ARTICLES

The Basques in the History of Mexico

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The Spanish writer Miguel de Unamuno wrote almost a century ago: " The Basque people have little imagination; they are more or less equally intelligent; their feelings are manly and primitive; but above all they are people of action and independence. The Basques do not waste time in subtle reflections on the freedom of thought; they want freedom of action ".[1] Himself a Basque, Unamuno knew his people well and thus gave an accurate description of their character which has not changed for hundreds of years. Imagination may be difficult to measure but the Basques have certainly shown all the traits mentioned in the history of Spain and Hispanic America.

In Spain, the Basque country remained for centuries practically independent; it pledged allegiance to the Crown of Castile on the condition that the latter recognize local privileges including freedom from Castilian taxes and military service. At least this was the Basque interpretation of their association with Castile. The Basques were not granted direct and equal access

[1] " Espíritu de la raza vasca ", 1887, reproduced in *La raza vasca y el vascuence. En torno a la lengua española*, Madrid, 1974.

to the empire comparable with that of the Andalusian port of Cadiz, hence they refused to be incorporated in to central Spain.[2]

Most Basques were, or claimed to be, *hidalgos*, or gentlemen, and thus considered themselves superior to other Spaniards, especially Castilians, only ten percent of whom at the most had the right to be called hidalgos. This feeling of superiority barely covered the poverty in which most Basque hidalgos lived. This feeling was perhaps strengthened by the fact that until the agricultural revolution of modern times they were basically sheep and cattle raisers while Castilian peasants were agriculturists. There were few large estates in the Basque country, a fact probably related to the democratic character of its natives.

According to the traditional pattern of inheritance, the Basque *caserío*, or farm, (sheep-raising explains the scattered pattern of settlement) was indivisible; it was inherited by only one child, preferably the first-born, of either sex. Unmarried brothers or sisters could stay in the house; once married, they had to leave. This system undoubtedly helped to maintain the productivity of the unit but it also produced excess rural population which had to look for employment elsewhere. Before the foundation of the Spanish empire the younger sons of Basque farmers became miners, fishermen and sailors — occupations less common in Castile, which perpetuated the feeling that Basques were different from Castilians; indeed they agreed with the Basque character traits as described by Unamuno.

The Basques began to emigrate to Mexico, or New Spain as it was then called, from the time of the Conquest. By the middle of the XVIth century central Mexico had already been conquered and pacified. Its administrative, military and political offices being taken by Castilians, the Basques moved Northwest and founded the frontier silver-mining centre of Zacatecas. From

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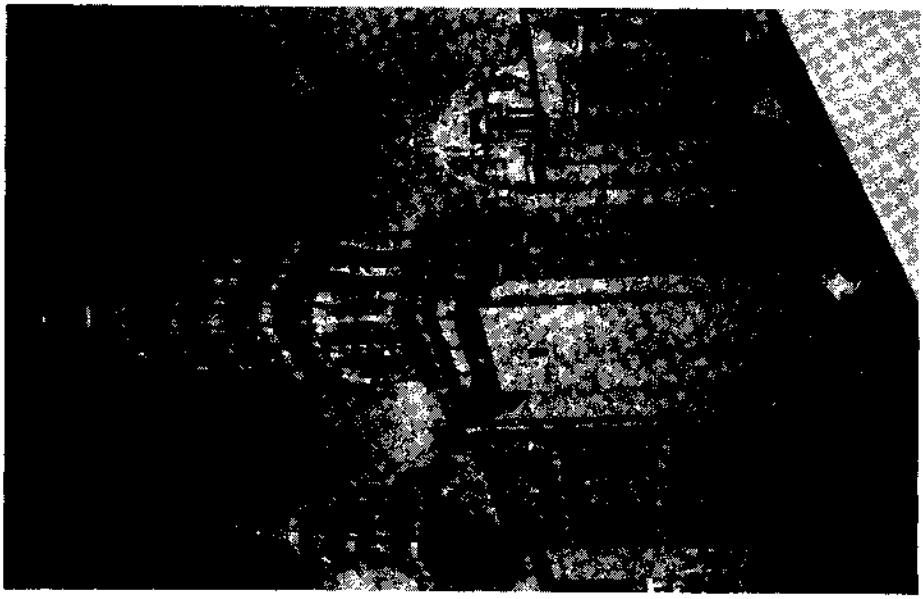
[2] STANLEY J. STEIN and BARBARA H. STEIN, *The Colonial Heritage of Latin America. Essays on Economic Dependence in Perspective*, New York, 1970, pp. 14 and 91.



The Cathedral of Zacatecas

The mining town of Zacatecas, the first Basque foundation in Mexico

there, a nephew of one of its founders, Francisco Ibarra, conquered in 1563-1575 the far North and founded the enormous province of New Biscay and its capital city, Durango.[3] At about the same time, another Basque, Miguel Legazpi y Gurruchategui, sailed from the Pacific coast of Mexico, conquered the Philippine Islands and founded its capital city, Manila (1564-1571). Given the opportunity, the Basques could become just as good discoverers as Castilians.

