**History of the Basque People**

The [Basque people](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basque_people) ([Basque](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basque_language): *Euskaldunak*) are a group of people inhabiting adjacent areas of [Spain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spain) and [France](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/France). Their history is therefore interconnected with Spanish and French history and also with the history of many other past and present countries, particularly in Europe and [the Americas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Americas).

**Origins**

**First historical references**

Location of the ancient tribes
·Red: Basque and other [pre-Indo-European](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pre-Indoeuropean) tribes
·Blue: Celtic tribes

In the 1st century, [Strabo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strabo) wrote that the northern parts of what are now [Navarre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Navarre) (*Nafarroa* in Basque) and [Aragon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aragon) were inhabited by the [Vascones](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vascones). Despite the evident etymological connection between *Vascones* and the modern denomination *Basque*, there is no proof that the Vascones were the modern Basques' ancestors or spoke the language that has evolved into modern [Basque](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basque_language), although this is strongly suggested both by the historically consistent toponymy of the area and by a few personal names on tombstones dating from the Roman period.

Three different peoples inhabited the territory of the present Basque Autonomous Community: the [Varduli](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Varduli), [Caristii](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caristii) and [Autrigones](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autrigones). Historical sources do not state whether these tribes were related to the [Vascones](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vascones) and/or the [Aquitani](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aquitani).

Fake archaeological finds at [Iruña-Veleia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iru%C3%B1a-Veleia) ([Álava](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%81lava)) were presented by academics and media as proof of the existence of early Basque texts, coexisting with Latin. The area where a Basque-related language is best attested from an early period is [Gascony](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gascony) in France, to the north of the present-day Basque region, whose ancient inhabitants, the [Aquitani](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aquitani), may have spoken a language related to Basque. (The extinct [Aquitanian language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aquitanian_language) should not be confused with [Gascon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gascon_language), the Romance language that has been spoken in Aquitaine since the Middle Ages.)

During the Middle Ages the name Vascones and its derivates (including *Basque*) were extended to cover the entire Basque-speaking population of the present-day [Basque Country](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basque_Country_%28greater_region%29), bordering areas and farther east and north (the whole Pyrenean region and Gascony).

**Prehistory: the mainstream view**

Although little is known about the prehistory of the Basques before the period of Roman occupation owing to the difficulty in identifying evidence for specific cultural traits, the mainstream view today is that the Basque area shows signs of archaeological continuity since the [Aurignacian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aurignacian) period.

Many Basque archaeological sites, including cave dwellings such as [Santimamiñe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santimami%C3%B1e), provide evidence for continuity from Aurignacian times down to the [Iron Age](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_Age), shortly before Roman occupation. The possibility therefore cannot be ruled out of at least some of the same people having continued to inhabit the area for thirty millennia.

A high concentration of [Rh-](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rh-) (a typical European trait) among Basques, who have the highest level worldwide, had already been taken as suggestive of the antiquity and lack of admixture of the Basque genetic stock before the advent of modern genetics, which has confirmed this view. In the 1990s [Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luigi_Luca_Cavalli-Sforza) published his findings according to which one of the main European [autosomal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autosomal) [components](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Principal_components), PC 5, was shown to be a typically Basque trait believed to have receded owing to the migration of Eastern peoples during the Neolithic and Metal Ages. Further genetic studies on [Y chromosome DNA haplogroups](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_Y-chromosome_DNA_haplogroups) and [X chromosome](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/X_chromosome) [microsatellites](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Microsatellite_%28genetics%29) also seem to point to Basques being the most direct descendants from prehistoric Western Europeans. Having the highest percent of "Western European genes" but found also at high levels among neighbor populations, as they are also direct descendants of the same People. However, [Mitochondrial DNA](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_mitochondrial_DNA_haplogroups) have cast serious doubts over this theory.

Some scholars have interpreted the etymologies of Basque words for knife and axe, which contain a root meaning 'stone', as evidence that the Basque language dates back to the stone age.

