founts such as the ones at Urrugne or Garris, a beautiful cross on a pedestal in the midst of a cemetery such as the one at Louhossoa, all bear mute testimony to the capabilities of

³⁰Veyrin, op. cit., p. 303.

³¹Ibid., p. 305.

Basque craftsmanship. However, the best examples of the indigenous art of the people can be seen in the hil harri, or funeral stones. The large flat surfaces on the face of these monuments were well suited for the development and exercise of the art of epigraphy. Also, one of the faces, as well as the edges reserved exclusively for motifs of ornamentation, graphically illustrate Basque artistic tastes. From these discoidal funeral stones "quasi millénaires," to the cross of the last century, one can sometimes trace in a single cemetery the evolution of the art of stone-carving among the Basques.³² Designs on the more ancient stone relics indicate a crude style strikingly powerful by virtue of their very simplicity. This style reached its apex in the sixteenth century. With the commencement of the nineteenth century the robustness of style diminished, and little by little it became more delicate and complicated.

Despite this refinement of style, certain general characteristics of Basque art have persisted throughout the centuries, their variations having been produced primarily by geographic factors.³³ Following is a list of some of the tendencies inherent in Basque art:

1) Whether in domestic, religious, or sepulchral art, the same decorative elements and symbols appear, some-

³²Ibid., p. 306.

³³Ibid.

times singly, and at other times in combination.

2) One can group the artistic repertoire of the Basques under three main headings: themes of a religious character, linear or geometric motifs, and representations of conventional or realistic figures - the first of these groupings providing over half of the forms in Basque ornamentation.

3) Among the religious symbols, the cross, and variations of its form, is the most widely used. The "croix de Malte, croix recroisetées, croix fleurdelisées" can all be found in different religious decorations.

4) The monogram of Christ is also widely used as a motif, varied by different interpretations of Basque artists. The three letters are found sometimes in juxtaposition, sometimes interlaced, and often in Gothic form.³⁴

5) Linear or geometric designs utilized by the Basques are similar to those employed by artists in other countries of Europe; however, their originality stems from the frequency with which certain of these designs appear and are combined. Veyrin enumerates this characteristic in the following paragraph:

. . . les rosaces à quatre, six ou huit feuilles, qui parfois s'accrochent les unes aux autres comme les mailles d'un filet; les motifs rayonnants qui, réduits

³⁴Ibid., p. 307.

à une demi-circonférence, prennent ainsi figure d'éventails; l'antique rosace hélicoïdale aux rayons incurvés qui évoqueraient, d'après quelques érudits, l'image du soleil en mouvement; les spirales dont la ressemblance avec les décorations mycéniennes ne saurait guère être que fortuite; les motifs étoiles, à cinq ou six pointes comme le pentalpha et le sceau de Salomon, mais souvent aussi à huit, douze ou même seize pointes . . . Mentionnons enfin ces sortes de virgules, issues de la division bipartite d'un cercle au moyen d'une sinusoïde.³⁵

6) In Basque art there is a wide use of figures such as stars, hearts, fleur de lis, etc. Sometimes isolated, sometimes in pairs, and sometimes attached together, these figures play a prominent role in Basque ornamentation.

7) The conventional figures are generally of heraldic origins. Many of the images of trees and animals are but unadorned remnants of ancient coats of arms.

8) Realistic figures gathered from impressions of the exterior world are often awkwardly done. However, they are to a marked degree indicative of the individual personalities of the artists. The most interesting are usually designs of simple implements of work. The tools of the small artisan, such as the mason, blacksmith, carpenter, barber, serve as artistic motifs. A Priest is represented by his ciborium, a soldier by his cross-bow, and a sailor by his harpoon, but the images most often used remain the simple, rustic tools of daily life such as the plough and

³⁵Ibid.

the keys of the good housekeeper. Domestic animals such as chickens, ducks, cows, and pigs also have their place in these realistic motifs.

Taken individually, none of the artistic elements with diverse origins can be said to be indigenous to Basque art. However, "leur voisinage constant dans les mêmes lieux et leur assemblage traditionnel sur de mêmes oeuvres ont fini par imprimer à l'ensemble de cette décoration une physionomie incontestablement euskarienne."³⁶

In conclusion, it seems appropriate to quote Veyrin's apt summation of Basque art:

. . . l'exceptionnelle aptitude des Eskualdun à se saisir si fortement et continûment de tout ce qui s'accorde avec l'humeur de leur race, qu'il devient impossible par la suite de ne pas y attacher définitivement leur nom. Peu importe que, suivant un mot de Camille Jullian, les siècles et les civilisations passées aient tour à tour légué aux Basques la plupart de leurs usages, puisque eux seuls ont su, s'imprégnant de tant de traits divers et ailleurs presque effacés, composer le mystérieux visage d'un peuple qui ne ressemble à nul autre.³⁷

³⁶ Ibid., p. 308.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 309.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BASQUES IN THE NEW WORLD

In the preceding chapters an attempt was made to enumerate and summarize some of the hypotheses concerning the origin of the Basques and their language, to depict the Basques and their mode of life in their natural habitat, and to arrive at a comprehension of the Basque temperament as revealed through literature and art. In this chapter a study will be made of the immigrant Basque who, usually as one of the younger members of a relatively large family, tests the wheel of fortune by coming to the New World to amass a fortune or perish.

