

**THE CENTURY OF THE BASQUES:  
THEIR INFLUENCE IN THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE 1500'S**

**CRAIG S. CAMPBELL**

University of Kentucky  
Department of Geography  
1457 Patterson Office Tower  
Lexington, KY 40506-0027

**RESUMEN: LA EPOCA DE LOS VASCOS: SU INFLUENCIA EN LA GEOGRAFIA DEL SIGLO XVI**

Se examina la influencia potente de los vascos en la edad de la exploración y, por lo tanto, su contribución al desarrollo del pensamiento geográfico. Algunos de los tópicos mayores tratados son: el desarrollo económico de Euskadi, específicamente en la costa; la división de la costa según la función marítima, y la investigación subsiguiente de esas funciones en el siglo XVI. La costa vasco-francesa contribuyó más a la pesca de bacalao en Terranova mientras que la costa guipuzcoana dio la mayoría de los balleneros. La costa vizcaina fue más diversa, y participó en una variedad sorprendente de comercios, siendo influyente en Europa, Terranova, y en las exploraciones españolas de las Américas. Se escudriña algunos casos de líderes vascos en el nuevo mundo y se propone que la influencia vasca fue uno de los elementos principales de la división e independencia de los virreinos.

**LABURPENA: EUSKALDUNEN GARAIA: HAIEN ERAGINA XVI. MENDEAREN GEOGRAFIAN.**

Txosten honetan Aurrakuntzaren garaian euskaldunen eragin handia aztertzen da, hots, haien ekarpena pentsamentu geografikoaren garapenari. Jotzen diren gai handi batzuk hauek dira: Euskadiko garapen ekonomikoa, batez ere, itsasertzean; itsasertzearen banaketa itsas-funtzioen arabera, eta hauei dagokien azterketa XVI. mendean. Iparraldeko itsasertzeak Tarranovako bakailuen arrantzan eragin handia izan zuen bitartean, Gipuzkoako itsasertzeak berriz, bale-arrantzan. Bizkaiko itsasertzeak ekintza gehiago izan zuen, eta komertzioaren zenbait aktibitateetan parte hartu zuen; Europan, Terranovan eta Amerikan espainolek eginiko aurrakuntzetan eragina edukiz. Mundu Berriko zenbait aitzindari euskaldun aztertzen dira, eta Virreinatuen independentzia eta banaketaren elementorik nagusienetako bat bezala euskal eragina proposatzen da.

## INTRODUCTION.

It is well recognized that the Basque are likely the most ancient of all European peoples. Unfortunately, due to their secretive nature and tendencies not to publicize their accomplishments, those interested in the study of the Basques are only given frustrating glimpses of who these people were and where they hail from.

The Basques are usually recognized by what makes them an odd species of man: a non Indo-European language related to no other, the highest frequencies of the blood type O and rh negative factor, their odd sporting events, and an ancient tendency towards independence and self-rule, among other outstanding traits. They are known for being odd, and there the line of understanding is usually drawn.

Basques are rarely recognized for the strong and innovative character that has enabled them to rise to the forefront of the fishing, whaling, metallurgical and shipbuilding industries at various points in history and including the present. The core of the contemporary culture region of the Basque Country (including Navarra) has been frozen to its present boundaries for centuries, but Basque influence in Spanish (and French) politics, exploration, and maritimes and wartime activities is of such a geographic stature that their importance can no longer be viewed as minimal or freakish in nature.

In such a manner, Basques have been involved in main affairs of Spanish activities for a long times. Basque geographical influence in the Age of Exploration and subsequent colonization is experienced en masse particularly from Columbus to the 1800's.

This paper will trace the Basque and his cultural influence, geographically, in the 16th century. It will first examine briefly the physical and economic geography of the Basque Country in this time period as a prerequisite to coastal and maritime culture and then follow two major routes: that of Basque enterprise in Europe and across the Atlantic and, second, Basque political and cultural influence in "Spanish" exploration. The latter theme will deal specifically with the beginnings of the Rio de la Plata region and Chile. The purpose of this partial study is to eventually develop the following hypotheses:

1. The Basque people are self-motivators who tend to lead and innovate whatever the circumstances.
2. A majority of Spanish maritime activities in the 16th century were related directly to Basque seafaring and shipbuilding expertise.
3. The Basque personality of independence and self-sovereignty is one of the major facts in the forming of the political and economic geographies of Latin America.
4. The Basques, as a distinct people, have made a large contribution to man's knowledge of the surface of the Earth, and thus, to the development of geographic thought.

## HISTORIAL VIEWS ON THE GEOGRAPHY OF EUSKADI

The comparison of Euskadi's physical geography and vegetational variety of landscape with the rest of Spain or southern France is hardly a mundane procedure. As one traces a path northward through Spain along the second degree of longitude into the Basque Country, influence of the mediterranean realm such as scrub vegetation, the olive tree, and vinyards respectively cede to the predominance of mountainous deciduous forest, sheep and cattle grazing, and then coastal and marine activities. The climate here is tropical marine, more akin to western France or the British Isles than the rest of Spain. There is also a direct relationship between the longevity or,

for example, the current linguistic boundaries of the Basque language and the rugged form of the Earth (fig. 2). The Basques find themselves preserved in an ancient and relatively untouched pocket of mountain and coast.