**Alternative theories**

The following alternative theories about the prehistoric origins of the Basques have all had adherents at some time but are rejected by many scholars and do not represent the consensus view:

* Basques as [Neolithic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neolithic) settlers: According to this theory, a precursor of the Basque language might have arrived about 6,000 years ago with the advance of [agriculture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agriculture). The only archaeological evidence that could partly support this hypothesis would be that for the [Ebro](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ebro) valley area. [Genetics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genetics) also lends little support.
* Basques arrived together with the [Indo-Europeans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proto-Indo-Europeans): Linked to an unproven linguistic hypothesis that includes Basque and some [Caucasian languages](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caucasian_languages) in a single super-family. Even if such a Basque-Caucasian connection did exist, it would have to be at too great a time depth to be relevant to Indo-European migrations. Apart from a [Celtic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celts) presence in the Ebro valley during the [Urnfield culture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urnfield_culture), archaeology offers little support for this hypothesis. The [Basque language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basque_language) shows few certain Celtic or other Indo-European loans, other than those transmitted via Latin or Romance in historic times.
* Basques as an Iberian subgroup: Based on occasional use by early Basques of the Iberian alphabet and [Julius Caesar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julius_Caesar)'s description of the [Aquitanians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aquitanian) as [*Iberians*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iberians). Apparent similarities between the undeciphered [Iberian language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iberian_language) and Basque have also been cited, but this fails to account for the fact that attempts so far to decipher Iberian using Basque as a reference have failed.

**The Basque Country in prehistorical times**

**Paleolithic**

Map of the Franco-Cantabrian region, showing the main caves with mural art.

About 35,000 years ago, the lands that are now the [Basque Country](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basque_Country_%28historical_territory%29), together with neighboring areas such as [Aquitaine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aquitaine) and the [Pyrenees](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pyrenees), were settled by [Homo sapiens](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homo_sapiens), who gradually displaced the region's earlier [Neanderthal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neanderthal) population. Arriving from Central Europe, the settlers brought the [Aurignacian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aurignacian) culture with them.

At this stage the Basque Country formed part of the archaeological [Franco-Cantabrian province](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franco-Cantabric_region) which extended all the way from [Asturias](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asturias) to [Provence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Provence). Throughout this region, which underwent similar cultural developments with some local variation, Aurignacian culture was successively replaced by [Gravettian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gravettian), [Solutrean](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solutrean) and [Magdalenian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magdalenian) cultures. Except for the Aurignacian, these all seem to have originated in the Franco-Cantabrian region, which suggests no further waves of immigration into the area during the Paleolithic period.

Within the present-day Basque Country settlement was limited almost exclusively to the Atlantic area, probably for climatic reasons. Important Basque sites include the following:

* [Santimamiñe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santimami%C3%B1e) (Biscay): Gravettian, Solutrean and Magdalenian remains, mural art
* Bolinkoba (Biscay): Gravettian and Solutrean
* Ermitia (Gipuzkoa): Solutrean and Magdalenian
* Amalda (Gipuzkoa): Gravettian and Solutrean
* Koskobilo (Gipuzkoa): Aurignacian and Solutrean
* Aitzbitarte (Gipuzkoa): Aurignacian, Gravettian, Solutrean and Magdalenian
* Isturitz (Lower Navarre): Gravettian, Solutrean and Magdalenian, mural art
* Gatzarria (Soule): Aurignacian and Gravettian

**Epipaleolithic and Neolithic**

At the end of the [Ice Age](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ice_Age), Magdalenian culture gave way to [Azilian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Azilian) culture. Hunters turned from large animals to smaller prey, and fishing and seafood gathering became important economic activities. The southern part of the Basque Country was first settled in this period.

Gradually, Neolithic technology started to filter through from the Mediterranean coasts, first in the form of isolated pottery items (Zatoia, Marizulo) and later with the introduction of [sheepherding](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shepherd). As in most of Atlantic Europe, this transition progressed slowly.

In the Ebro valley, more fully Neolithic sites are found. [Anthropometric](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthropometry) classification of the remains suggests the possibility of some Mediterranean colonization here. A comparable situation is found in Aquitaine, where settlers may have arrived via the [Garonne](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garonne).