In 1563, Ibarra left for New Biscay, the region he was going to rule as governor and captain-general. Most of the 170 Spanish participants in the expedition were Basques. Some, although not many of them, remained in the new territory, which eventually covered an area of well over 400,000 square kilometres, acquired land there and introduced sheep into their properties; their descendants transformed them gradually into sheep-raising latifundia. New Basque immigrants kept coming, intermarried with the daughters of original Basques and thus arose in the XVIIIth century a group of Creole estate owners who sold sheep to central Mexico and there bought goods imported from Europe. One of these families of Basque origin was the Jugo-Urquidi family formed by the marriage of the Basque immigrant Agustìn Urquidi with the daugther of Pedro Jugo whose estates he had been managing. Jugo himself had come from the Basque country and became manager of the estates of another countryman, Orrantia, whose daugther he eventually married; and the chain reaches back to the founders of New Biscay. At its height in the XVIIIth century, the Jugo-Urquidi family owned or controlled around one million hectares of land in the present State of Chihuahua.[4] One late addition to their property was the purchase of two derelict former Jesuit *haciendas*, estates, after the break-up of the order and the expulsion of its members in 1767.

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[3] See J. Lloyd Mecham, *Francisco de Ibarra and Nueva Vizcaya*, Durham, 1927.

[4] Maria Urquidi, *Los Urquidi de Chihuahua*, México, 1978, unpublished manuscript.

(It is interesting to note that two Jugo brothers were Jesuits). To be sure, the price was very low but the haciendas had been ruined by Indian raids. What was of value in Northern Mexico at that time was not land but sheep and cattle, horses and goats; of course, the *haciendas* also produced agricultural goods as well some industrial goods like textiles for their own consumption and for the local market, but this was of little importance compared with the value of sheep and wool.

By far the largest sheep-raising latifundium of Northern Mexico was founded by the Basque Francisco Urdiñola (1552-1618), who had made a fortune in the Manila trade and Mexican mines. As governor of New Biscay province, he acquired land further east and thus formed an empire of almost five million hectares, reaching as far as Texas. Most of the land was poor pasture and desert, but there were also oases with plentiful water for irrigating fields and vineyards. The wealth of his great-granddaughter was so great that in 1682 it helped obtain for her husband, Agustín Echeverz y Subiza (a Navarre Basque from Pamplona), the title of Marquis de Aguayo, and two years later, the appointment as governor and captain-general of the Northeastern province of Nuevo León. Thus one man united political and economic power in his hands. In the 1760s, the empire reached its greatest size, about six million hectares, and the family its largest fortune, almost five million pesos, and was the largest in the colony. But there were also mortagages and the patrimony vanished in the 1820s, soon after the establishment of Mexican independence.[5]

We have seen a certain pattern in the formation of the Urquidi family: a land-owner employs a younger countryman and then gives him his daughter in marriage. A similar pattern ruled the recruitment of Spanish merchants in the cities. Let us start at the

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[5] Doris M. Ladd, *The Mexican Nobility at Independence 1780-1826*, Austin, 1976, pp. 78-80, 184, 188.

moment when a Basque in Mexico City reaches middle age and becomes successful in business; now he can marry a local girl and can afford a trustworthy assistant. So he turns to his brother in his native village, the owner of the homestead and father probably of more than one son. He summons one of his younger nephews to Mexico and pays him his fare. The nephew lives with his uncle, works extremely hard in the shop. His fare is deducted from his salary, the rest is saved for him by his uncle. After more than a decade, the employee has saved enough to open a business of his own. Then the cycle repeats itself, with possible variations. If the nephew is especially able — and this is quite frequent — the merchant gives him his daughter as a wife and he will become the manager, though not the owner, of the business. If the merchant has no sons then his son-in-law will eventually inherit the business. But if he has a son, the latter becomes the owner and a wealthy gentleman, thus realizing the dream of his father who started his life as a son of a poor hidalgo. The gentleman works less and spends more. It often ends with his son's impoverishment which confirms the proverb, " El padre mercader, el hijo caballero, el nieto pordiosero " (equivalent in English: porter, importer, sporter, porter). The system, as it existed before the war of independence, was summarized by the contemporary conservative historian L. Alamán: " the employees of each shop were held under a very strict order and an almost monastic regularity, and this Spartan education made the Spanish resident of America a type of man that did not exist in Spain itself ".[6] If the system did not exist in Spain, at least not in Alamán's times, how, where and when did it originate? Writers who mention it, like Alamán and recently D.A. Brading,[7] do not ask themselves this question.

The pattern applies obviously to Spaniards in general, not only to Basques, but it can be assumed that it was developed by

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[6] Lucas Alamán, *Historia de Méjico*, 4th. ed., México, 1942, p. 17-18.

[7] *Miners and Merchants in Bourbon Mexico 1763-1810*, Cambridge, 1971.

the latter. It certainly conforms to their hardworking character and their tendency toward endogamy, which again is related to their internal democracy and at the same time a feeling of superiority to other Spanish "nations". We can eliminate the Castilians, who in so many ways form a contrast to the Basques, as possible originators of the system and also the Catalans who, as subjects of the crown of Aragon, had no right to settle or trade in the Indies,[8] and finally also the neighbours of the Basques, the natives of the Santander mountains, whose character is somewhat similar to that of the Basques but whose province at that time was backward and sparsely populated and therefore hardly sent any emigrants overseas.