The Romans seem to be the earliest peoples to divide Euskadi (the Basque name for the Basque region) into bio-geographical regions and record their interests for economic purposes. The lush landscape and coastal zone of the north the Romans termed the 'saltus', or the 'forest'. The area south of the mountains, essentially the floodplain of the Ebro River they called the 'ager', or, the region of 'agricultural' usefulness (Larrea and Mieg, pp. 14-15). In general, therefore, on the basis of physical landscape and cultural atmosphere, the Basque homelands can be divided latitudinally into three belts of distinct human activity (fig. 2):

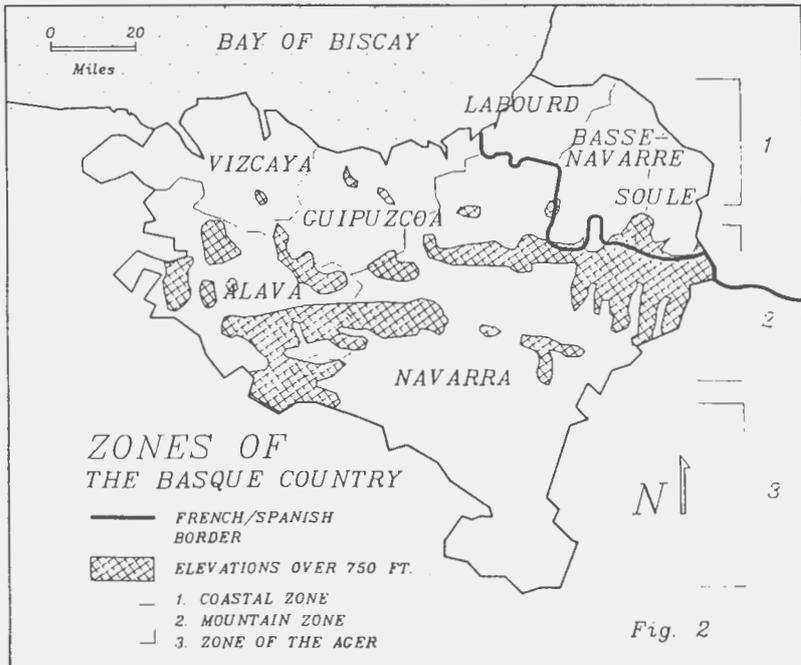
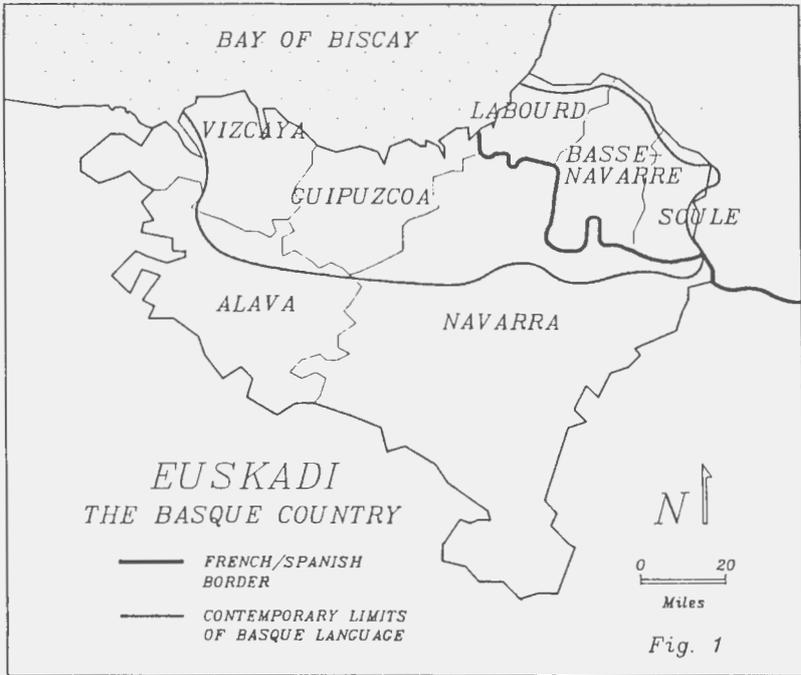
1. The 'ager', or southern agriculture area making up the floodplain of the Ebro River and the area of the most marked mediterranean influence.
2. The mountainous belt north of the ager from the Pyrenees Mountains in eastern Navarra across and through Alava in the west. This belt also includes southern Vizcaya and Guipuzcoa.
3. The coastal strip from Vizcaya through Labourd in France.

This exact shape from south to north has acted largely as a cultural filter and barrier from various invaders throughout history. The fertile ager has been overrun by Romans, Visigoths, and Moors alike, which has resulted in the elimination of many elements of the Basque way of life. Southern Navarra may proclaim itself Basque, but the strongest elements of Basque culture no longer reside there (again, see fig. 1). North, in the mountains and along the coast, Basque cultural elements are preserved fairly much as a whole. The Romans occasionally sacked Basque ports, but neither the coastal nor the mountain areas were ever under direct Roman control (see discussion and maps, Baroja, pp. 52-57). The coast has specifically become a hearth of Basque seafaring culture and is the most important factor in the development of this paper.

In the 9th century, small towns and fortresses were appearing all over Europe (Northam, p. 51) and the coastal part of Euskadi (Vizcaya, Guipuzcoa, and Labourd) was apparently no exception. Baroja attributes town growth locally in the 1100's to three major causes (translated from Baroja, p.90):

1. The existence of royal power (in Vizcaya, town leaders with ambitious desires) that attempts to intensely exploit specific resources and certain operations of apparent economic benefit; above all, the ports.
2. The need to protect frontier boundaries from those with ancient designs on the homelands (like Navarra) and from rural marauders.
3. The growth of commerce by land and sea.