In the second half of the 4th millennium BC, [Megalithic culture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Megalith) appeared throughout the area. Burials become collective (possibly implying families or clans) and the [dolmen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dolmen) predominates, while caves are also employed in some places. Unlike the dolmens of the Mediterranean basin which show a preference for corridors, in the Atlantic area they are invariably simple chambers.

**Copper and Bronze Ages**

[*Cromlech*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cromlech) of Okabe ([Lower Navarre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lower_Navarre))

Use of copper and gold, and then other metals, did not begin in the Basque Country until c. 2500. With the arrival of metal working, the first urban settlements made their appearance. One of the most notable towns on account of its size and continuity was [La Hoya](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Hoya%2C_Alava) in southern Álava, which may have served as a link, and possibly a trading center, between [Portugal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portugal) ([Vila Nova de São Pedro](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vila_Nova_de_S%C3%A3o_Pedro) culture) and [Languedoc](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languedoc) (Treilles group). Concurrently, caves and natural shelters remained in use, particularly in the Atlantic region.

Undecorated pottery continued from the Neolithic period up until the arrival of the [Bell Beaker culture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beaker_culture) with its characteristic pottery style, which is mainly found around the Ebro Valley. Building of megalithic structures continued until the Late Bronze Age.

In Aquitaine there was a notable presence of the [Artenacian culture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artenacian_culture), a culture of bowmen that spread rapidly through Western France and Belgium from its homeland near the Garonne c. 2400.

In the Late Bronze Age, parts of the southern Basque Country came under the influence of the pastoralist [Cogotas](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Cogotas&action=edit&redlink=1) I culture of the Iberian plateau.

**Iron Age**

In the Iron Age an Indo-European people, probably Celtic, settled on territories adjacent to the Basque region and began to exert influence. Bearers of the late [Urnfield culture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Urnfield_culture) followed the Ebro upstream as far as the southern fringes of the Basque Country, leading to the incorporation of the [Hallstatt culture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hallstatt_culture).

In the Basque Country, settlements now appear mainly at points of difficult access, probably for defensive reasons, and had elaborate defense systems. During this phase [agriculture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agriculture) seemingly became more important than animal husbandry.

It may be during this period that new megalithic structures, the (stone circle) or [*cromlech*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cromlech) and the megalith or [*menhir*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Menhir), made their appearance.

**Roman rule**

The Romans first reached the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula, including the Basque region, under [Pompey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pompey) in the 1st century BC, but Roman rule was not consolidated until the time of the Emperor [Augustus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustus). Its laxness suited the Basques well, allowing them to retain their traditional laws and leadership. There is not much evidence of Romanization, and the survival of the separate Basque language has often been attributed to the fact that the Basque Country, as a poor region, was little developed by the Romans.

However, there was a significant Roman presence in the garrison of Pompaelo (modern [Pamplona](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pamplona), *Iruñea* in Basque), a city south of the Pyrenees founded by and named after Pompey. Conquest of the area further west followed a fierce Roman campaign against the [Cantabri](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cantabri) (see [Cantabrian Wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cantabrian_Wars)). There are archaeological remains from this period of [garrisons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garrison) protecting commercial routes all along the Ebro river, and along a [Roman road](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_road) between [Asturica](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Astorga_%28Spain%29) and [Burdigala](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burdigala).

Many Basques joined the [Roman legions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_legion), and were often deployed far away to guard the Empire. A unit of [Varduli](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Varduli) was stationed on [Hadrian's Wall](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadrian%27s_Wall) in the north of Britain for many years, and earned the title *fida* (faithful) for some now-forgotten service to the emperor. Romans apparently entered into alliances (*foedera*, singular *foedus*) with many local tribes, allowing them almost total autonomy within the Empire.

[Livy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Livy) mentions the natural division between the *Ager* and the *Saltus Vasconum*, i.e. between the fields of the [Ebro](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ebro) basin and the mountains to the north. Historians agree that Romanization was significant in the fertile *Ager* but almost null in the *Saltus*, where Roman towns were scarce and generally small.