An important fact is that in 1520-1539 (the conquest of Mexico took place in 1519-1521) the Basques constituted only 4.5% of the total Spanish settlers in America, but their share of merchants amounted to 14%, larger than that of any other Spanish province. Many of these Basque merchants were already settled in Seville and other Andalusian ports where they formed distinct and generally prosperous groups of tradesmen, ship officers and seamen, and retained their identity as Basques.[9]

One such family was the Urrutia family which traded from Seville with America and also in America itself in the first part of the XVIth century. The family's history gives some hints as to how the peculiar system of recruiting merchants might have originated.[10] A native of Valmaceda in the Basque country, Sancho Urrútia settled in Seville and then in 1508, at the age of thirty, went to the Indies in order to trade with his brother who had remained behind in Seville. In 1525 Sancho returned and now sent to Mexico (New Spain) his son, who became a shipper there

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[8] J.I. Israel, *Race, Class and Politics in Colonial Mexico 1610-1670*, London, 1975, pp. 110-117.

[9] Peter Boyd-Bowman, "La emigraciòn peninsular a América: 1520-1539", *Historia Mexicana*, Vol. XIII, No. 2, Oct-Dec. 1963, p. 175.

[10] E. Otte, "Los mercaderes vizcaínos Sancho Ortíz de Urrutia y Juan de Urrutia", *Fundación John Boulton Boletín Histórico*, No. 6, Sept. 1964, Caracas, pp. 5-32.

and never returned. The father in Seville then invited his nephew, a native of the same Basque home town, to form an export-import company. Eventually the nephew became one of the wealthiest men in Seville. Before he died in 1549 he endowed in perpetuity a chantry and chapel in Valmaceda, but made sure that the clergy would not intervene in the management of its finances. Here we have the system — however it might be called — in its simplest form. Typically Basque is the remittance of a certain proportion of the fortune to the home town, together with the insistence on freedom from ecclesiastical interference.

Hence we might perhaps conclude that the system already operated among the Basques around 1500 and was brought to New Spain via Seville. Its most distinguishing feature, long, voluntary, self-imposed celibacy before marriage, was especially suited for seamen and travelling traders or merchant adventurers who had to undertake long, perilous journeys.

The Basques transplanted it to America and as a part of the general equalizing process on this enormous continent it was adopted by other Spanish-fortune seeking immigrants as the best way of achieving wealth and keeping it. This transference was perhaps made easier by the fact that the Basques gave up their language in America. Curiously, the Spanish colonization of America did not increase the regional differences that were so important in Spain. The spreading of a thin and heterogenous Spanish population over the enormous continent did not lead to the formation of, say, Basque, Galician and Andalusian countries, but, on the contrary, unified the Spaniards linguistically as well as in many other ways. Faced by the nightmare of a general Indian rebellion, the Spaniards closed their ranks around the crown of Castile and its language.

As early as 1607 a Mexican Basque deplored the loss of the Euzkerra tongue and its replacement by the Castilian language.[11]

[11] ISRAEL, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

But the Basques remained a separate community and even had at the beginning of the XVIIth century their own detachments in the city militias. What helped them in the long run to preserve their identity, however, was the brotherhood of Our Lady of Aranzazú, founded in honor of the Virgin said to have appeared in the middle of the XVth century to a Basque shepherd boy. The sacred image became to Mexican Basques more important than to Basques back in Spain; it became the symbol of their nationality.

The brotherhood, or fraternity, of Aranzazú was formally established in 1681-1682. A small chapel dedicated to this particular virgin already existed as a part of the large Franciscan monastery of Mexico City. The fraternity negotiated with the monastery an agreement whereby it would be granted in perpetuity the chapel in exchange for certain amounts of money payable for masses and ceremonies to be performed by the friars at regular intervals. The Basques received permission to build on the same spot a larger and more luxurious chapel — which they did soon afterwards — but reserved themselves the right to manage its financial affairs; in particular they insisted that any gift given to the chapel and the image should enter the treasury of the brotherhood " without any interference of the prior ".[12] The fraternity then proceeded to formulate its " Constitutions ", or statutes. Characteristically, it was not allowed to receive gifts from individuals who were not Basques or descendents of Basques. " This brotherhood does not ask for alms as other fraternities do... "

In fact, it did not need to. The Basques were getting wealthier and wealthier, partly thanks to an upturn in silver mining, to which they themselves contributed. Pious bequests to be administered by the brotherhood began to pile up. The Franciscan monastery resisted the temptation and fulfilled its obligation not to intervene in the financial affairs of the brotherhood. But

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[12] Gonzalo Obregón Jr., *El Real Colegio de San Ignacio de México* (*Las Vizcaínas*). México, 1949, pp. 16-25.

the archbishopric did attempt in 1716 to influence the investment decisions of the Aranzazú brotherhood, forcing it to join the Basque Congregation of Madrid and with its help to overrule the colonial authorities of Mexico City. In 1728, the Virgin was already so rich that a Mercedarian friar tried to stir up popular hatred against the " Basque heretic dogs ". Four years later, three leading members of the fraternity, Aldaco, Meave and Echeveste decided to found in Mexico City a boarding school for Spanish girls, preferably Basque girls or daughters or granddaughters of Basques.

Aldaco and Meave (Meabe in Basque spelling) were managers of the Fagoaga mining, banking and mercantile interests, totalling over one million pesos, then one of the largest patrimonies in the country and one which was still growing as it was closely bound up with the silver production which had been increasing steadily since about 1700. In figures, the mintage of silver and gold in Mexico rose from the average of four million pesos a year around 1700, to over twenty million pesos one century later, an increase of five hundred per cent. Around 1800, which was the climax of the prosperity of Mexico as a colony, the royal revenue raised from Mexican mining amounted to over five million pesos a year. Silver mining was the motor of the whole economy of the country. Thanks to it the viceregal government was able to collect yearly the sum of twenty million pesos, more than 10% of the country's agricultural, mining and manufacturing production. Of this total revenue about one half went to Madrid. These simple figures illustrate Mexico's contribution to the wealth of Spain; in this contribution the share of the Basques was the largest, and among the latter, the Fagoaga patrimony was predominant.