The use of the Cantabrian Sea as an important economic employer dates from approximately this time period, and it is not surprising that the first towns in Vizcaya and Guipuzcoa to establish charters were ports; among others, Fuenterrabia (1203), Motrico (1209), and Guetaria (also 1209) (Baroja, p. 90). Marine fishing primitively developed as an essential food resource for the coastal population (Allieres, p. 147). Since the vikings explore the French and Spanish coasts in 9th and 11th centuries, it is often reasoned that the Basques may have picked up much additional seafaring knowledge from the aggressive northerners. In any case, somewhere in this time period, the coastal people of Euskadi began to use the Cantabrian Sea as an important resource. Many types and sizes of marine life were sought with success. The sardine,



sea bream, hake, and anchovy were all common local catches while tuna were brought in from the Asturian coast to the west (Baroja, p. 179). Cod fishing and whaling quickly became a mainstay of the industry, taking the Basque mariners further and further across the Atlantic in search of more 'fertile' waters. Whaling and marine scenes were so culturally prominent that they were sometimes incorporated into town seals as seen in that of Fuenterrabia, Guipuzcoa in 1297.

With the increasing power of the Christian monarchs, the foundation and growth of the Basque interior urban nuclei, and the flourishing of the industry and mercantile activities and needs of these urban centers, the development of Basque fishing, whaling, and commercial navigation becomes extremely important to the economy of Spain as well as that of Euskadi.

### NEWFOUNDLAND

Gradually, Basque whalers and cod fishermen made their way across the Atlantic Ocean to establish very important fishing grounds in the waters of Newfoundland and Labrador. These waters became prominent, economically, to the Basque Country, though wind and ocean currents were against the vessels headed westward and the crossing was not an easily negotiated affair. The determined mariners had to fight against, cross, or skirt the Gulf Stream as it impacts Western Europe and breaks into major eddies in different directions. The Westerlies were also to be dealt with and the ships to Labrador largely sailed into the wind. It is likely that Basque ships struck out northward along the western European coast and gradually headed in the direction of Labrador as they crossed the Gulf Stream probably sailing not far from Iceland and Greenland. The return trip easily followed the Gulf Stream straight back to the Basque homeland.

The Cantabrian coast was a very active place at the beginning of the 15th century and was to reach an absolute peak at the end of the 16th century. Just as the Basque Country was divided into three cultural/physical regions above, the coast can now be similarly divided into three sections of maritime geography:

1. The section of coast from Labourd in the French 'Pays Basque' through eastern Guipuzcoa associated primarily with cod fishing.
2. The 'whaling' portion of coast from eastern Guipuzcoa through eastern Vizcaya.
3. The industrially and commercially diverse part of coast stretching through the remainder of Vizcaya and reaching Santander in influence.

For the sake of order, these can be respectively referred to as the French Basque, Guipuzcoan, and Vizcayan coasts (fig. 4). The French Basque coast seems to have its roots most deeply anchored in cod fishing, as well as a good part of Guipuzcoa. In fact, a number of Guipuzcoan cod fishing crews hired out on French ships toward the end of the 15th century, but so did some whaling harpooners, showing that the coastal classifications described here are for general purposes only and not to be rigidly accepted (Barkham 1977, p. 76). The French Basque vessels were more popularly known for their prominence in cod fishing than their Guipuzcoan counterparts because French curing salt was readily available to them and they could sail directly for North Atlantic waters. Guipuzcoan ships needed to procure salt from Portugal or southern Spain before heading for Terranova (Douglass and Bilbao, p. 54n). Actual cod waters are difficult to pinpoint precisely, though the eastern coast of the island of Newfoundland seems to have been the primary fishing area. Other cod exploits may have extended from Newfoundland all the way to Iceland, though the one-

time existence of a maritime Basque-Icelandic pidgin language reflects whaling activities in its vocabulary rather than cod fishing. For example, one of the pidgin's extant phrases, translated, says, "If Christ and Mary give me a whale, I'll give you the tail" (Hualde, p. 51).

Whaling seems to have been a familiar activity all along the Atlantic coast, "... but in the 1570's the men who were experts at whaling came from the area between Capbreton in France and Santander, and the most expert of all appear to have lived between the (cape of) Machichaco and Fuenterrabia, a very short stretch of coast..." (Barkham 1977, p. 76). The whalers were active users of important ores such as iron and copers which were used to make such tools as harpoons and tryworks cauldrons for melting down whale blubber. Vizcaya and Guipuzcoa are well known for such mineral resources and the Basque Country's iron industry together with shipbuilding helped to make Basque whaling in the 1500's the most important whaling enterprise in the world. Unlike codfishermen, whalers set out for Terranova Province with much more equipment and stayed in Labrador from late Spring to Fall, careful not to be icelocked there into a fierce winter. Whaling activities were done on site in seven to twelve semi-permanent settlements most of which were in or near the Strait of Belle Isle (Barkham 1978, p. 10). These activities included the boiling down of whale fat and cooping of the barrels for the transportation of the multi-purpose oil back to Europe. Here the ship's valuable 1,000 to 2,000 barrels of oil were to be sold in London or Flanders for approximately 4,000 to 6,000 dollars per 55 gallon barrel. This averages to about \$5 million per shipload (Grenier, pp. 58,62). It is credible that some 30 ships a year participated in the Terranova whale run, constituting approximately a \$150 million industry.

The duration of the Basque whaling industry is substantiated from about 1540 to around 1600. A map by Pierre Descelier, 1546, (see Laxalt, pp. 70-71) shows Basque-like galleons and harpooned whales in waters off of eastern Newfoundland (fig. 5). Codfishing, in particular, was known to have taken place even earlier than the 1500's by the Spanish and French in Labrador. The Labrador coast was often referred to on the maps of the time as, 'bacalaia', 'bacaleorum', or 'bacalaos', all relating to the Spanish term 'bacalao', meaning 'cod fish'. Appearances of Basque cod or whaling activities previous to the 1530's or 1540's would be expected though at the same time speculative (Wroth, pp. 21,27).