The [Bagaudae](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bagaudae) seem to have produced a major impact on Basque history in the late Empire. In the late 4th century and throughout the 5th century, the Basque region from the [Garonne](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garonne) to the [Ebro](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ebro) escaped Roman control in the midst of revolts. Several Roman villas (Liédena, Ramalete) were burned to the ground. The proliferation of mints is interpreted as evidence for an *inner* [*limes*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limes) around [Vasconia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vasconia), where coins were minted for the purpose of paying troops. After the fall of the Empire, the struggle against Rome's [Visigoth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Visigoth) allies continued.

**Middle Ages**

**Early Middle Ages**

The Duchy of Vasconia

In 409, [Vandals](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vandals), [Alans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alans), and [Suevi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suevi) forced their way into Hispania through the western Pyrenees, chased closely by the Visigoths in 416 as allies of Rome, while the consequences of their advances are not clear. In 418 Rome gave the provinces of [Aquitania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gallia_Aquitania) and [Tarraconensis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hispania_Tarraconensis) to the [Visigoths](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Visigoths), as [*foederati*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foederati), probably with a view to defending [Novempopulana](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Novempopulana) from the raids of the [Bagaudae](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bagaudae). It has sometimes been argued that the Basque were underlying these roving armed hosts, but this claim is far from certain. The contemporary chronicler Hydatius was well aware of the existence of *the Vasconias*, but does not identify the Bagaudae rebels as Basque.

While the Visigoths seem to have claimed the Basque territory from an early date, the chronicles point to their failure to subdue it, punctuated only by sporadic military successes. The years between 435 and 450 saw a succession of confrontations between the Bagaudae and Romano-Gothic troops, the best documented of which were the battles of [Toulouse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toulouse), [Araceli](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uharte-Arakil), and [Turiasum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tarazona). Just about the same period, in 449-51, the Suevi under their king [Rechiar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rechiar) ravaged the territories of the Vascones, probably looting their way through the region on their way back home from Toulouse. Settlements were clearly damaged after the raids and, while Calahorra and Pamplona survived, Iruña (Veleia) seems to have been abandoned as a result. After 456 the Visigoths crossed the Pyrenees twice from Aquitaine, probably at [Roncesvalles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roncesvalles), in an effort to destroy the Suevic kingdom of Rechiar, but as the chronicle of [Hydatius](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hydatius), the only Spanish source of the period, ends in 469, the actual events of the Visigothic confrontation with the Basques are obscure.

The [Franks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franks) displaced the Visigoths from Aquitaine in 507, placing the Basques between the two warring kingdoms. In 581 or thereabouts both Franks and Visigoths attacked *Vasconia* (*Wasconia* in [Gregory of Tours](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregory_of_Tours)), but neither with success. In 587 the Franks launched a second attack on the Basques, but they were defeated on the plains of Aquitaine, implying that Basque settlement or conquest had begun north of the Pyrenees. Soon afterwards, the Franks and Goths created their respective [marches](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marches): the [Duchy of Cantabria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duchy_of_Cantabria) in the south and the [Duchy of Vasconia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duchy_of_Vasconia) in the north. After further fighting, the Duchy of Vasconia was consolidated as an independent polity between [660](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/660) and [678](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/678). A personal union with the [Duchy of Aquitaine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duke_of_Aquitaine) ensured several decades of peace only interrupted by occasional Visigothic campaigns.

The [Muslim invasion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslim_conquests) of [711](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/711) and the rise of the [Carolingian dynasty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carolingian_dynasty) posed new threats for this state and eventually led to its downfall and breakup.

Vasconia's submission to the Franks was interrupted by frequent outbreaks of resistance, the best known of which today is the first [Battle of Roncevaux](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Roncevaux) (*Orreaga* in Basque, *Roncesvalles* in Spanish). The Basque-Muslim state of the [Banu Qasi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Banu_Qasi) (meaning "heirs of Cassius" in Arabic), founded c. [800](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/800) near [Tudela](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tudela%2C_Navarre) (*Tutera* in Basque), helped to maintain peace between the Basques and [Al Andalus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al_Andalus).

