Juan Carlos “Xamar” Etxegoien

ORHIPEAN
The Country of Basque

English version
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BOOK TITLE: Orhipean = “all that below Orhi” which in this case is the Basque Country.

Mt. Orhi is the highest westernmost peak of the Pyrenees above 2,000 meters (at 6,617 feet) on the border between Nafarroa and Zuberoa.
Great peoples,
Masters of time,
Like shadows
Have gone for ever;
Not so the places
they knew.
The Basque people
alone have
survived.”

~J.M. Hiribarren
Azkaine (L)
1810-66
1. **Prehistory**

**Ohidura xaharrenek ere ikan dute hastapen bat:** “Even the oldest customs started somewhere”

**Harpea (NB):** “Some caves have been used as dwellings from prehistoric times to the present.”
“Basques don’t survive just because of isolation: in the 9th century Vikings reached the Basque Country, conquering Baiona and moving inland to Iruñea.”
Pilgrimage route to Santiago since Medieval times
For a brief period in the 11th century all the Basque Country was united as the medieval Kingdom of Navarre, but soon the emergence of Spain and France divided it once again.
4. The “border” Treaty of the Pyrenees, 1659 Divided the Basque Country between Spain & France
5. **The Language**

Today the Basque language and the Basque people are an endangered species, because Basque identity is founded on the Basque language. The revival of Euskara is the biggest challenge the Basques face in order to save them from extinction in the future.
6. **The Basque House**

“In the long history of a house, received from one’s ancestors and passed on to one’s successors, the inhabitants are merely passing through. The house does not belong to them, but they to the house.”
“The holistic nature of the Basque house as dwelling, place of work, church and cemetery must have originated in the prehistoric caves, since these same activities were carried out in them.”
8. The Villages

“Basque villages are usually of two kinds: those of clustered houses and those of scattered houses.”
9. **Warring Factions**

*Bandoak* or clan warfare up to the end of the 15th century:
> Oinaz vs. Ganboa
> Agramonts vs. Beaumonts

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**The tower houses**

The Elder kinsmen had numerous tower houses and palaces throughout the Basque Country. Some are still standing, although the majority have lost their original military aspect.

In Nafarroa stand the palace of Donamaria (A) and that of Arraiotz (B). These tower houses have preserved the wooden structure in the upper storeys and as such are unique in the whole country.
10. At life's end

“Each house had its grave in the cemetery. From the 12-19th century, this was located inside the church, in the same place as the family’s seat or jarlekua.

“Dolmens and cromlechs (below) were burial places used in some periods of prehistory.”
11. Folk Beliefs

“Since time immemorial, the worship of the sun has manifest itself: dolmens face East, towards the rising sun, and so do houses, tombs ...”
12. Magic and witchcraft

“The evil deeds attributed to witches were completely fictitious and people only confessed to them under torture.”
“In Basque folk culture [the] day (eguna) under the sun belonged to humans, but the terrible, dark nights (gaua) belonged to the night things [that] came out at night.”

*Tartalo: one-eyed giant*

*Akerbeltz* (Black goat) protected the other animals
14. The Plant Kingdom

**EGUZKILORE**
“When the night things see it they think it is the sun and do not dare to go in.”

**PAGOIA:**
“Of all trees the most beautiful in the dark woods is the beech.”
~Irati (N-NB)
15. The Animal Kingdom

“Domestic animals ... are work power, food and aid; they are cared for almost as if they were members of the family.”

**ERLEAK**: “When the master or mistress of the house died, the bees had to be informed.”
16. Shepherding

“In the Basque Country, shepherding goes back five thousand years.”

MANEXA: “Earliest know breed in the Basque Country.”

GAZTA/GASNA: “Making cheese is one of the shepherd’s main jobs.”
Agriculture

“In the past, the work on land began in Azaroa (November) when the earth was turned with a fork called laia or plough. This is found nowhere else but in the Basque Country.”
18. The sea

“It is true that on the coast a completely different way of [Basque] life has developed from life in the [agrarian] interior.”

“Proof that whaling was practiced long ago can be seen in the whaling scenes depicted on the coats of arms found in many seaside towns.”

< Mutriku (B)
19. The Woods

“At one time, woods covered a large area of the Basque Country, though today they are much less extensive and in many places the autochthonous trees have been replaced by fast growing [pine trees].”

“The shipbuilding industry also required a vast amount of wood, taking into account that in the Middle Ages, almost all shipbuilding on the Iberian Peninsula was concentrated in Bizkaia & Gipuzkoa.”
20. Emigration

“My beret on my head and off to see the world.”

“During the course of history many Basques have left their homeland and ventured out into the wide world. From the 16th century onwards, the main emigration route led to America.”
21. Basque Sports

“The work which gave birth to Basque sports (*herri kirolak*) is no longer necessary and the sporting activities [remain]: the sports of the present were jobs of the past.”

*Harrijasotzaileak*:
“one who lifts stone.”
22. Pelota

“The Romans are thought to have introduced *pelota*, or *pilota* in Basque, to Europe. It was played widely throughout Europe up until the 17th century but then disappeared everywhere except in Euskal Herria.”
23. **At the end of the year**

“The ancients looked on the shortening of the days with great apprehension and for that reason, there was a time when it was customary to try to “waken” the sun with cow bells, shouts and the drawn out cry or *irrintzina.*”

**Water/year connection:**

“from the word *ur* (‘water’) we get *urte* (‘year’) [and this link is] evidenced in the songs and rituals at the end of the year.”
“The festival almost certainly drew on pre-Christian pagan rites.”

The carnivals of Iturens and Zubieta (N) used to be celebrated over a much wider area than they are today.”
“Any village which wants to organize a *Maskarada*, the Carnival play with music and dance characteristic of Zuberoa, must have a number of good dancers since the honor of the village is at stake.”
“Visitors to the Basque Country have always been surprised by the Basques’ love of dancing and the sill with which they dance.”
“The pastoral play originates in the religious mystery plays of the Middle ages. With the passing of time they disappeared from most of Europe, but in Zuboera they put down roots, were adapted and have been maintained to this day.”
28. Oral literature

**Zaharrak dauka beti zer erran, gazteak zer ikasi:**
“Old people always have something to say and young people something to learn.”

“When the chain linking generations began to weaken [early 20th century] after centuries of passing on folk knowledge, folklorists endeavored to salvage at least part of Basque popular culture.”
“The technique of improvising verse in public ... was found in many parts of Europe, but today it is in the Basque Country where we find its greatest expression.”
30. **Written literature**

The first Basque book: *Lingae Vasconum Primitae* ("The beginnings of the Basque language") by Mosen Bernat Etxepare (1548)
“The Basque customs, the Basque language too, have sadly been severely wounded; that the sick might grow strong is our hope; it is only right that someone should come to their aid.”

~Manex Etxamendi Ezterenzubi NB, 1873-1960
ITURRI: Source

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