The Fagoaga fortune had been formed in a characteristically Basque Way. " In the last decades of the seventeenth century ", D. Brading recounts,[13] " Juan Bautista Arosqueta, a native of

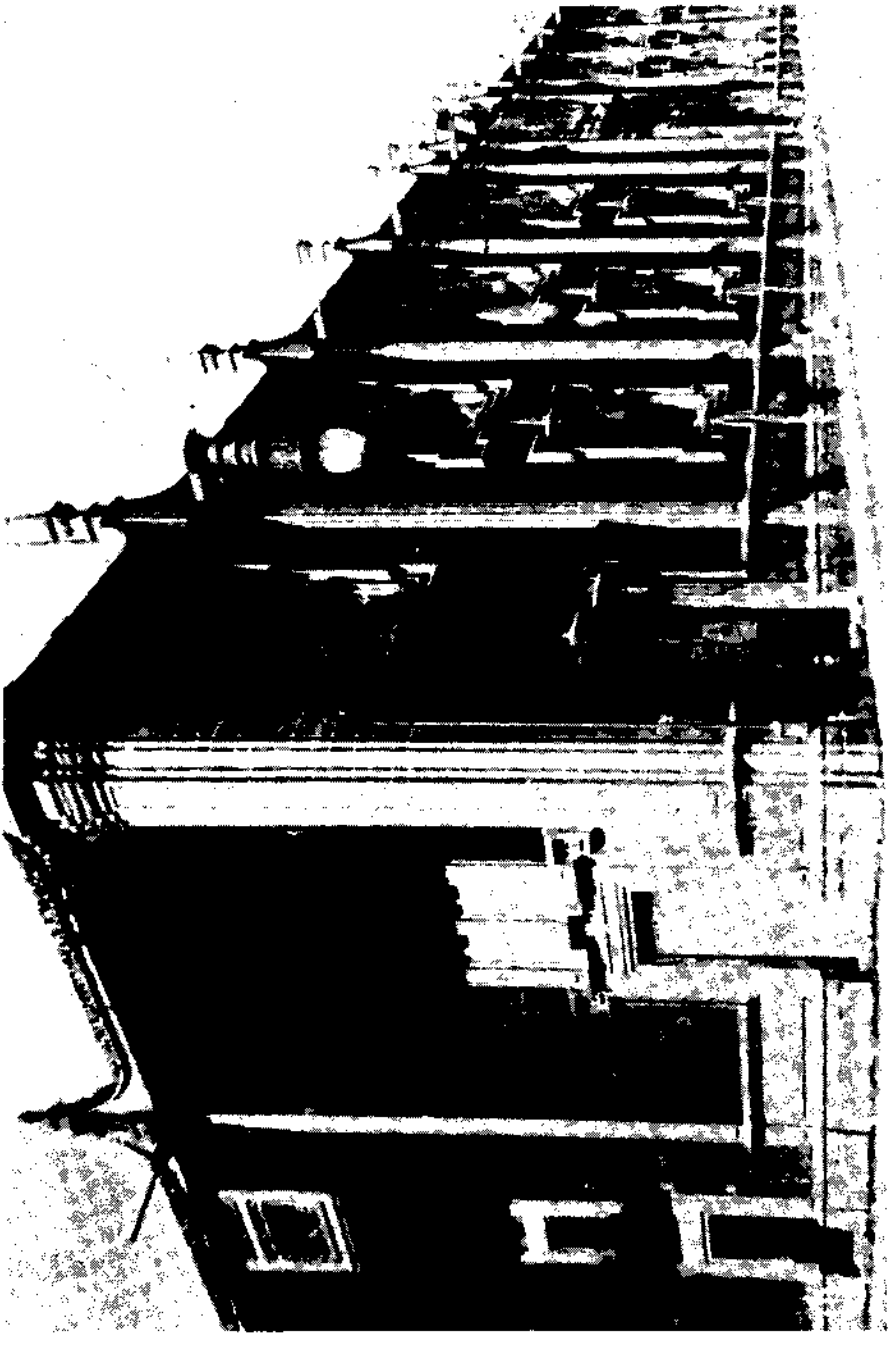
[13] *Op. cit.*, pp. 120, 173-176.

Lequeitio in Biscay, established an import house in Mexico City. His only heir, his daughter Josefa, married Francisco de Fagoaga, a wealthy silver banker, who then operated the trading firm in conjunction with his mining interests. In his turn, Fagoaga, a native of the valley of Oyarzu in Guipuzcoa, summoned his nephew, Manuel de Aldaco, both to manage his silver bank and to marry a daughter. Following Fagoaga's death in 1736 Aldaco appointed Ambrosio de Meave, from Durango in (Old) Biscay, to direct the trading house, granting him first 13.5 per cent of all profits, and then, after 1747, a full third. Meave remained in charge of the firm until his death in 1781."