After [Charlemagne](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlemagne)'s death, his son [Louis the Pious](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_the_Pious) provoked a new rebellion led by [Gartzia Semeno](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garc%C3%ADa_I_Jim%C3%A9nez_of_Gascony). A relative of the latter, [Enecco Arista](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I%C3%B1igo_Arista) (Basque *Eneko Aritza*, i.e. Eneko *the Oak*), took power in [Pamplona](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Navarre) c. [824](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/824) with the defeat of the Franks by the Pamplonese and Banu Qasi at the third Battle of Roncevaux.

**High Middle Ages**

The Kingdom of Pamplone in the early 10th century

Main article: [Kingdom of Navarre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Navarre)

The [Kingdom of Pamplona](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Navarre), as this newly formed Basque state came to be known, consolidated its Frankish and Muslim borders before turning its attention to its western neighbors. In [905](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/905), the *Cronica Albeldense* states that the territory ruled by Pamplona included [Nájera](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/N%C3%A1jera) and possibly the province of [Álava](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%81lava) (referred to as *Arba*).

Under [Sancho III](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sancho_III_of_Pamplona) *the Great* (1000–1035), Pamplona controlled the entire southern Basque Country; indeed, its power extended from [Burgos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burgos) and [Santander](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santander%2C_Cantabria) to Northern [Aragon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aragon). Through marriage Sancho also became the acting [Earl of Castile](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Castilian_Monarchs) and held a protectorate over [Gascony](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gascony) and [León](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Le%C3%B3n).

Following Sancho III's death, [Castile](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Castile) and Aragon became separate kingdoms ruled by his sons, who were responsible for the first partitioning of Pamplona. However, the kingdom was restored in 1157 under [García Ramírez](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garc%C3%ADa_VI_of_Navarre) *the Restorer*, who fought Castile for control of the western half of the realm. A peace treaty signed in 1179 ceded La Rioja and the northeastern part of present-day [Old Castile](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Castile) to the Castilian crown. In return, this pact acknowledged that Álava, [Biscay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biscay) and [Guipúzcoa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guip%C3%BAzcoa) belonged to Navarre.

In 1199, while Navarre's King [Sancho VI](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sancho_VI_of_Navarre) *the Wise* was away on an embassy to [Tlemcen](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tlemcen), Castile invaded and annexed the western Basque Country, leaving Navarre landlocked. Castile divided this territory into the three modern provinces, but permitted these to retain a large degree of self-government and their traditional [Navarrese rights](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fueros_of_Navarre), encapsulated in special charters called [*fueros*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fueros), which all Castilian (and later, Spanish) kings have since sworn to uphold on oath.

**Basque sailors**

Basque fishing sites in Canada in the 16th and 17th centuries

Basques played an important role in early European ventures into the Atlantic Ocean. The earliest document to mention the use of whale oil or blubber by the Basques dates from 670. In 1059, whalers from [Lapurdi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lapurdi) are recorded to have presented the oil of the first whale they captured to the viscount. Apparently the Basques were averse to the taste of whale meat themselves, but did successful business selling it, and the blubber, to the [French](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_people), Castilians and [Flemings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flanders). Basque whalers used longboats or *traineras* which they rowed in the vicinity of the coast or from a larger ship.

Whaling and [cod](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cod)-fishing are probably responsible for early Basque contact with both the North Sea and [Newfoundland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newfoundland_%28island%29). The Basques began cod-fishing and later whaling in Labrador and Newfoundland as early as the first half of the 16th century.

In Europe the rudder seems to have been a Basque invention, to judge from three masted ships depicted in a 12th century fresco in [Estella](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estella-Lizarra) (Navarre; *Lizarra* in Basque), and also seals preserved in Navarrese and Parisian historical archives which show similar vessels. The first mention of use of a rudder was referred to as steering "à la Navarraise" or "à la Bayonnaise".