That the Basques were acquainted with the American continent before Columbus is still a debatable point. However, articles such as the following suggest that they were among the first recorded group to sight the New World:

Without contending for honors, all Basques know that long before Columbus, their own small fishing-vessels left every spring on six month voyages and returned laden with codfish which never came to European waters to be caught. They know that Basque sailors told an obscure mariner named Columbus that he could find land by sailing west and that when he did sail his navigators were two sturdy Basque pilots - brothers whose names the perfidious Spaniards perverted in the records by very un-Basque nomenclature into "the brothers Pinto" . . .

A Basque, in all records, was the pilot who led Magellan on his voyage around the world. Since

Magellan died in the Philippines, it was the Basque pilot, not Magellan, who first circum-navigated the globe.¹

The first missionaries in Canada recorded that Basque whalers engaged in commerce and founded colonies on the North American continent, particularly above Tadoussac in a region which in 1612 Champlain designated as "Nouvelle-Biscaye" on his map. It appears that the Basques of the seventeenth century were prompted to migrate by the desire to "réaliser une petite fortune et retourner vivre au vieux pays," and records indicate that the early church fathers had cause to complain of the Basque practice of trading wine for furs with the Indians of the region. In fact, during the seventeenth century the Basques from Biscaye had so completely monopolized commerce in the region that all merchant vessels were referred to as "biscaïenne."²

During the same century the Spanish Basques established themselves commercially in South America, founding a colony in the region that now comprises the Republic of Peru. They also formed an important colony in what is now Mexico. Here they maintained their old traditions and customs to such an extent that this colony, like its counterpart in Canada, also received the appellation "Nouvelle-

¹"No Aryans," op. cit., p. 9.

²Lhande, op. cit., pp. 90-92.

Biscaye," while in Chile, during this same period, Basques "fondée des maisons prosperes qui donneront au royaume nouveau des illustrations comme les Zavala y Lazao et les Iturgoyen y Amasa . . ."³

With the discovery of America, the stories of the first colonists and the echoes of the first conquests, imaginations in the Old World were stirred, evoking the "instinct vagabond" of the Basques. As can be surmised from the foregoing material, the seventeenth century marks the epoch at which the first migratory waves of Basques swept the shores of the New World. A repetition of the seventeenth century exodus occurred two centuries later,⁴ and, as indicated by a newspaper article written in 1952, continues, albeit on a more minor scale, to this date.⁵

From the preceding introduction to the subject of Basque migrations to the American continent, it would seem that a more specific study of Basque contributions to the commercial and industrial life of the New World is in order. In this survey, the Basque will first be studied in relation to his role in South America.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 95.

⁵Pierre Salinger, "From Pamplona to the San Joaquin . . . Basque Shepherds", San Francisco Chronicle, June 29, 1952.

In the colonization of South America, the Basques and their descendants have made exemplary contributions. One of the greatest figures in South American history, Simon Bolivar, the Great Liberator, is alleged to have owed much of his toughness and stamina to his Basque heritage.⁶ In tracing Bolivar's lineage, one authority writes that in 1590 a certain Basque by the name of Simon de Bolivar, "hidalgo, dueno y senor de la casa infanzona du même nom en Biscaye," together with a group of his countrymen, debarked at a port in Venezuela. Beginning as a colonizer and tradesman, this Spanish Basque nobleman later engaged in politics. His sons were founders of cities in the New World and his grandson was the legendary Simon Bolivar, "le Libérateur, le 'Washington du Sud', comme disent les Anglo-Saxons."⁷

One writer who made a comparative study of the contributions made by Spanish groups in Venezuela expressed his conclusions in the following manner:

Étudiez de près . . . l'élément andalou, castillan ou catalan, et l'élément basque. Vous vous rendrez vite compte que ce dernier est le seul à avoir survécu à tous les troubles des siècles passés, le seul à avoir laissé, pour les générations à venir, des oeuvres impérissables; aucun n'a rempli dans l'histoire du Venezuela un rôle

⁶Gerhard Masur, Simon Bolivar (Albuquerque, The University of New Mexico Press, 1948), p. 28.

⁷Lhande, op. cit., p. 93.

aussi fécond, aussi utile, aussi bienfaisant . . .⁸

That the achievements of the migratory Basques were not confined exclusively to any one region in South America becomes evident when one scans the history of various South American republics. For instance, there was a period in South American history in which three of the Latin republics were governed simultaneously by three men of Basque origin: Chile by Errazuriz, Argentina by Uriburu, and Uruguay by Idiarte Borda.⁹ One Chilean publicist estimated that in his country three-quarters of the generals, soldiers, and political figures of note during the eighteenth century were Basques or descendants of Basques. This same writer affirmed that there were sixty-five famous Basque families in Chile during the course of the nineteenth century.¹⁰

The Basques not only rendered valuable services in the organization and administration of the neophyte republics of South America but also established and directed a number of important commercial enterprises. One of the greatest commercial undertakings in South America during the eighteenth century was the Compania guipuzcoana of Venezuela. Alleged by one historian to have been la pri-

⁸Ibid., p. 257.