So these two Basques, Aldaco and Meave, were the founders of the institution known as the "College of the Biscayne girls", which became famous not only for its beautiful architecture, but also for its independence from ecclesiastical authorities, thanks to which it weathered the liberal storm one century later after its foundation. The confraternity of our Lady of Aranzazú, the organization of the Mexican Basques, had insisted from 1732 that the future establishment should not be subject to ecclesiastical jurisdiction. However, the great wealth of the new institution was too tempting and in 1752 the archbishop of Mexico City rejected this condition. The Basques refused to accept defeat; in a hasty note to Meave, Aldaco wrote that "if we lose we shall burn down what we have paid for with our own money", more than 600,000 silver pesos spent on the building and the endowment of the college.[14] They enlisted the help of the Basque residents of Madrid and kept on writing to the Court that the school was to be a secular institution; "we do not wish it to be a sacred or inviolable place; even if there exists a public church annexed to it, this church has been made for the spiritual well being of the college, not the college for the church..."

Finally, in 1766, the pope Clement XIII accepted the complete

[14] OBREGÓN, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-75, 163-185.



El Colegio de los Viscaines in 1920

exemption of the college from ecclesiastical jurisdiction and simultaneously the king of Spain, Charles III, declared the college to be under his royal protection. The college was opened the following year when the original documents arrived from Madrid. The opening coincided with the deportation of the Jesuits from New Spain, and no doubt the political circumstances of the times helped the Mexican Basques to their victory over the church.

The king also approved the thirty " constitutions ", or statutes, of the college. Its property was to be managed exclusively by the confraternity, subject only to the Viceroy; as its founders intended to house and educate widows and girls — preferably descendants of Basques — under no circumstances would the school be converted into a nunnery, monastery or a similar institution; all inmates were going to be equal, independently of their economic position, an important article considering the danger that the paying boarders might try to take advantage of the poor ones; no servants would be allowed within the college, again an important article in view of the great number of servants in Mexican nunneries; thus all would take turns in cooking, washing and cleaning. These democratic provisions are certainly interesting. One of the articles deals with education; but it must be said that the " Biscayne college " became known more as a charitable institution than as an educational establishment, since there was only the customary, routine teaching of reading, writing, basic arithmetic, " Christian doctrine ", sewing and embroidering.

Clearly, the college was a product of the Basque character: more action than thought, hard work, democracy and independence. The Basques were good catholics — after all, Ignacio Loyola had been a Basque — but their struggle for independence from ecclesiastical interference was bound to lead them towards liberalism at a time when this doctrine was spreading from France. It was quite normal that Francisco Ibarra, founder of New Biscay, left in his last will of 1575 a part of his fortune to four churches; the greater part of course remained in the family,

one brother inheriting the material possessions and the other, the governorship of New Biscay as well as other royal grants. A sister in the Basque country received 1,000 ducats.[15] Almost two centuries later in 1740 the marchioness de Aguayo, a descendant of Urdiñola, bequeathed about 15,000 pesos for religious purposes, like church contruction in Mexico and Spain, missionary work in Mexico and Pamplona, the birth-place of the Urdiñolas, and jewels and costumes for saints in Mexico and Pamplona, out of the total of 38,732 pesos in specific bequests only.[16] The will of Francisco Fagoaga written in 1737 was different. Out of 42,100 pesos in specific bequests, 12,800 pesos were to be given to the poor and the sick in Mexico City and in Oyarzum in the Basque country, 3,200 for missionary work in Mexico and San Sebastiàn in Biscay and 4,500 for masses, but nothing for pious works, religious building funds, and jewels and costumes for saints. The difference between these two almost simultaneous wills is revealing. The marquesses of Aguayo lived on their enormous northern territory and were perhaps slightly behind the times, while the Fagoagas, as bankers, miners and merchants, were in close contact with European events, trends and thinking.

This is confirmed by the connection between the Mexico City Basques, among whom the Fagoaga clan was most prominent, and the " Royal Basque Society of Friends of the Country ", " *Real Sociedad Bascongada de Amigos del País* ", whose programme consisted in the promotion of the Basque economy. Such " economic societies " already existed North of the Pyrenees, but the Basque society was the first in Spain. Inspired with the idea of economic progress and freedom, the Spanish Basques founded their society in 1765 in Vergara; one year later they opened, also in Vergara, the " *Real Seminario Patriótico Bascongado* ", the Royal Basque Patriotic Seminary, a college in which special atten-

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[15] MECHAM, *op. cit.*, pp. 223-225.

[16] LADD, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

tion was given to the study of mineralogy and metallurgy, important subjects in a country rich in iron. The Society declined after 1790, because the royal favourite, Godoy, hated the Basques. Its end came in 1794 with the French invasion and the destruction of the Vergara college.[17]

The close relations between the Society and Mexican Basques can be seen in the following figures: in 1773, of 190 Society members residents overseas 158 lived in New Spain, as Mexico was then called. In 1774–1790 payments to the Society by men in the Indies totalled 1.700,000 reales de vellón, equivalent to 85,000 silver pesos (1 peso = 20 reales de vellón), more than one half of which came from Mexico. Particularly active in Mexico in winning new members and contributors was Meave; [18] he secured the signatures of 171 new associate members and collected 14,000 pesos for the Vergara college; in his own will he left 14,000 pesos for the same school (according to Shafer, the sum was 12,000 pesos). This relation was fruitful for both countries, for on the one hand Spain received money and on the other hand Mexico obtained from the Vergara college modern technology for its mining. In fact, the famous Mining School, (*Escuela de Minería*) of Mexico City, can be considered as an off-shoot of the Vergara college. One of its distinguished professors, the Basque, Fausto Elhuyar, a mineralogist and member of the Society, was later sent by the Spanish Government to Mexico and there in 1792 established a technical high school designed on the same model.