Magellan's exploration around the world was sailored by Basques, and when Magellan was killed in the Philippines, his Basque second-in-command, [Juan Sebastián Elcano](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juan_Sebasti%C3%A1n_Elcano) took the ship all the way back to Spain, making the Basques the first people to circumnavigate the globe.

**Late Middle Ages**

The Basque Country in the [Late Middle Ages](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Late_Middle_Ages) was ravaged by the [War of the Bands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_of_the_Bands), bitter partisan wars between local ruling families. In Navarre these conflicts became polarized in a violent struggle between the [Agramont](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Agramont&action=edit&redlink=1) and [Beaumont](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beaumont) parties. In Biscay, the two major warring factions were named Oñaz and Gamboa (cf. the [Guelphs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guelphs) and [Ghibellines](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghibellines) in Italy). High defensive structures called *dorretxeak* ("tower houses") built by local noble families, few of which survive today, were frequently razed by fire, sometimes by royal decree.

**From the Renaissance Era to the nineteenth century**

As the [Middle Ages](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_Ages) drew to a close, the lands inhabited by the Basques were allotted to either France and Spain. Most of the Basque population ended up in Spain, and the resulting situation continues to this day.

However, Basques in the present-day Spanish provinces of *Navarra*, *Guipúzcoa*, *Vizcaya* and *Álava* and in the portion of Navarre that was parceled out to France managed to retain a large degree of self-government within their respective provinces, practically functioning as separate nation-states. The *fueros* recognized separate laws, taxation and courts in each province.

Basques serving under the Spanish flag became renowned sailors. Many Basque sailors on Spanish ships were among the first Europeans to reach North America. A great many early European settlers in Canada and the United States were of Basque origin.

Back in the Basque Country, the [Protestant Reformation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protestant_Reformation) made some inroads and was supported by Queen [Jeanne d'Albret](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeanne_d%27Albret) of [Low Navarre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lower_Navarre). The printing of books in Basque, mostly on Christian themes, was introduced in the 16th century by the Basque-speaking [bourgeoisie](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bourgeois) around [Bayonne](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bayonne%2C_France) in the northern Basque Country. However, Protestants were persecuted by the [Spanish Inquisition](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_Inquisition). In the northeast, the Protestant Navarrese king converted to Roman Catholicism and went on to become King [Henry IV of France](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_IV_of_France).

Self-government in the northern Basque Country came to an abrupt end when the [French Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Revolution) centralized government and abolished the local privileges that had been granted by the [*ancien régime*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancien_r%C3%A9gime). While this development pushed some Basques to counter-revolutionary positions, others actively participated in the process, and a Basque constitutional project was drawn up by the Basque revolutionary [Garat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garat). This issue brought the Basque Country into the [Convention War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Convention_War) of 1793, when all the Basque territories were nominally French for a time. When the [Napoleonic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napoleon) Army invaded Spain some years later it encountered little difficulty in keeping the southern Basque provinces loyal to the occupier. Because of this lack of resistance (see the [Battle of Vitoria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Vitoria)), the southern Basque Country was the last part of Spain controlled by the French until the [burning of San Sebastian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burning_of_San_Sebastian) on August 31, 1813.

Political Spain in 1854, after the first [Carlist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlist) War

In Spain, ironically, the [*fueros*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fueros) were upheld by the traditionalist, and nominally [absolutist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Absolute_monarchy), [Carlists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlism) all through the civil wars of the 19th century, in opposition to the victorious constitutional forces. The southern Basque provinces, including Navarre, were the backbone of revolts seeking to crown Carlos, the male heir to the Spanish throne who had promised to defend the [Basque floral System](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fueros), and his descendants after him.

Fearing that they would lose their self-government or *fueros* under a modern, liberal constitution, Basques in Spain rushed to join the traditionalist army, which was financed largely by the governments of the Basque provinces. The opposing [Isabeline Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Isabeline_Army&action=edit&redlink=1) had the vital support of British, French (notably the [Algerian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Algeria) legion) and Portuguese forces, and the backing of these governments. The Irish legion (*Tercio*) was virtually annihilated by the Basques in the [Battle of Oriamendi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Oriamendi).