⁹Ibid., p. 258.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 256.

mera aristocracia mercantil fundada en el Nuevo Mundo, this enterprise, a society of shipowners and bankers, was granted political powers as well as an absolute monopoly of commerce in the province of Caracas. In return for these royal favors, the Compania was charged with the surveillance of the sea lanes and ports in order to prevent piratical depredations by the Dutch. It also played an important part in developing agriculture by methods which have become classic in modern colonization techniques. The Compania had the Lake of Valence drained along the banks of the Portuguesa, thereby creating new plantations and villages.¹¹

Basques are also credited with founding Montevideo and Buenos Aires. Their work in developing the wilderness of these regions is vividly described by Lhande in the following words:

Les Eskualdunacs, les hommes aux bras puissants, sortaient, confiante en leurs forces; ils peuplaient les campagnes, ils luttèrent contre le desert et ses peuplades indiennes, ils goûtaient tous les plaisirs d'une existence forte et libre qui cadrerait si bien avec leurs goûts et leurs tendances. Ils se firent éleveurs. Peu à peu ils devinrent les maîtres de la terre; ils arrivèrent à posséder de riches héritages.¹²

At the turn of the century, the milk and butter industries of Argentina were almost completely monopolized by Basques. According to Lhande, "L'industrie laitière fut

¹¹Ibid., pp. 93-94.

¹²Ibid., p. xii.

peut-être celle qui contribua le plus largement à établir le renom d'honnêteté, de constance et de grandeur d'âme dont tout Basque jouit aujourd'hui encore dans la République."¹³

From this rather sketchy résumé of the Basque role in South America, it is obvious that the activities of this small, enigmatic group of people have contributed in no small part toward the development of the southern half of the American hemisphere. In the United States, particularly in the regions of the Far West, the Basque influence has also asserted itself, albeit on a somewhat minor scale.

The Basque in the United States

In compiling accurate statistics on Basque immigration to the United States, one is confronted by the problem arising from the tendency of immigration officials to list the Basques as either Spanish or French. However, one writer states that the vanguard of this group arrived in the Nevada area during the 1860's or early 1870's.¹⁴ The period from 1903 to 1910 is one in which Basque immigrants commenced to arrive as a constant stream, the majority of them coming to Nevada or Idaho where they usually had a

¹³Ibid., p. 185.

¹⁴John B. Edlefsen, "Enclavement among Southwest Idaho Basques," Social Forces (December, 1950), p. 155.

brother, an uncle, a cousin, or even a nephew.¹⁵ In an article published in 1950 by the Basque delegation in New York, it was estimated that there were approximately 15,000 Basques residing in the states of Idaho, Oregon, and Nevada.

In Idaho, the first Basques arrived in the Boise area during the early 1890's. They were quickly extended an "economic welcome" by the ranchers and sheep owners of the region, who found the new immigrants a dependable, hard-working group.¹⁶ Coming from a land in which vestiges indicate that grazing and pastoral activities were an integral part of life as early as the Age of Iron (2500 B.C. to 1000 B.C.),¹⁷ the Basques quickly proved their worth in the sheep industry, and soon many of them had herds of their own and had attained prominence as leaders in the sheep industry. Although a few of the Basques went into other occupations, their "ascent of the occupational ladder differed from the sheepherding pattern in detail only."¹⁸

In Nevada the pattern was similar to that in Idaho. Here the Basque also found that "with his strong body, his sense of honesty, his ability to withstand hardships, and

¹⁵Jeannette Guthmann, "Basque People of the Northwest," The National Wool Grower (December, 1945), p. 13.

¹⁶Edlefsen, op. cit., pp. 155-56.

¹⁷Veyrin, op. cit., p. 38.

¹⁸Edlefsen, op. cit., p. 156.

his inadequate grasp of the new language, herding was a job ideally suited to him." The sheep owners and ranchers, quickly appreciating the capabilities of these newcomers, took them into partnerships in order to retain their services, and soon the older, established immigrants were sending for their younger relatives still in the Pyrenees.¹⁹

How have the Basques, a people sometimes referred to as a "remnant of the Stone Age",²⁰ and alleged to be one of the most ancient groups in Western Europe, reacted to the influences of the comparatively new civilization of the United States? One recent study of Basque enclavement in Idaho provides some answers to this question. Edlefsen introduces the subject in the following manner:

Study of other groups has shown that enclavement often occurs when the surrounding culture is considered greatly inferior, or when the residents of the surrounding culture assume superior attitudes, engage in persecution of the minority group, or become strongly competitive. None of these factors was significant as causes of Basque enclavement. The Basques, though extremely proud of their ethnic heritage and long history of democracy, never considered the American culture inferior. . . .²¹

The writer then gives the following as contributory factors leading to this situation:

- 1) strong ethnic pride and resistance to culture change,

¹⁹Guthmann, op. cit., p. 12.

