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**P. Woodworth. *The Basque Country: A Cultural History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2008.**

*The Basque Country: A Cultural History* offers an account of the experiences of the author in the Basque region over the past 40 years. Paddy Woodworth is an Irish journalist, lecturer, and tour guide with extensive knowledge of Spanish politics and a particular interest in the Basque Country. From 1988 to 2002, he covered Spain as a staff journalist for the *Irish Times* and has contributed numerous articles on Spanish and Basque politics for many newspapers including the *London Times*, *The Sunday Post*, and *El País*, among others. His first book, *Dirty Wars, Clean Hands: ETA, the GAL and Spanish Democracy* (2002), explored the Spanish state-sponsored terrorism during the mid to late 80's. In 2010, he started offering guided tours of the Basque Country.

As mentioned in the preface, *The Basque Country. A Cultural History* is not a comprehensive survey; rather, it is based on Woodworth's personal lifelong relationship with the country. To this, he adds historical and political background information necessary to understand the different subjects he discusses. He also includes a reading list and a useful glossary of Basque and Spanish words used throughout the book. The book is part of a series called *Landscapes of the Imagination*, which allows the authors to creatively explore their subject matter. The starting point of such explorations is usually geographic, as Woodworth's exploration of the Basque region is. Then, his train of thought takes him from one topic to another in a most original way. The book is divided into fifteen chapters, but topics are repeated and reintroduced throughout the book. Chapter One sets the geographical boundaries of the country and discusses its climate and population distribution. Chapter Two briefly explores some of the most common topics with respect to the history of the Basques: their unknown origin, the mystery of their language, *euskera*, the birth of nationalism within the Basque region, and the importance of significant Basque political figures like Sancho the Great of Navarre or Sabino Arana. The 19<sup>th</sup> century Carlist Wars as well as the 20<sup>th</sup> century Civil War and the diverse impact of these wars on different parts of the Basque Country serve to give a brief historical overview.

Chapter Three (*Bai, Bai, Urdaibai: Cave Paintings, Painted Trees, Tree of Gernika*) focuses on the northwestern corner of the Basque Country: the Bay of Urdaibai in Biscay. Starting in the nearby town of Gernika, Woodworth introduces the reader to the spiritual capital of the Basques. However, instead of focusing on the history of the place, Woodworth chooses instead to focus on its ecology to highlight some of the changes experienced in this area. The game of *pelota*, or *jai alai* is the topic of Chapter Four. The small towns of Zizurkil and Sara serve as an example of the modern importance of the *frontón*, the place where *pelota* is played. Besides explaining the origins of the game, the different versions that are played, and the current worldwide popularity of the game, Woodworth also highlights the significance of the *frontón* as a public space, one that is also often used for political rallies or vindications. Moreover, he says, it is a "masculine" space, which explains not only the absence of women who play *pelota* there but also their invisibility in politics.

Chapter Five revolves around the area known as the *Cinco Villas* or Five Towns. Pío Baroja, one of the most important 19<sup>th</sup> century writers in Spanish Literature who spent most of his life in this area, does not get much recognition in the Basque Country because he wrote his works in Spanish. Seventeenth century local witch hunts, on the other hand, have created keen

interest in the *Cinco Villas*. Similarly, the San Fermín festivities in Lesaka deserve much more attention than the better known ones in Pamplona. In fact, the guided tours that Woodworth now offers include a visit to the town during the festivities. (A copy of this book is included with the trip's materials.)

Gastronomy is the focus of Chapter Six: *txakoli*, a white wine, *sagardoa*, hard cider, and *patxarán*, a liquor made by soaking berries in anise, are mentioned as the quintessential local drinks; gastronomic societies and cider houses are the best places to enjoy these drinks along with some pickled peppers, curdled sheep's milk, or squid. Food and drink provide the author an excuse to discuss Basque identity with some of his Basque friends. The transformation of the city of Bilbao is analyzed in Chapter Seven. Woodworth explores the rise and fall of the city as an important economic center based on ship building and iron mining and its reinvention as a potential cultural epicenter produced by the new Guggenheim Museum-Bilbao.

Next, Chapter Eight, delves into some of the most traditional Basque instruments: the *txalaparta*, a rural, rudimentary xylophone consisting of two planks of wood that sit on top of straw pads or turned baskets that produces its music when the musician hits the horizontally laid wood planks with two sticks; the *txistu*, a three holed flute, was used as a marker of identity during politically oppressed times; the *alboka*, a reed horn had almost disappeared by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was thought to be unique to the Basque Country until a similar instrument was found in Turkey in 2006. Woodworth emphasizes the traditional use of folk instruments in the Basque region as identity markers, but he also highlights a change in Basque nationalism: instead of looking only for uniqueness or “separateness”—i.e. from Spain—(a historical trend among the Basque), many Basques now seek to find a commonality between themselves and other peoples of the world.

To discuss Basque literature (Chapter Ten), Woodworth explores the fictional town of Obaba, a creation of Bernardo Atxaga, the best internationally known Basque writer. From Obaba, the author jumps to the town of Laguardia in Chapter Eleven. Laguardia illustrates the progressive secularization of religious festivities in Basque Country as a sign of modernization. Woodworth turns to politics in Chapter 11 and discusses the historical circumstances that produced the birth of Euskadi Ta Askatasuna ETA as well as why it still exists. The Spanish government-sponsored state terrorism and comparisons to Irish, Catalanian and Galician nationalism are also analyzed.

In Chapter Twelve, Woodworth explores the whaling and festive past of a nation of fishermen. Fishermen's guilds in towns like Lekeitio or Getaria have regulated both fishing practices and rituals in their festivities. Continuing his coastal journey, he then describes the cities of Zarautz, Biarritz and San Sebastián, which enjoyed a golden period during the Belle Epoque and still attract many tourists today. His trip ends in Irún and Hondarribia, two towns in which traditional festivities have precipitated gender wars in which women have been fighting for the possibility of female participation in the festivities.

Back inland, Navarre is the focus of Chapter Thirteen. The text highlights Navarre's past importance as a kingdom until absorbed by Castile, the role of Basques in the defeat of Roland, the pilgrimage route to Santiago, and some of the most interesting towns in the area (Burguete, Olite, or Ujué). The Basque obsession with mountain climbing is explored in Chapter Fourteen. Not only is hill walking a common pastime but it was also a recruiting tool used by nationalists during Franco's times. Woodworth also observes that besides being topped with many small churches, many of the mountains are also the home of pre-Christian pagan Gods, still feared in rural areas.

The final chapter is devoted to *Iparralde*, the French Basque area. Towns like Bayonne, Biarritz or St. Jean-de- Luz show the differences between being Basque within the French state and the Spanish one. *The Basque Country: A Cultural History* is an interesting and easy read. Despite some inaccuracies, such as the naming of Tirso de Molina as the most prolific Golden Age playwright instead of Lope de Vega or the reduction of the three Carlist wars to just two, the book is worth reading. The author makes some good points and inspires the reader to learn more about the Basque Country.

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