## FLANDERS AND EUROPE

Selma Barkham's enlightening account of Guipuzcoan shipping notes 37 ships registered along the Guipuzcoan coast for the Spring of 1571, most of which were in port preparing to set sail for Terranova. 20 of these were registered as being between 250 and 750 tons. Along the majority of the Vizcayan coast at the same time (including the Cantabrian ports of Laredo and Castro Urdiales) 34 ships were registered, 17 being over 250 tons (Barkham 1977, pp. 73, 76-77). Many of the Vizcayan ships were being loaded with wool to be shipped to Flanders, though many other commodities were also popular. These ships commonly carried iron, wool, woad, hides, wine, olive oil, whale oil, cod, salt, wheat, bacon, barrels, building materials, silver and gold from the New World, and many other items important to the commerce of the day (Barkham 1977, pp. 74-75). These varied cargos show the more diverse economic base of the Vizcayan coast stemming largely from industrially independent Bilbao and its productive estuary, the Nervion.

Spain's economy was largely dependent upon the commercial ingenuity of the Basques as their ships sailed from Scandinavia to the eastern Mediterranean (Baroja, p. 196). There is some doubt about just how loyal Basque mariners were to the Spa-

nish Crown, however. It is obvious that commerce is the Basque's 'reason for being' in such extensive maritime activities, though social setting forces Basques to often describe themselves and their ships as "totally devoted to King and Country" (Barkham, p. 74). The thing that Basque merchants feared the most was the government embargo of their ships for use in war, and all too common procedure under Philip II, who received the main bulk of his naval strength directly from the Basque coast. Baroja states, "Each time that the kings needed them (Basque vessels) for some bellicose act, they were subjected to embargos. There was at that time no possibility of distinguishing between maritime activities of war, and those of commerce, and a merchant fleet was converted into an armada, or vice-versa, according to the circumstances." (translated from Baroja, p. 197). The English fleets were the major opponents of the Spanish royalty. Their ships were sleek and maneuverable, unlike the Basque galleons of commerce. Apparently, the link longed for the development of new ships, faster and more adapted for war, "... but the Basque ships continued in their short, fat form, where a greater quantity of cargo would fit." (Baroja, p. 199). Interestingly, Baroja says that in these instances, the Basques were conservative, "but advanced when compared with the Andalusians and Portuguese". (Baroja, p. 199).

In the 1570's, uprisings in Flanders resulted in the loss of many Basque ships, and the destruction of the 'invincible' Spanish Armada by the British took virtually all large galleons out of commission permanently. Sir Francis Drake himself, in preparation for war with the Spanish, wrote of Vizcayan Basques who taunted by flying the British flag on their vessels. In a report to the British government, he wrote:

*"There is come home, since the sending away of my last messenger, one bark whom I sent out as an espial, who confirmeth those intelligences whereof I have advertised your lordships by him; and that divers of those Biscayans are abroad along the coast wearing British flags, whereof there are made in Lisbon three hundred with the red cross, which is a great presumption, proceeding of the haughtiness and price of the Spaniard, and not to be tolerated by any true natural English heart"* (Henderson, p. 18).

The Basque was not favorable to the enlistment of his ship for use in war, but once involved he took the challenge with a fair amount of spirit, typical of Basque persistence in character. At the demise of the Armada, Basque commerce in Terranova was drastically reduced. Most ships of large tonnage had been destroyed though fishing and whaling activities resumed on a minimal scale through the early 1600's. By this time, however, the Basque foothold in the 'province' of Terranova was lost forever. Barkham appropriately sums up that:

*"It speaks well for the persistence and enterprise of the Basques that in spite of many royal interferences they kept on with trade and transatlantic fishing right up to the eve of the Invincible Armada which finally drained all their resources to such a low ebb that the economy never fully recovered"*. (Barkham 1977, p. 74).

## THE NEW WORLD: CADIZ AND SEVILLA

After having examined the considerably developed condition of Basque maritime commerce in the 1500's, the slightly more obscure area of their influence in the realm of "Spanish" exploration can be better understood. Before proceeding it is important to point out some of the basic questions that need to be confronted since, generally, there exists only minimal inkling as to the difference between "Basque"

and “Spaniard”. It may be asked: If the Basque Country is, at this time, a part of Spain, why distinguish between a Basque and a Spaniard? If the reasons are strong for such a distinction, was the Basque Country involved in the discovery of the New World and how was it linked to the Spanish operations thereof? If Spanish leaders in exploration happened to be Basque, did their loyalty differ from that of other ‘regional’ groups? If Basques are different from Spaniards, how do their activities set them apart from the Spanish? If the Basques have recognizable traits in their New World dealings, what are they? Then, last, how did Basque enterprise in the New World conquest and colonization affect the future of ‘Latin’ America? To answer these questions even in part, it is necessary to keep in mind the economic scale of Basque maritime activity that developed in the late 15th and during the 16th centuries. A good portion of this activity has already been summarized and now remains the challenge of linking Basque shipping, whaling, and fishing to the conquest of the Americas. In a nutshell, the relation is an undisputed one, and impossible to relegate to an insignificant level.

It is currently necessary to address the above questions. If any people have a right to consider themselves a ‘separate’ group, the Basque people possess this right. Enough has been written on Basque language, economy, politics, and general culture to support the unique Basque identity. After all, were not the Basques “there first”, so to speak? In any case, history has proven the Basque people to be innovative and alert to their surroundings and opportunities, and the livelihood of the Iberian Peninsula, the Spanish state in particular, has long been dependent upon the area of Basque culture as one of the country’s most industrial and productive regions (de Blij, pp. 70, 106).