²⁰Cr. p. 50.

²¹Edlefsen, op. cit., p. 156.

- 2) the nature of the occupation the great majority engage in,
- 3) religious differences, and most important,
- 4) their fierce pride and stubborn retention of their language.²²

In elaborating upon these factors, Edlefsen emphasizes that down through the centuries, the Basques have regarded themselves as a "people apart." The mystery that obscures the origin of themselves and their language, "together with their long struggle for the retention of their democratic institutions," has produced a high degree of ethnocentric feeling among these people. A consequence of this has been the fostering of "group reserve and a strong attachment for the old culture patterns."²³

In regard to the occupational factor, most Basques find themselves directly or indirectly involved in activities such as sheep raising which entail residence in isolated or semi-isolated areas for considerable periods of time. Thus social contact remains at a minimum, and group assimilation is made difficult.²⁴

As to the role of the linguistic factor in maintaining the Basque enclavement, perhaps this can best be summed up by one of the old stories told of Basque herdsmen. This story is of a Basque herder who spent all his spare time attempting to learn English by listening to conversations

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

in a particular restaurant in Mountain Home, Idaho. Becoming exasperated at his inability to learn the new language, he told a Basque friend that he thought he would never learn to speak the strange English language. "His friend, who had mastered a little English, told him that all the eating houses were run by Chinese, and he had been trying to learn their language, not English."²⁵

The religious factor has also been an important factor in the maintenance of Basque enclavement. Catholicism, as traditional among the Basques as the beret and the game of pelota,²⁶ is so deeply engrained in Basque tradition that there is an undated French proverb to the effect that "Qui dit Basque, dit catholique." Finding themselves in regions predominately Protestant, the Basques have been drawn together more closely by their desire to practice their traditional faith.²⁷ Despite the foregoing factors, the Basques were socially accepted by other groups without prejudice, and Edlefsen affirms that the only conflict that arose was that of an "occupational nature, involving cattlemen and Basque sheepmen."²⁸

In California as in other western states, the Basque

²⁵Guthmann, op. cit., p. 33.

²⁶Ibid., p. 32.

²⁷Ibid., p. 14.

²⁸Edlefsen, op. cit., p. 156.

immigrant has made his greatest contributions through his activities in agricultural circles, particularly the sheep industry. However, as in the Latin American countries to the south, the Basque ability to organize and administrate was clearly demonstrated while California was still a region of Spanish-speaking, Mexican subjects.

In 1794 mention is made of an "urbane, convivial, and witty Basque" named Diego de Borica who became the governing head of California. Borica established a precedent now habitually practiced by loyal Californians, that of praising highly the climate and fertility of the region. Further than this, he also proved to be an exceedingly able administrator. Under his direction the following activities were promoted and encouraged: (1) development of irrigation; (2) encouragement of hemp and flax culture; (3) the launching of the mission industries; (4) an effort, somewhat futile, to develop interest in sheep raising.²⁹ In addition to the aforementioned programs, Borica helped develop education in California. He opened schools for the children of the soldiers and the settlers, arranged for teachers and classrooms, and even "planned the curriculum and required that reports and copy-books be sent frequently to him for

²⁹John Walton Caughey, California (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1954), p. 149.

inspection."³⁰

As previously mentioned, the majority of current Basque immigrants are usually associated in livestock or agricultural activities. That they enjoy a reputation as outstanding sheepmen can be deduced from articles such as the following:

Basques of the Pyrenees, alien among all other breeds of men, these sheepmen are. Aloof, secure on the mountains, their ancestors watched sweep by the warring tides of Gaul and Roman, Goth and Frank and Saracen. A simple shepherd folk, they crushed the hosts of Charlemagne; and shepherds still, they overrun the California mountains.³¹

The idyllic, poetic life of the herdsman immortalized by the bards of the Old World was not always the lot of the newly arrived herdsman, tending his flocks in solitude on the lonely ranges of the west. The young shepherd from the Pyrenees suffered a rude transition from the accustomed routine of his homeland. Instead of spending a portion of his time with the flock and a portion of his time aiding in the harvests and field work as was often the practice in his homeland, the young immigrant found it necessary to spend the greatest part of his time alone, tending vast flocks.³² One writer describes this situation

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Peter Van Valkenburgh, "Shepherd Basques of California," Overland Monthly (August, 1924), p. 343.