The Basque merchant Antonio Bassoco was also connected by marriage to the Fagoagas. He had been summoned from his native valley by his uncle, a successful merchant who had bought the title of Marquis of Castañiza, to be trained in the business;

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[17] SHAFER, ROBERT JONES, *The Economic Societies of the Spanish World (1763-1821)*, 1958, Syracuse University Press, pp. 24–47.

[18] BRADING, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

he soon became its manager and after Castañiza's death married his only daughter. Thus he entered into the possession of one of the country's largest fortunes; it continued to grow despite his numerous gifts to the capital city for the improvement of municipal services, the total amount of which is impossible to ascertain, but probably exceeded 100,000 pesos. In his younger days he was also quite active in the Mexican branch of the Friends of the Country, but later became more inclined towards the church. He spent around half a million of pesos in the construction of the Loreto church and in the rebuilding of the Enseñanza convent, both in Mexico City. The fact that he had no children and that his two brothers-in-law were priests, had perhaps something to do with it. A natural complement of his pious turn of mind was his loyalist feeling for Spain, which was not otherwise very prominent among the Fagoagas.

The difference between the Fagoaga clan and Bassoco can be seen in the structure of their contributions to the Spanish treasury during the Napoleonic wars. Bassoco gave $ 1,570,000, of which 1,300,000 were loans and the balance, 270,000, gifts, while the Fagoagas contributed only $ 200,000, all of which were loans.[19] The explanation is that by 1800 the Fagoagas were creoles, Mexican-born Basques, while Bassoco was a Spanish-born Basque. The Fagoagas were more identified with Mexico, then still called New Spain, and less interested in the future outcome of European wars.

There were deeper motives for this attitude. " Towards the end of the eighteenth century ", it has been written recently,[20] " the central, viceregal government (in New Spain) as well as the high ecclesiastical positions and foreign trade were in the hands of European born, so-called " peninsular Spaniards ". Mexican-born Spaniards, called creoles, ... were miners, merchants

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[19] LADD, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

[20] J. BAZANT, *A Concise History of Mexico from Hidalgo to Cárdenas 1808-1940*, Cambridge, 1977, pp. 3-4.

and *hacendados*, owners of large farms or estates called haciendas... Both peninsular and Mexican-born Spaniards considered themselves gentlemen. Many of them were wealthy. A few of the wealthiest acquired titles of nobility from the crown. Some creoles or Mexican-born Spaniards had been to schools of higher learning but nevertheless they had to be satisfied with minor government positions, although they were often more cultured than their Spanish-born cousins who ruled the country. They resented it... "

Besides, the Basques had their particular feud with Godoy, for all practical purposes ruler of Spain since 1792. The Basques were branded as " collaborationists " during the French invasion of 1794–1795 and perhaps quite naturally Godoy attempted to curtail Basque privileges, thus arousing the resistance of this indomitable people. The echo of these events reached the colony. When the Godoy government tried to raise money in 1805 for the war with Great Britain and decreed what amounted to be an almost confiscatory tax on property, the landowners, both creole and peninsular, protested. One leading Basque merchant and *hacendado* in Mexico at the beginning of the XIXth century was Gabriel Yermo. Born in the vicinity of Bilbao, Yermo married in Mexico — characteristically — his cousin who had inherited from her father two rich sugar-cane growing haciendas.[21] He soon became known for his generosity, for he granted freedom to more than four hundred black and mulatto slaves on these plantations; and when he later purchased another sugar plantation, a former Jesuit property, he did the same for over two hundred slaves that were there. (Almost all these freedmen remained on the haciendas and later, during the war of independence defended the Spanish cause). But Yermo was not inclined to be generous towards the Godoy government and he did everything in his power to pay as little as possible: out of his total debt of almost

[21] ALAMÁN, *op. cit.*, pp. 224-225.

$ 200,000, he paid less than thirty thousand. All in all, Madrid managed to extract from the colony about $ 12 million.[22]

The situation changed suddenly with the fall of Godoy in 1808. Spain was threatened with chaos. On the one hand, this meant that the traditional Basque liberties would be restored; on the other hand, it opened the way to a movement for Mexican independence led by creoles. "Peninsular traders of the capital sensed danger to their monopolistic position... a cleavage of interests became apparent between the Spanish-born importers of goods from Spain or via Spain and creole landholders who, as consumers, wanted cheaper goods imported directly from England or other countries; this could have been achieved only by making Mexico independent. Thus the peninsular Spaniards were pushed into allegiance for their mother country, even though many were married to daughters of Mexican landowners".[23] Under the leadership of Yermo and other Spanish-born Basques, they organized a conspiracy and deposed the vacillating viceroy and in his place appointed an old Basque soldier.

This act of violence was a blow to the hopes of the creoles, including the Basque creoles, of achieving the independence of the country by peaceful means. A conspiracy was born with the programme of overthrowing the existing government and establishing an independent Mexico. Its four leaders were Hidalgo, Allende, Aldama and Abasolo. The first one was a creole priest of Castilian background; the other three were sons of Spanish-born Basque merchants, hence first-generation creoles; they were militia officers and members of town councils. Their interests and ambitions were obviously not mercantile but political; their rebellion against the colonial authorities was also a rebellion against their fathers, insofar as these upheld the former. With the vigour

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[22] B.R. Hamnett, "The Appropriation of Mexican Church Wealth by the Spanish Bourbon Government", *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 1, 2, Nov. 1969, pp. 85-113.