Elementary history lessons are blind to Basque endeavors in the New World, strong as they were. One of the main reasons for this is the fact that in 1494 all shipping to the ‘Indies’ was restricted to the Andalusian port of Cadiz, preventing any actual ventures from being made from the Basque coast (Douglass and Bilbao, p. 68). Spanish shipping was already heavily dependent upon Basque marine vessels, money and manpower. The royal selection of Cadiz only heightened the fervor for the recruitment of Basque men and ships. Bilbao, specifically, was superior to either Sevilla or Cadiz in naval and maritime strength. Even the Andalusian shipyards depended upon the Basques for the shells and masts of their ships; they were constructed in the Basque Country (Douglass and Bilbao, pp. 68-69). After whaling vessels in the Labrador run had more than paid for themselves, they were commonly sold to Sevillian merchants for use in Caribbean and New World exploits (Thurston, p.46).

In Cadiz, the ‘College of Vizcayan Pilots’ had been established when Basque naval assistance was sought previously to help fight the Muslims. In Sevilla, a sizable Basque community developed as the demand for Basque shipping and manpower increased. In 1540, the ‘Confraternity of the Basque Nation’ had formed as an ethno-religious organization which helped to build a chapel and crypt solely dedicated for the use of Basque mariners who were involved in New World shipping, and their families (Douglass and Bilbao, pp. 68-69).

Douglass and Bilbao concisely state:

*“Thus, “while Sevilla had a monopoly of trade, the north of Spain, especially Biscay (Vizcaya) had a monopoly of shipping, for it supplied almost all of the Spanish vessels in the Indies trades.” Basque interests controlled more than shipping; they “supplied capital, equipment, and goods for trade as well as many of its personnel.” Several of the previously established Basque commercial interests in Sevilla opened branch operations in the Indies (notably Santo Domingo) under control of close kinsmen” (Douglass and Bilbao, p. 69).*

Later and in summary, they continue:

*"... the magnitude of Basque involvement in New World maritime traffic was substantial... By Lynch's estimate almost 80 percent of this New World traffic between 1520 and 1580 was Basque controlled, while between 1580 and 1610, Basque interest represented 50 percent of the total. These figures prompt him to label the Basque area "the nursery of Spanish seamen, which supplied most of the manpower on the American run" "*" (Douglass and Bilbao, p. 70).

## THE NEW WORLD: THE EARLY VOYAGES

It is known that the Basque contributed much even at the very beginning of New World exploration, not all in a positive light. Columbus' flagship on his first voyage was a Basque vessel, the Santa Maria, as was her owner and master, Juan de la Cosa, a Vizcayan. He accompanied Columbus on his first two voyages, though it seems a wonder that Columbus put up with his unreliability for so long. Columbus found his Captains of the Pinta and Santa Maria often rebellious, independently taking jaunts and separating their ships from the rest without Columbus' permission. "He (la Cosa) seems to have been not only negligent, but also cowardly and insubordinate" (Kish, p. 317n). This independence was common on the voyage. At one point the crew of the Santa Maria threatened mutiny and almost threw Columbus overboard. This reluctance to follow Columbus' orders may or may not have been Basque induced, but another incident surely was. After the Santa Maria was shipwrecked off of Hispaniola (possibly another sign of the neglect of La Cosa and his crew), Columbus was forced to leave a group of men to wait for his return. A fort was constructed and the men were left with strict orders of obedience. Upon Columbus' return on his second voyage, little sign of the fort and its occupants remained, having been destroyed by the seemingly peaceable indians. Apparently, the men had not behaved. Investigation,

*"Revealed that the defeat resulted when the Europeans split into two camps. The division took place along ethnic lines as the Basques seceded. Las Casas states, "certain Vizcayans joined together against the rest". Herrera remarks, "There was a division among the Christians caused by the Vizcayans." "*" (Douglass and Bilbao, p. 74).

In a letter to Ferdinand and Isabella, Columbus' dismay at the disunity of his first voyage is evident though subdued:

*"I lingered nowhere longer than the winds compelled, except at the village of Navidad where I took care to establish the fort and to make all safe. Though these things are great and unheard of, nevertheless they would have been much greater if the ships had served me as they should" (Kish, p. 317).*

Columbus is forgiving in his report. He places blame on the ships themselves and does not mention the Basque contingent of the crews, nor the ship's masters. Of interest is the fact that while the Santa Maria was Basque owned and manned, the Niña, too, had a largely Basque crew though Columbus seems to have had few problems on his own ship (Douglass and Bilbao, p. 74).

La Cosa later became recognized for his maps of the Caribbean and American coasts, as well as his map of the world. His world map, dated 1500, is a combination of his own observations and those of others. It is a fairly accurate work. On it he denotes South America as the "Island discovered by the Portuguese", with a subtitle

on Brazil's northeast coast; "This coast was discovered in 1499 for Castile, Vincente Eanes being the discoverer". On the south coast of South Asia he labels, "Land discovered by Don Manuel, King of Portugal", but gives no mention of Da Gama. He labels the East Indies as the "Land of Cannibals" (Crone, pp. 48-49).

It also seems likely that if Basque whalers and cod fishermen had penetrated the waters of Newfoundland/Labrador Juan de la Cosa might have indicated such on his world map. The northern coast of North America is referred to as "Discovered by England" and a northernmost cape, possibly part of the island of Newfoundland is labeled the "Cape of England", both reflecting the presence of Cabot in 1497. Nothing is shown which indicates Basque commerce in the area. He names Guanahani, Cuba, 'la Española', and many features of the area of the Americas first seen by ambitious European eyes, but he mentions Columbus nowhere.

Some observations on the relationships between Basques and the Portuguese are also pertinent to the discussion. If Prince Henry the Navigator used Basque naval expertise at Sagres, it has not been uncovered yet, though a likely prospect. By the 1400's Basque whaling had developed to the point that vessels were probably venturing well into the Atlantic. Their merchant secrets, however, seem well kept.