³²Observation of the author.

lucidly in the following passage:

The patient Basque boys follow (the flock), through dust, through rain or snow: the furies of their wild blood banked, the springs of their youth welled in . . . This is no work for us of other breeding. No jingling spurs, no singing saddle leather here! It takes a Basque to be a sheepman. Alone half round the world, across deserts, through canons, he comes seeking a waiting kinsman. Never before out of call of father and mother, and sister, now he is solitary in the wild mountains with the sheep . . . To his unwonted eyes the great slopes should rise plaided with cheerful farmsteads; studded with pleasant villages; but they lean harsh and savage around him. Women are gone out of his life. From the few hard-eyed, gestureless horsemen who in terse, meaningless words sometimes accost him, he learns to shrink away. He sees his camp-tender through tears of joy. The suns scorch him, the rains drench him. Through dripping chaparral, he plods all day in mud-clogged shoes, at night to shiver in wet blankets; perhaps to wake under a coverlet of snow. The coyotes howl around his sleep.

Two or three years of this, and then, if meanwhile his young blood has not surged in riotous overflow at Reno or the Coast, his savings will buy an interest in the sheep he tends. A few years more, and he is owner of a band of sheep. Back to the Pyrenees a letter goes, and, some months after in a wild spot of our West, stands another slim, dark boy, lonely on a jutting crag, his uncle's sheep below him.³³

In contrast to the small flocks of his Pyrenean home, the newly arrived Basque youth now finds himself sole custodian of herds often numbering as many as two thousand.³⁴

Unlike the popular, romantic aura which seems to be associated with the cattle industry, steeped as it is in

³³Valkenburgh, op. cit., p. 377.

³⁴Ibid., p. 344.

folk-lore and American tradition, the sheep industry seems prosaic and insignificant. However, during the recent war the importance of possessing a domestic wool supply was clearly demonstrated, and in recent years steps have been taken to safeguard this industry. In the implementation of this objective, Basque herders have made significant contribution, as attested by articles such as the following: ". . . in the current shortage of American herders, the foreign ways of the Basques who have been imported recently work wonders in the U. S. grazing lands,"³⁵ and

The thousands of Basques who have come to the West since the turn of the century have become the backbone of the sheep industry.

The Ybarraguirres, Recaldes, Arburas, Etcheverrys, and Noriegas, to name a few, are responsible for some 60 per cent of the wool production in California.

And almost without exception they started as sheepherders in the great Central Valley . . .³⁶

Today, as in most other industries, technological developments have changed the pattern of the herder's life. One reporter, citing the case of a Basque sheepman named Jose Azparren, affirms that in 1926 when Azparren first arrived in the United States, the thousand-mile trek was routine. Describing one itinerary that was commonplace to

³⁵"Basque Shepherd", Life (May 12, 1952), p. 125.

³⁶Salinger, op. cit., p. 17.

Jose Azparren, the reporter writes:

He would start driving the sheep down the west side of the Central Valley to Bakersfield, over the Tehachapi mountains and down to the end of the Mojave desert. Then they were driven around the edge of the desert, up the Owens River valley to Bishop, Lone Pine and up to Mono Lake. The last stretch was back west of Ebbetts and Carson passes and down to Stockton . . .

adding that for the first nine years, Azparren scrupulously avoided towns, thus saving his money and becoming one of the biggest sheep men in the valley.³⁷

The contemporary herder is no longer confronted with the challenge of the thousand-mile hike, the following factors having made this former practice obsolete:

1) Today there are no open stretches of land similar to those of twenty-five years ago.

2) At present most of the sheep in the Central Valley are pastured on leased land, land which is becoming increasingly difficult to find.

3) Cotton has become a double threat to the sheep industry; it not only competes with wool on the market, but is also grown on land formerly used for grazing.

4) Much of the grazing land formerly available in the Sierra foothills has now been transformed into national and state parks.

Moreover, the sheep industry has now become mechanized to

³⁷Pierre Salinger, "From Pamplona to the San Joaquin - The Day of a Shepherd," San Francisco Chronicle, June 30, 1952.

the point where men, sheep, and equipment are moved to a great extent by truck.³⁸

In discussing Basque immigration to the United States, it is felt that some mention should be made of the procedure involved in paving the way for entry.

The usual procedure for sponsoring a Basque herder's entry is to contact the California Range Association, submit the name of the desired herder and deposit \$710 to cover the immigrant's travel expenses. The submitted name is subsequently checked by the Association, and if found acceptable, arrangements are made for entry under the quota system. Usually the sheep owner will submit the name of a relative or friend in whom he has the utmost confidence. The \$710 which he has deposited will be deducted from the wages of the newly arrived herder, who will draw an average of \$185 a month if he comes to the Central Valley of California.³⁹

Today the California Range Association is headed by John P. Bidegaray, Jr. Himself the son of a Basque immigrant who played an important role in the development of the sheep industry in central California, John Bidegaray, Jr., makes frequent trips to Spain and France in order to check on the names submitted to the Association. In some instances applications for entry to the United States are

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

first initiated by the Basques in Europe. In these cases the applicant must have connections with someone in this country who will assume responsibility for him.⁴⁰

Working from modest offices in Fresno, the California Range Association has apparently made significant gains in facilitating the arrival of Basque immigrants. That their efforts have born fruit can be seen in the fact that in 1951 the quota for Basques was set at 250; the following year this number was doubled.⁴¹ Despite these gains, the work of the Association has not been easy, and they have been confronted by considerable political and diplomatic difficulties, particularly in obtaining visas for the Spanish Basques. The following article which appeared in the New York Times on August 17, 1952, illustrates this point:

Resentment over what Spanish officials regard as Washington's inimical attitude toward the Franco regime was said today to have delayed action on a request by United States wool growers for the services of 405 Basques needed to relieve a serious shortage of sheepherders . . .