As differences grew between the Apostolic (official) and Navarrese (Basque-based) parties within the Carlist camp in the course of the [First Carlist War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Carlist_War), the latter signed an armistice, the terms of which included a promise by the Spaniards to respect Basque self-government. Spain's failure to keep this promise led to the [Second Carlist War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Carlist_War), which concluded in a similar way. The final outcome was that the Basque provinces, including Navarre, lost most of their autonomy, while keeping control over taxation through the [*Ley Paccionada*](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ley_Paccionada&action=edit&redlink=1). Indeed, they still retain this power today in the form of the so-called [*conciertos fiscales*](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Conciertos_fiscales&action=edit&redlink=1) between the Basque provinces and the Spanish government in Madrid.

Thus the wars that brought new freedoms to large parts of Spain resulted in the abolition of most (though not all) of Basques' traditional liberties. Although the Basque provinces of Spain today have greater autonomy than other mainland territories, they still have far less freedom than their ancestors under the present-day Spanish regime.

On the other hand, one consequence of the transfer of the Spanish customs border from the southern boundary of the Basque Country to the Spanish-French border was the inclusion of Spain's Basque provinces in a new Spanish market, the protectionism of which favored the birth and growth of Basque industry.

**Late Modern history**

**Late nineteenth century**

The loss of the Charts in 1876 spawned political dissent and unrest, with two traditionalist movements arising to counter the Spanish centralist and comparatively liberal stance, the Carlists and the Basque nationalists. The former emphasized staunchly catholic and absolutist values, while the latter stressed Catholicism and the charters mingled with a Basque national awareness (Jaungoikoa eta Lege Zarra). Besides showing at the beginning slightly different positions, the Basque nationalists took hold in the industrialized Biscay and to a lesser extent Gipuzkoa, while the Carlist entrenched themselves especially in the rural Navarre and to a lesser extent in Álava.

With regards to the economic activity, high quality iron ore mainly from western Biscay, previously worked in small traditional forges around the western Basque Country, was now exported to Britain for industrial processing. Then, given the momentum of new market conditions, Biscay acquired its own modern [blast furnaces](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blast_furnaces), opening the doors to local industrialization and even heavier mining. The large numbers of workers which both required were initially drawn from the Basque countryside and the peasantry of nearby Castile and Rioja, but increasingly immigration began to flow from the remoter impoverished regions of Galicia and Andalusia. The Basque Country, hitherto a source of emigrants to France, Spain and America, faced for the first time in recent history the prospect of a massive influx of foreigners possessing different languages and cultures as a side-effect of industrialization. Most of these immigrants spoke Spanish; practically all were very poor.

In this period Biscay reached one of the highest mortality rates in Europe. While the new proletariat's wretched working and living conditions were providing a natural breeding ground for the new socialist and anarchist ideologies and political movements characteristic of the late nineteenth century, the end of the century also saw the birth of the above [Basque nationalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basque_nationalism), with the founding in 1895 of the [Basque Nationalist Party](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/EAJ-PNV). The PNV, pursuing the goal of independence or self-government for a Basque state (*Euzkadi*), represented an ideology which combined [Christian-Democratic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Democracy) ideas with abhorrence towards Spanish immigrants whom they perceived as a threat to the ethnic, cultural and linguistic integrity of the Basque race while also serving as a channel for the importation of new-fangled, leftist (and "un-Basque") ideas.

**Early twentieth century**

In 1931, at the outset of the Spanish 2nd Republic, echoing the recently granted self-government to [Catalonia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catalonia), an attempt was made to draw up a single statute for Navarre and the Basque western provinces (the "Provincias Vascongadas"), but after an initial overwhelming approval of the draft and a round of council mayor meetings, Navarre pulled out of the draft project amidst heated controversy over the validity of the votes (Pamplona, 1932). Undaunted, the [Basque nationalists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basque_nationalist) and [leftist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Left-wing_politics) republican forces kept working on a statute, this time only for the Basque western provinces, Álava, Gipuzkoa and Biscay, eventually approved in 1936, with the Spanish Civil War already raging and an effective control just over Biscay.