The picture that gradually forms in the exploration is one of a strong Portuguese maritime strength in the 1400's which gives way to a Basque domination in the 1500's, and then to British expertise in the 1600's. Says Baroja:

*"It is more than pure coincidence that Magellan, a Portuguese, started the voyage of the world's first circumnavigation, while a Basque, Elcano, finished it. But if of the first there as been mucha and well written, of the latter we only have an idea that is poor and imprecise. Taciturnity has been a characteristic of our people for a long time". (Baroja, p. 196).*

In the 1470's Basque vessels were fighting against the French as well as the Portuguese, trying to disrupt communications between the two who advanced against a divided Castille. The Basque Country, then called the 'Kingdom of Navarra' fought to retain its sovereignty.

Later, in the mid-1500's, Basque cod fishermen from Guipuzcoa sought salt off of Portuguese shores before striking out for 'Bacalaos'. A greater relationship between the Basques and the Portuguese is suspected and regarded as an important topic to develop, and for that reason, briefly discussed.

## NEW WORLD EXAMPLES: EL RIO DE LA PLATA AND CHILE

The Basque presence has been discussed concerning their own commerce, duties for the Spanish Crown, especially in war, and their startling connections to New World exploration. The inquiry continues, then, as the inspection of New World settlement of particular regions is magnified.

At this point it becomes difficult at times to discern who was actively and culturally Basque by simply examining surnames. A sailor may be thoroughly Basque in language and culture, but, because of changes of family residence, have a castilian surname. Likewise, a Basque surname may mean little more than the fact that the family has moved and lived in another part of Spain for three generations. If a Basque surnamed individual does, for example, live in Sevilla in 1540, it would need to be ascertained if he/she was part of the Basque community prevalent here, or simply of a separate stock generations and long since removed from Basque culture. For instance, it seems unlikely that the Mendoza brothers, famous for the initial discovery

of Buenos Aires, were an active part of Basque culture or even considered themselves strongly Basque since the family had moved out of Alava to Guadix, Andalucía some 200 years before (Baroja, p. 97). The second founder of Buenos Aires in 1580, Juan de Garay, was certainly Basque through and through.

It does not matter, in these contexts, whether one person was 'racially' Basque or not. What is sought is a Basque background of a group of people who participated together and caused specific outcomes politically and geographically. In other terms, how did the Basque traits of regionalism, separatism, independence, individuality, innovativeness, language or culture, (or whatever the desired term) aid in the shaping of Latin American political, social, and cultural geography during settlement and independence as well as to the present day? This is a loaded question and one that will no doubt be answered unsatisfactorily here. The emphasis is on the 1500's and here the emphasis must largely stay.

Whichever region of 'Spanish American' history one examines an overabundance of Basque characters can be found. All of the viceroyalties were founded by, or had a substantial number of leaders who were Basque. The earliest purely Basque settlements in America were located on Hispaniola as merchant extensions of Basque shipping and financial interest in Bilbao or Sevilla. The earliest organised attempt of a Basque colony consisted of forty recruited families that were to have settled in Santo Domingo in 1501, but the plan was a failure (Douglass and Bilbao, p. 75). Other more substantial, and successful colonies with families were established in the 1530's and after in Santo Domingo.

Most Basque influence was found, though, not in families, but in male leadership. Ship captains, important merchants, and religious leaders were the most likely candidates for governorship, and Basques were plentiful and influential in these ranks.

A predominance of Basques are found in the beginnings of Mexico. The first bishop of 'New Spain' was Juan de Zumarraga, named in 1527, who proceeded to surround himself with Basque family and friends (Douglass and Bilbao, p. 76). As seen here and in many other instances, nepotism was an exceedingly powerful Basque trait. Cristóbal de Oñate and his brother Juan founded Guadalajara, Mexico. Cristóbal de Oñate, Diego Ibarra, and Juan de Tolosa all became wealthy on the mines of Zacatecas, founded by the latter. The son of Cristóbal, Juan de Oñate took the first expeditions into the New Mexico region and became the first governor in the region, though this was to be a short lived post (Laxalt, p.70). Such leaders have had a great part in the roots and formation of what, to a substantial degree, was certainly 'Basque America', at least in authority and leadership, if not in colonization. Those Basques who had the good fortune to maneuver themselves into power affected greatly the region they directed. Basques often teamed with other Basques to achieve results which at times shine as heroic, but often show them to be mischievous underminers. Such is the case with Domingo Martínez de Irala, the first governor of the Rio de la Plata from Asunción (what is today Paraguay). Irala was a native of Vergara, Vizcaya and often referred to as the Vergaran Captain, which gives special emphasis upon his Basque heritage. After the disappearance of Juan de Ayolas, friend of Irala and himself probably of Basque lineage due to surname and hometown of Briviesca, Burros, not far from Alava, Irala becomes governor himself until the arrival of Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, the rather benign leader sent by Charles V to take the reigns of the region. On the arrival in Asunción of Cabeza de Vaca, Irala is made his lieutenant governor. Irala is incensed by the whole matter. He has had his authority usurped, though by royal decree, and hereafter uses his position to belittle Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, despite efforts by the latter to please him (Fernandez, pp. 30-31).

What happens next appears to be partly a Basque conspiracy. In Framis, a personalized dialog of the account is given; even as to actual conversations. What Framis proposes may be in part fictional, at least his style seems rather presumptuous. At any rate, history has approved the fact that as Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca lay ill in his bed, a group of men burst into his quarters and threw him in jail. Irala is historically very quiet before and during these political disruptions, but according to Framis, the group went to Irala soon after and were reported to have told him:

*"... and look Sir, Irala our Governor, at Martin de Ure, your friend who threw down his (Cabeza de Vaca's) ruling rods one by one". Essentially, this is how it happened. Martin de Ure, who was a Vizcayan and only for this reason a good friend of Irala's, displayed the sceptors, or rods, that were of the best polished wood of Castille that could be found around Asunción..."* (Framis, p. 1842).