A conflict with United States labor laws resulted from the requirement of Spanish officials of individual contracts for the herders before their departure from Spain. This requirement appears to have been instituted in retaliation

⁴⁰Salinger, "From Pamplona to the San Joaquin . . ." loc. cit.

⁴¹Ibid.

for the McCarran Internal Security Act which bars Fascists and Communists, as well as members of the Spanish Falange, from our shores.⁴²

Although on a smaller scale than that of the pioneer period of South America, the Basque immigrant continues to make his contribution to progress. In California he is valued by sheep owners as worth a thousand of his woolly charges. Here he is also maintaining an old tradition - "the tradition of the rugged, lonely shepherd."⁴³

⁴²"Spanish Visas for Herders Delayed," The National Wool Growers (September, 1952), p. 6.

⁴³Salinger, "From Pamplona to the San Joaquin . . ."
loc. cit.

CHAPTER IX

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE BASQUE EXODUS AND CONCLUSIONS

New republics, thriving cities, flourishing agricultural and grazing activities in regions formerly dominated by wilderness and desolation - these and other benefits have come into existence in the New World due in some part to the Basque exodus. As the preceding chapter was a summary of the more obvious Basque contributions to the development of the New World, this chapter will attempt to supplement by outlining some of the factors prompting this exodus of a group who in their own habitat manifest a love and attachment to home and soil seldom surpassed.

Some authors have contended that one factor causing the Basques to migrate was their aversion to conscription for military service. In response to this, one authority writes, "il faut noter en effet que la conscription militaire, dans sa forme rigide, égalitaire et rigoureuse du jour, est une chose relativement nouvelle pour les Basques."¹ Up to the French Revolution of 1789, the French Basques of the provinces of Labourd, Basse-Navarre, and Soule were exempted from military conscription by the terms of their

¹Lhande, op. cit., p. 3.

fors, or special privileges.² However, it must be said that as early as 1692, Louis XIV of France complained to his minister, Pontchartrain, "que l'envie de la course fit fuir son service aux matelots basques." The Basque deserter from military service is explained in the following words:

. . . il n'obéit ni à la lâcheté ni à l'antimilitarisme économique ou bourgeois; il cède à la poussée des instincts ataviques pour le mouvement sans règle et sans frein.³

Somewhat more materialistic factors contributing to the Basque exodus were "la cherté des grains en 1847" and "les maladies de la vigne en 1856." The diminution of contraband, which was for thousands of individuals a "véritable industrie," is also attributed as a cause of emigration.⁴

Another, and probably most important, factor causing the Basques to emigrate is their family organization. The modus vivendi, which is a natural consequence of the Basque custom of parents designating one of their children as heritor of the home and property, leaves other members of the family little recourse other than to migrate and seek fortunes elsewhere.⁵ Although, technically, modern

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 7.

⁴Ibid., p. 8.

⁵Ibid., pp. 10-11.

French law provides for equal distribution of property among surviving children, the French Basques of today continue to bypass this law, "usually through self-denial of younger brothers and sisters. They agree either to a fictitious division or set off to seek their fortunes elsewhere."⁶

Lhande elaborates on a seemingly inherent factor in the Basque race which causes the people to emigrate to far-off, unknown shores seeking adventure and wealth. He refers to this as the inquiétude atavique, adding that:

. . . c'est ce besoin ardent d'aventures et de courses lointaines que les ancêtres baleiniers, corsaires ou capitaines, ont légué, par une filière demourée intacte, à leurs légitimes descendants. C'est là le grand rouage que viennent accélérer ou ralentir, un moment, un siècle au plus, les méprisables agitations des entours: hausse ou baisse du travail, vexations des gouvernements, progrès, guerres . . .⁷

In defending his thesis, Lhande emphasizes the fact that the Basques, having remained comparatively aloof from their neighbors, and, in the past, having married almost exclusively within their own group, possess more atavic qualities than any other people of the great, civilized nations of today. In contrast to the other peoples of Europe who have been and are continuously mingling their

⁶John E. H. Nolan, "Life in the Land of the Basques," The National Geographic Magazine (February, 1954), p. 159.