[23] J. Bazant, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

inherited from their ancestors, these sons of Basques proclaimed a revolution in September of 1810. Even though defeated and all except one executed, they started a protracted, cruel and destructive war which lasted with interruptions for eleven years.

The war taxed the resources of the Mexican wealthy classes. Yermo revealed himself a true Spanish patriot: of his total contributions to the sum of $ 212,700, only $ 33,500 were in loans; the most interesting of his contributions to the Spanish effort to maintain Mexico in subjection by force was to finance a battalion of 500 men consisting of his employees and former slaves throughout the war.[24] The Fagoagas loaned money to Spain only when they could not avoid it. Their sympathies were on the side of the Mexican independence, but they were of course too rich to become involved in conspiracies and actual fighting.

The last act of the war was also staged by a Basque creole, Agustín Iturbide. The son of a Basque merchant, Iturbide also had a Mexican-born Basque for a mother; thus he was able to say, "I am a foursquare Basque". In 1810, he embraced the cause of Spain, we might say the cause of his father, but ten years later he changed his mind and being the head of the viceregal army proclaimed Mexico independent in February-March 1821 and achieved his goal half a year later. In this way the Basques with their old spirit of freedom, contributed to Mexican independence. However, the presidency was not enough for him and the following year he let himself be proclaimed emperor of Mexico. Now the Fagoaga group became important. As several-generation creoles they wanted an independent Mexico which would give stability to the unhappy country; it seemed to them that a constitutional monarchy under a European prince would be the solution. In fact, Iturbide liberated Mexico with this objective, but then his ambition proved stronger than his reason. So the Fagoagas and other wealthy people turned against

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[24] ALAMÁN, *op. cit.*, p. 509.

him and brought about his downfall in 1823. But they were not destined to enjoy the fruit of their victory: republican sympathies were spreading with an amazing speed, in 1824 Mexico adopted a federalist-republican constitution and the Fagoaga influence dwindled. So ended the political influence of the Basques in Mexico. Their economic dominance was also about to end.

The ravages of the war and the flooding of the mines caused silver production to fall to about one half of the prewar average. Independent Mexico then made it possible for foreign firms to invest in Mexican mines. As a result the Fagoagas and other mining families sold out, or went into partnership with British firms and eventually became *rentiers*, living from their income alone. Also the large Spanish import houses were replaced by British and French firms. Finally, the Spaniards and creoles who had specialized in making loans to the government yielded their primacy to other foreigners, especially the British. And so the Mexican mining, finance and import-export businesses were gradually taken over by British, French, German and later also North-American interests.

These newcomers, however, did not understand the Mexican countryside and therefore shunned investment in land, so that the Spaniards and their descendants kept their dominant place in Mexican agriculture. Let us take as an example the province of San Luis Potosí, situated North of Mexico City. The Basque immigrant Pantaleón Ypiña came to the City of San Luis Potosí during the war of independence with letters of introduction to Pedro Imaz, a Basque merchant already established there. The young Ypiña first did the "hackwork" for Imaz, then became his partner, especially in buying and selling of silver bars. Thus he acquired a moderate fortune, opened a store of his own and finally married the widow of the owner of an important former Jesuit estate. His son José enlarged the family fortune by purchasing other haciendas and by marrying the daughter of another Basque hacienda owner, Paulo Verástegui. By 1900 José Ypiña

was the most important landowner of the province, some of his haciendas specializing in cattle, others in cereal-growing and others in sugar-cane cultivation.[25] Eventually this fortune vanished too as a result of the civil war of 1910-1920 and the agrarian reform of 1935-1940.

In some of the other Mexican provinces the Basque contribution to Mexican agriculture was more important. North of San Luis Potosí, a part of the former Urdiñola latifundium was acquired in 1848 by the Basque immigrant Leonardo Zuloaga, owner of a adjoining former Jesuit hacienda and husband of the wealthy Mexican born Basque, Luisa Ibarra. Irregular rainfall made their lands, around one million hectares, unsuitable for farming but Zuloaga built dams and irrigation canals and thus transformed the desert into a modern cotton cultivating district. A Basque born in a humid sheep-raising country created a large scale irrigation system in Northern, arid Mexico. Zuloaga had the misfortune of supporting Maximilian's empire; he himself died in 1865; his property was first confiscated by Juárez and then returned to the widow. However, the situation for the former monarchists was not favourable and the widow sold the latifundium in portions which became prosperous cotton-growing haciendas. Even though these fell victim to the agrarian reform of the 1930's Zuloaga is still remembered as the father of the progressive farming of the arid Mexican North.

After 1910 the Basque immigrants preferred to devote themselves to commerce and manufacturing. The Basque names of their firms indicate the national pride of their founders: "*Euzkadi*", the automobile tyre factory, and more recently "*Aurrerá*", a department store. The first modern iron foundry in Mexico was also founded by Antonio Basagoiti, a Basque who brought the know-how from his mother country.