An indication of Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca's suspicion of Irala, and possibly the Basque contingency, is shown as proclaiming of Juan de Salazar de Espinosa governor of the province at the moment of his deportation and forced departure for Spain (Koebel, p. 79). Irala later sent a nephew to the Spanish Corte to report on his own accomplishments as governor. The nephew's name was Esteban de Vergara (Framis, p. 1844). Irala governed until his death in 1557.

While details in this instance are rather vague, they are consistent with other situation in the Americas. In the Potosi mining district (of present day Bolivia) there was continual war between Basques and other ethnic groups. In a 100 year period dating from 1580, almost a 1,000 lives were lost on account of race wars, apparently founded in "Basque indiscretion in the display and use of their economic and political power", which was considerable (Douglass and Bilbao, pp. 81-82).

Chile is a country whose history has seen Basque immigration and influence in the extreme. A Basque, Francisco de Aguirre, was influential in Chilean conquests of the 1500's along with Santiago de Azocar, for whom the Chilean capital seems to have been named. Pedro de Gamboa, a Guipuzcoan, was appointed the city's first surveyor and proceeded to draw off "126 blocks or squares divided by streets at regular intervals", according to royal guidelines. It was obviously a large undertaking as it "took many year before these five hundred odd solares (quarter blocks) were all occupied" (Pocock, pp. 72-73).

When Pedro de Valdivia, himself an Extremaduran, was appointed first governor, he selected a number of Basques as his royal officials: Jerónimo de Alderete as Treasurer, Francisco de Arteaga as Controller, Juan Fernández de Alderete as Overseer, and Francisco de Aguirre as Commissioner.

All Basques did not get along together in "ethnic unity" as the next and last example attests. A focus is now given to Martin Ruiz de Gamboa, most likely a relative of the above mentioned Pedro de Gamboa. Gamboa was a native Basque of Durango, Vizcaya who first arrived in Chile on a military expedition from Perú (Ponce, p. 39). Gamboa married the daughter of Governor Quiroga soon after arriving and thus insured for himself future nobility. In 1565, Gamboa was made lieutenant governor by Quiroga, and lead a march to the island of Chiloe where he founded the city of Castro and baptized a nearby river with his name. In 1580, general Gamboa becomes governor at the death and will of Quiroga, starting a most precarious situation. According to the decree of King Phillip II one Lope de Azocar, a prominent Guipuzcoan, was to have been lieutenant governor of Quiroga, instead of Gamboa. Azocar arrives in Santiago just in time to witness the proclamation of Gambos as governor by the authority of the Viceroyalty of Perú. Azocar is not a little disgusted, and while

Governor Gamboa is away at war in southern Chile, the new lieutenant governor is content to try and turn popular opinion against Gamboa. In a mad dash of events, Azocar proclaims himself governor (Ponce, p. 40). At the return of Gamboa, Lope de Azocar is forcibly arrested and promptly sent to Perú.

From this point, the career of Gamboa quickly comes to a close as a new governor is chosen by Phillip II, Alonso de Sotomayor, a non-Basque. Sotomayor arrives in Santiago in September 1583, and Gamboa is imprisoned. His problems are further aggravated by the return of Lopez de Azocar who again becomes lieutenant governor under Sotomayor. After a period of problems and complaints about the condition of the Chilean government by Azocar himself to the King, he is finally removed from office and replaced by Pedro de Vizcarra (Ponce, p. 41). Vizcarra is a Basque from the Vizcayan colony in Sevilla.

Sotomayor is replaced by Martin Garcia Onez de Loyola, continuing the Chilean Basque tradition in leadership. Martin Ruiz de Gamboa was absolved by Sotomayor and released from prison. He spent the rest of his life in Santiago at a distance from all aspects of Chilean politics.

## CONCLUSION

The Basques have been notorious for their ability to capitalize and find success on whatever industry, opportunity, or hardship that they encounter. They possess a surprising resilience and ability to survive economic and social crises. This is evident in the 1500's by their abilities to conduct their own transatlantic commerce, aid in shipping and manpower in New World exploration, move the King's trade and fight his battles all at relatively the same time. Basque innovativeness and endurance is not a thing to be taken lightly. Indeed the 1500's can be referred to as the 'Basque Epoch' as they were a world influence with few economic rivals.

The early development of a vigorous maritime industry led the Basque people on a course which would eventually make them of the most influential groups in the exploration and political formation of the New World.

Presence of the Basque leadership in New World conquests was substantial. The evidence indicates that Basques leadership in politics as well as economics often led to divisions among political ranks, economic groups, and ethnic 'nations' (Douglass and Bilbao, p. 82).

To a great extent, Basques supplied the ships, manpower, and leaders in New World conquests. These leaders, soldiers and the Basque contingent in general, appear to have instilled qualities of independence and individuality which have been a strong influence in each 'Latin American' region as it has developed since the age of exploration.

The development of the political geography of Spanish Latin America has been a matter only generally defined and discussed. The problem of the eventual breakup of the Viceroyalties into the countries as seen today, in a intriguing one. Factors of rugged physical geography, minimal population, diverse indigenous cultural groups, and an archaic and weakened government in Spain, are all seen as natural causes of the disruption of the Viceroyalties, and the persistence of political instability. These causes are not to be doubted. Here it is only proposed that there are other causes which have gone unmentioned and little examined. The cause that this paper attempts to pinpoint is one of the affect of 'national', 'regional', or ethnic influence of cultural groups (non-indigenous to the Americas) within the intrinsic workings of the Spa-

nish system. The cultural group among the most prevalent and influential numerically, and economically in Spanish exploration were the Basques. This historically taciturn people (as Baroja would say) served an important role in fostering individualistic ideals in most Latin American countries.