⁷Lhande, op. cit., p. 23.

blood through intermarriage, the Basque race from time immemorial has remained isolated and apart in its almost inaccessible Pyrenees. Guarded by their mountains, the Basques have further surrounded themselves by an impenetrable wall of language and tradition. As a consequence of this combination of factors, one writer affirms that the Basques have remained a homogeneous group retaining many of the atavic qualities of their ancestors. As stated by Lhande: "les Basques forment l'un des rares peuples d'Europe qui puissent encore se réclamer justement de leurs aïeux."⁸

Continuing this theme, Lhande explains the existence of two ostensibly conflicting elements in the Basque social structure: "l'inquietude ataviques" as opposed to the "foyer stable" and the "psychologie, enfin, toute imprégnée de calme et de sérénité," in the following words:

On peut dire des peuples, comme on l'a dit des individus, que, souvent, la richesse de leur fond et la vigueur de leurs ressources héréditaires se manifestent dans une psychologie à contrastes. Les sociétés où s'affaiblissent les énergies ataviques tendent à ne plus offrir que des types sans relief dont la terne physionomie se confond avec la teinte morne du milieu . . . Au contraire, les sociétés qui ont su conserver la réserve ancestrale dans toute sa pureté et toute sa vigueur y gardent, comme "en roulement" des germes psychiques rares, emmagasinés laborieusement par les ancêtres. A certains moments de l'existence, ces germes se font jour tout à coup et déterminent de

⁸Ibid., pp. 23-24.

subites réactions dont il faut chercher l'origine dans l'histoire plus ou moins lointaine de la race.⁹

That the inquiétude atavique of the Basque race has a dark, somber, destructive side is illustrated by excerpts from articles such as the following:

In former times, however, the Basques were one of the fiercest tribes in Europe. They attacked every foreigner who lacked permission to pass through their country, sometimes even bishops of their own faith . . .

As residents of a region that lies athwart the border between two large countries several times at war with each other, they are still suspicious of outsiders.¹⁰

Further evidence of the more undesirable manifestations of the atavic tendencies of the Basques can be seen in the sentence of excommunication pronounced against them in 1179 by the Third Council of Latran.¹¹

It is hoped that the foregoing chapters have cast a glimmer of light on a subject that in the past has too often been classified as a complete mystery and dismissed with a shrug of the shoulders.

Admittedly the problem of methodology still presents a formidable barrier. For instance, in the linguistic approach to the problem, Professor Lafon points out that there is an appalling dearth of researchers sufficiently

⁹Ibid., pp. 29-30.

¹⁰Nolan, op. cit., p. 162.

¹¹Cf., p. 27.

well-versed in Basque and the languages under comparison, and much of the previous work done in this field has been rendered invalid by the haphazard manner in which it was conducted.

Fanciful conjectures and suppositions also obscure the anthropological study of Basque origins. As indicated by one authority, too much stress has been placed on exterior racial characteristics such as hair and eye color. As yet the more important statistics such as the measurements of bodily dimensions and cranial structures have not been compiled on a plane extensive enough to be valid. However, recent blood tests are providing researchers with another avenue of approach to the problem of Basque origins.

Endowed with a small but picturesque land in which it appears that God and nature have worked in conjunction in order to preserve intact the mystery of the Eskual-dun, the Basques have conservatively retained their ancient modes of life wherever possible, particularly in the French Basque department of Basses-Pyrénées. Although losing ground in the Spanish Basque provinces due to political developments since 1936, the Basques on both immediate sides of the frontier have maintained many of their old traditions as well as their enigmatic language. However, today the linguistic boundaries of their land have been constricted to an area measuring roughly 106 miles from

east to west and 37 miles from north to south.

Although it is difficult to compile accurate statistics as to the number of Basques residing in both the Spanish and French Basque provinces, one authority estimates the number of Basques in the French Basque provinces at about 112,000, while in the Spanish Basque provinces it is estimated that about 600,000 inhabitants still speak their ancient tongue. A more recent article sets the figure at slightly less than a million inhabitants on both the French and Spanish sides of the frontier, adding that approximately two-thirds of this number live in the four Spanish provinces.¹²

In the French Basque provinces the bulk of the inhabitants follow three modes of life: pastoral, maritime, and agricultural. On the Spanish side of the frontier these patterns of life differ somewhat due to the greater emphasis on mining and industry.

Although it does not appear that the Basques attempted to conquer or subjugate their neighbors, records indicate that they were almost always hostile and warlike to strangers who attempted to cross their country. This is illustrated by the Basque ambush of the hosts of Charlemagne at Roncesvalles in 778 a.d. Here twenty thousand

¹²Nolan, op. cit., p. 147.

troops of the Frankish hordes paid the supreme penalty for their violation of the Basque homeland.

Despite this early ferociousness, the character of the Basques appears to have undergone changes during the course of centuries, changes which kept pace with the shifts in popular beliefs and fads. For instance, in the sixteenth century the Basques were regarded as a "gay and lively" people, while during the nineteenth century, when Romanticism was in vogue, they were regarded as "noble savages." However, recent works depict the Basque as "practical, independent, and unimaginative." This is illustrated by the sobriquet given the Spanish Basques: "the Yankees of Spain."