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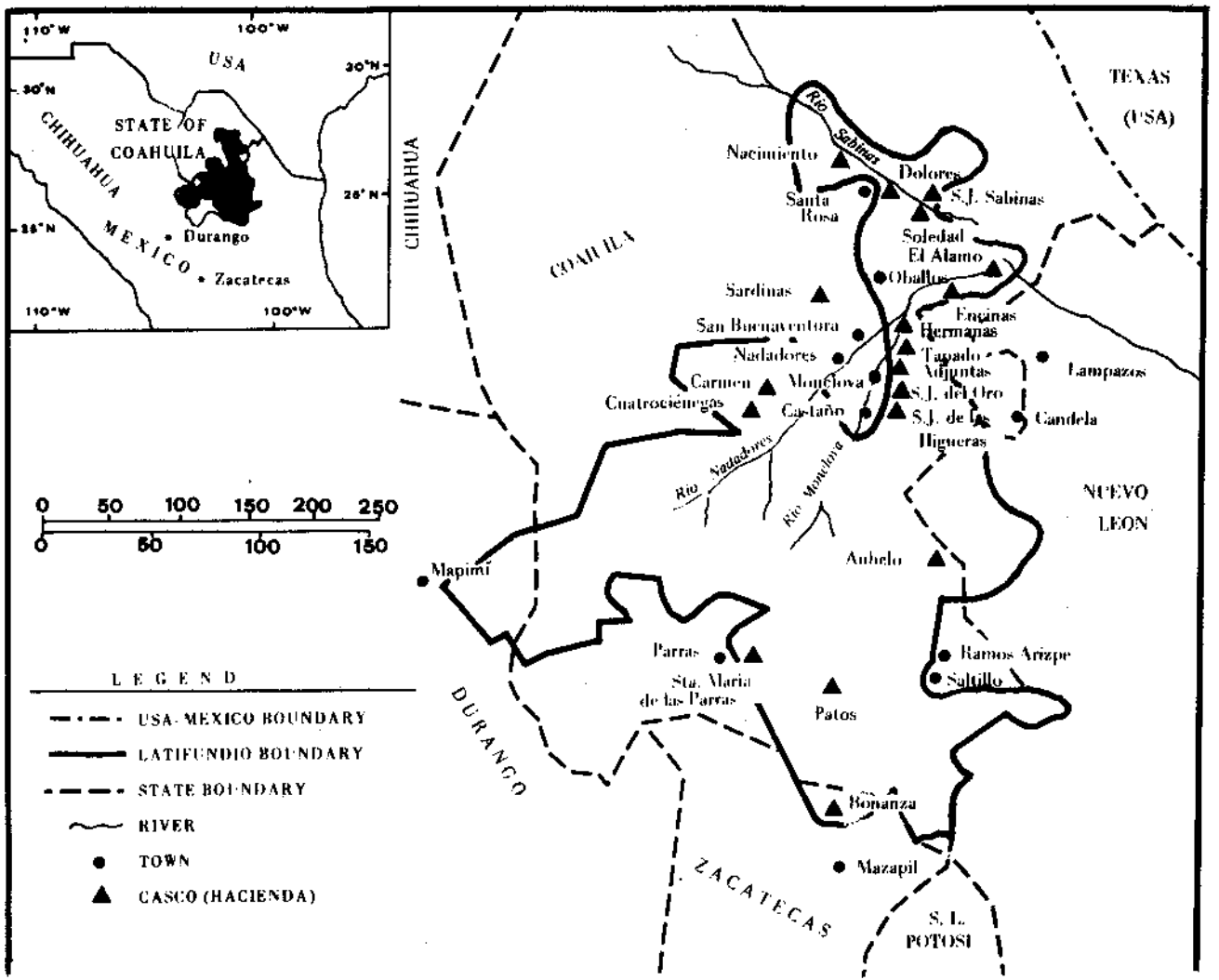
[25] J. BAZANT, *Cinco haciendas mexicanas. Tres Siglos de vida rural en San Luis Potosí, 1600-1910*, 2nd. ed., México, 1980.

Of the colonial charitable foundations, only the Hospital of Jesus, founded by the conqueror, the pawnshop (Monte de Piedad), and the Biscayne college have survived to the present day. The college was reduced to poverty by the confiscatory policy of the Spanish government of 1805-1808, with its strong anti-Basque bias, when the college had to surrender to the royal treasury mortgages in the value of $ 500,000. Up to then, the college had supported itself on the interest of this capital; the government undertook to continue paying the same interest, but the payments stopped a few years later as a consequence of wars both in Europe and in Mexico. In the end the college girls had to support themselves by sewing and embroidering for sale.[26] Normality returned gradually, and by 1856 the college again owned ten houses in Mexico City valued almost $ 100,000.

The second storm came with the liberal revolution of 1856-1863. In the 1859, the liberal government headed by Benito Juárez decreed the confiscation of all ecclesiastical property as well as property of all institutions managed or controlled by the clergy, such as congregations, confraternities, poorhouses, hospitals and schools. Other schools for girls existed in Mexico City and they were in effect administered or supervised by the clergy. Hence it seemed easy to lump the Biscayne college with them and so seize its property. The board of trustees of the college, however, was able to prove that the institution had been independent of the church since its foundation. Despite the aggressive feelings of radical liberals against everything Spanish and Catholic, the government in 1861 exempted the college property from nationalization and brought the college itself under its protection. As confraternities were to disappear from then on, the property of the Virgin of Aranzazú was transferred directly to the college which was to continue under a different name. And so it continues even today, administered, as before, by men of Basque origin.

[26] OBREGÓN, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-119, 124-127.



The Urdiñola latifundium (Aguayo Marquisate) after 1820