Basque leadership was solid and continuous enough in a majority of Spanish Latin American that Basque 'nationalism' (however defined) seems to have been an important factor in the formation of various nations based around regional nuclei. In Mexican beginnings, for example, Basque leadership in government, religion and colonization helped lead Mexico towards independence by fostering and diffusing Basque nationalistic ideals and values throughout the region focused on Mexico City. This transmission of ideals must develop quite unconsciously as the ruling class in Mexico starts to take pride in their own possible sovereignty and uniqueness which are practically ageless Basque ideals, though admittedly not ideals which only the Basque Country has succeeded in fostering. The effect of Basque nationalism on the individual regions and countries of Latin America would naturally depend on the amount of Basque immigration to a particular area, the strength of Basque leadership in the area, and the influence of the different area's own indigenous uniqueness. None of these variables is particularly easy to measure.

Chile, having had one of the greatest influxes of Basque people, as well as the forbidding barrier of the Andes Range, has typically developed its own desires to be its own people. In the development of Paraguay and Argentina, also, is seen a strong Basque commencement in their first governors and founders. Similar situations seem to be the case of Bolivia, Perú, Venezuela, The Dominican Republic, Cuba, and most others.

It is entirely in harmony with these ideas that the Venezuelan Simón Bolívar, and the Uruguayan Artigas, independence fighters of South America were both of Basque descent (see Laxalt, p. 71 and Fitzgibbon, chap. 1). In fact, Uruguay may be somewhat of a textbook example of Basque American influence. Since its population is the most homogeneously European of any country in the Americas, it will be interesting to see to just what extent its history and geography are indebted to the Basques.

The issue of Basque influence in the age of exploration is really not an issue at all, it is fact. The imprint of the Basques in the study of the development of geography and geographic thought can no longer be dismissed or ignored. The Basque people and Basque homeland have served as incubators of ideals that have spread from their coasts, through Spain, across the oceans, and into the intrinsic values and geographies of Latin American development visible even today.

These qualities are spatial in importance, as much as historical. That they are spatial or historical, however, is not nearly so nebulous to understand as the properties of the qualities themselves, described here in such terms as 'nationalistic', 'independent', 'ethnic', or 'separatist', etc.

The influence of the Basque people has been immense in widening the geographical horizon of the western world. Indeed, they are a unique people, but they need to be studied as active contributors to man's knowledge and enthusiasm, and not as sideshow oddities whose time has come and gone.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY (\*)

- ALLIERES, Jacques. (1978). *Los Vascos*. Madrid, EDAF Universitaria.
- BARKHAM, Selma Huxley. (1977). "Guipuzcoan shipping in 1571 with particular reference to the decline of the transatlantic fishing industry". In, *Anglo-American contributions to Basque studies: essays in honor of Jon Bilbao*. Reno Nevada: Desert Research Institute Publications on the Social Sciences.
- BARKHAM, Selma Huxley. (1978). *The Basques: filling a gap in our history between Jacques Cartier and Champlain*. In, *Canadian Geographical Journal*, vol. 96, no. 1. Ottawa, Canada: The Royal Canadian Geographical Society.
- CARO BAROJA, Julio. (1971). *Los Vascos*. Madrid, Ediciones Istmo.
- CRONE, G.R. (1978). *Maps and their makers: an introduction to the history of cartography*, 5th ed. Hamden, CT: Archon Books.
- DOUGLASS, William A.; BILBAO, Jon. (1975). *Amerikanuak: Basques in the New World*. Reno, Nevada: University of Nevada Press.
- DE BLIJ, Harm J.; MULLER, Peter O. (1985). *Geography: regions and concepts*, 4th ed. New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons.
- FERNANDEZ, José B. (1975). *Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca: the forgotten chronicler*. Miami, FL: Ediciones Universal.
- FITZGIBBON, Russell H. (1954). *Uruguay: portrait of a democracy*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- FRAMIS, Ricardo Majo. (1946). *Navegantes y conquistadores españoles del siglo XVI*. Madrid: M. Aguilar Editor.
- GRENIER, Robert. (1985). *Excavating a 400-year-old Basque galleon*. In, *National Geographic Magazine*, vol. 168, no. 1. Washington, D.C.: The National Geographic Society.
- HENDERSON, Ernest F. (1900). *Side lights on English history*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company.
- HUALDE, José I. (1984). *Icelandic Basque pidgin*. In, *The Journal of Basques Studies in America*, vol. V, no. 1. Chicago: The Society of Basque Studies in America.
- KISH, George. (1978). *A source book in Geography*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- KOEBEL, W.E. (1929?). *Paraguay*. New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- LAXALT, Robert. (1985). *The indomitable Basques*. In, *National Geographic Magazine*, vol. 168, no. 1. Washington, D.C. The National Geographic Society.
- LARREA, M.<sup>a</sup> Angeles; MIEG, Rafael Mieza. (1985). *Introduction to the history of the Basque Country*. Fresno, CA: The Basque American Foundation.

- NORTHAM, Ray M. (1979). *Urban Geography*. New York NY: John Wiley and Sons.
- PONCE, Roberto Hernandez. (1985). *El aporte vasco a la construcción de Chile. Gobernadores del siglo XVI*. In, *The Journal of Basque Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1. Fresno, CA: The Basque American Foundation.
- POCOCK, H.R.S. (1967). *The conquest of Chile*. New York, NY: Stein and Day.
- THURSTON, Harry. (1983). *The Basque Connection*. In, *Equinox: The Magazine of Canadian Discovery*, Nov.-Dec.
- WROTH, Lawrence C. (1970). *The voyages of Giovanni da Verrazzano 1524-1528*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.