[Basque nationalists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basque_nationalist) in Biscay and Gipuzkoa sided with the [Spanish republicans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Spanish_Republic), but many in Navarre, a Carlist stronghold, supported General [Francisco Franco](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francisco_Franco)'s insurgent forces. (The latter were known in Spain as "Nacionales"—usually rendered in English as "Nationalists"—which can be highly misleading in the Basque context). One of the greatest atrocities of this war, immortalized by Picasso's emblematic mural, was the [bombing of Gernika](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bombing_of_Guernica) by [German planes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legion_Condor), a [Biscayne](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biscay) town of great historical and symbolic importance, at Franco's bidding.

In 1937, [the troops](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eusko_Gudarostea) of the new [Basque Autonomous Government](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Basque_Autonomous_Government&action=edit&redlink=1) surrendered to Franco's fascist [Italian allies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corpo_Truppe_Volontari) in [Santoña](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santo%C3%B1a) on condition that the life of the Basque soldiers was respected ([Santoña Agreement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santo%C3%B1a_Agreement)).

**The Franco dictatorship**

With the war over, the new dictator began his drive to turn Spain into an authoritarian [nation state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nation_state). Franco's regime passed harsh laws against all minorities in the Spanish state, including Basques, aimed at wiping out their cultures and languages. Calling Biscay and Gipuzkoa "traitor provinces", he abolished what remained of their self-empowerment. Navarre and Álava were allowed to hang onto a small local police force and limited tax prerogatives.

Two developments during the Franco dictatorship (1939–1975) deeply affected life in the Basque Country in this period and afterward. One was a new wave of immigration from the poorer parts of Spain to Biscay and Gipuzkoa during the 50s, 60s and 70s in response to the region's escalating industrialization aimed to supply the Spanish internal market as a result of a post-war self-sufficiency policy, favored by the regime.

Secondly, the regime's persecution provoked a strong backlash in the Basque Country from the sixties onwards, notably in the form of a new political movement, [Basque Country And Freedom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ETA)/Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, better known by its Basque initials [ETA](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ETA), who turned to the systematic use of arms as a form of protest in 1968. But ETA was only one component of a social, political and language movement rejecting Spanish domination but also sharply criticizing the inertia of the Basque Country's own conservative nationalists (organized in the PNV). To this day the dialectic between these two political trends, the *Abertzale* (patriotic or nationalist) Left and the PNV, dominate the nationalist part of the Basque political spectrum, the rest of which is occupied by non-nationalist parties.

**The present**

Franco's authoritarian regime continued until 1975, while the latest years running up to the dictator's death proved harsh in a Basque Country shaken by repression, turmoil and unrest. Two new stances arose in Basque politics, namely break or compromise. While ETA's different branches decided to keep confrontation to gain a new status for the Basque Country, PNV and the Spanish Communists and Socialists opted for negotiations with the Francoist regime. In 1978, a general pardon was decreed by the Spanish Government for all politics related offences, a decision affecting directly Basque nationalist activists, especially ETA militants. The 70s and early/mid-80s the Basque Country was gripped by intense violence practiced by Basque nationalist and state-sponsored illegal groups and police forces.

Between 1979 and 1983, in the framework of the new Spanish Constitution, the central government granted wide self-governing powers ("[autonomy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statute_of_Autonomy_of_the_Basque_Country)") to [Álava, Biscay and Gipuzkoa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basque_Country_%28autonomous_community%29) after a referendum, including its own elected parliament, [police force](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ertzaintza), [school system](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basque_education_system) and control over taxation, while [Navarre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Navarre) was left out of the new autonomous region after the Socialists backed down on their initial position, and it was made into a separate autonomous region. The Statute of Autonomy is a constitutional law but powers have been devolved gradually during decades according to re-negotiations between the Spanish and the consecutive Basque regional governments to reach an effective implementation, while the transfer of many powers are still due. The French Basque Country, meanwhile, lacks any political or administrative recognition whatsoever, while a large number of regional representatives have lobbied to create a Basque department, to no avail so far.