Although still a Gordian knot, the origin of the Basques and their language is becoming better understood due to the application of new scientific techniques. One of the world's foremost linguists, Professor René Lafon of the University of Bordeaux, is currently working on the hypothesis relating Basque to the dialects of the Caucasus, the region in southwest Russia now comprising the modern state of Georgia. Becoming acquainted with a group of Turkish students at the University of Bordeaux, the writer, curious as to the connection between Basque and the languages of the region surrounding the Black Sea, offered a Turkish friend a Basque text to read. The Turkish student


not only pronounced the text with perfect ease and accuracy, but also commented on the remarkable similarity between his language and Basque.¹³

As to the origin of the Basque race, recent blood tests conducted on a group of four hundred Basques indicated that they were nearly all Rh negative. The researchers concluded that inasmuch as all other European racial groups have an estimated mixture of 60 per cent Rh positive and 40 per cent Rh negative (the original Europeans all were Rh negative), the Rh negative Basques undoubtedly inhabited Europe longer than the mixed or positive Rh peoples.

Although the Basques have not made any significant contributions to world literature or art, the primitive simplicity and naturalness of their works is a refreshing contrast to some of the stilted, superficial artifacts of other groups; in addition they provide an interesting clue to the spirit of the Basque race. This is also true of their folk music, whose serene, detached melodies give the impression of "something infinitely old and infinitely remote," like the Basque race itself.

The Basque whom we of the North American continent most generally see is the young, inarticulate herdsman

¹³Observation of the author.



who, arriving on our shores knowing little or no English, acclimatizes himself to the strangeness of the New World by spending a short time in a French, Spanish, or Basque hotel, thence to be transported to the lonely mountain ranges where he will spend most of the months of the year tending vast flocks with no other company than that of his dogs.

Despite the preceding oversimplified generalization depicting the stereotyped Basque of today, it should be borne in mind that the ancestors of the Basques probably antedated those of most other European people in arriving on the shores of the New World. Records indicate that Basque fishermen were returning from six-month voyages laden with codfish, caught only in American waters, long before Columbus set sail.

Accounts of the seventeenth century French missionaries in Canada indicate that they had cause to complain of Basque trading practices with the Indians at this early period. At that time the Basques of Biscay had so completely monopolized trade and commerce that all merchant vessels in those waters were referred to as "biscailenne."

In South America, the Basques made outstanding contributions in the colonization and development of regions which were but dank jungles at the time of their arrival. Founding colonies in Peru and Montevideo and developing

commerce in Chile and other South American countries, the Basques also played an important part in the political development of the Latin American republics. The South American George Washington, Simon Bolivar, had Basque antecedents. There was also a period in South American history when three of the Latin republics were governed simultaneously by men of Basque origin.

In the United States the Basque role, although much less spectacular than in South America, is nevertheless important. Although it is extremely difficult to find accurate statistics as to the number of Basques in this country - one article setting the number at 50,000 spread throughout the states of California, Nevada, and Wyoming,¹⁵ while the Basque delegation in New York estimates that there are approximately 15,000 Basques in the states of Idaho, Oregon, and Nevada - the numerically few that there are have made substantial contributions, particularly in grazing and agricultural activities. Today it is estimated that sixty per cent of the wool production in California is in the hands of Basques. A more intangible contribution that the Basques have made to the West is the spirit and gayness of their old way of life. This can readily be observed at Basque picnics and other social get-togethers.

¹⁵Nolan, op. cit., p. 159.

Why has the New World been such a magnet to the Basques? One of the important factors leading to Basque emigration is the family organization. Inasmuch as there is usually only one member of a Basque family who inherits the ancestral home and property, the other members of the family, usually the younger brothers and sisters, have little choice but to migrate elsewhere in quest of the fortune with which to found their own hearth and family. In the past the usual plan of the Basque emigrant was to work, save, and return to the lulling shadows of the Pyrenees economically free and independent, there to marry the girl of his choice, passing the declining years of his life in the same manner as his ancestors before him. This is aptly summed up in the following manner by one reporter writing of the Basques in the United States:

There comes a day when, sturdy and sunburned, still in his early thirties, he stands on some little desert station platform surrounded by vociferating Basques . . . the train bears the traveler eastward and away, followed by a babel of messages to fathers, mothers, sweethearts, in the loved Pyrenees . . .

What does he in the Pyrenees, this gleaner of the desert, this home-gone wanderer? He marries the girl who has been waiting for him. With his six or seven thousand dollars, he buys the farm she has chosen; stone houses, stone wine-cellar, barns, fences - everything stone, he tells you; fine vineyard, horse, cows, pigs - everything fine, he tells you. He is rich, he is successful; he has won the Fleece of Gold.¹⁶

¹⁶Valkenburgh, op. cit., p. 377.

Another writer elaborates at great lengths on the inquiétude atavique of the Basque race. To this he attributes the irresistible urge which prompts many Basques to travel to unknown lands seeking adventure and fortunes.

Be that as it may, it is hoped that this study has, to some extent, divested the subject of its cloak of mystery and misconception. Furthermore, it is to be hoped that a greater understanding and appreciation will be gained of the contributions made to world culture and civilization by a group heretofore considered merely bizarre or paradoxical.

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