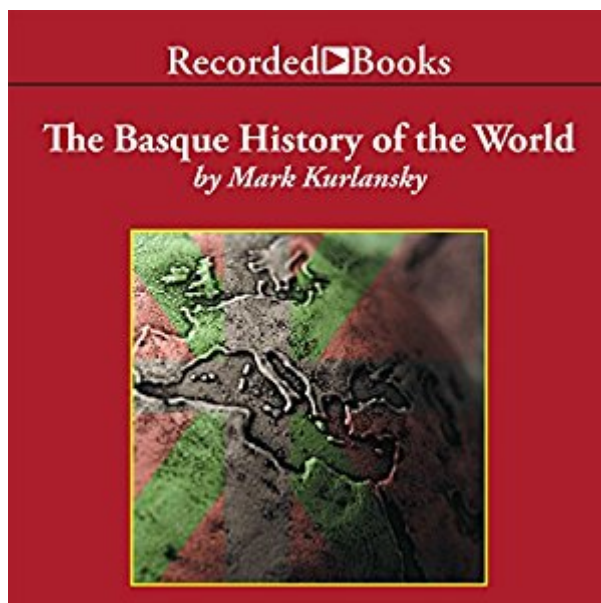


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Basque History Of The World



Synopsis

Award-winning author Mark Kurlansky has drawn enthusiastic praise for his books, which are sharply-focused studies as well as glorious celebrations of their subjects. In *The Basque History of the World*, he turns his eye toward Europe's oldest surviving culture - a culture as mysterious as it is fascinating. Settled in the western Pyrenees Mountains of France and Spain, the Basque nation is not drawn on maps, and the origin of their forbidden language has never been discovered. Yet Basques appear to predate all other cultures in Europe, with many significant global contributions to their credit. Most notably, one of their own took command after Magellan's death and was the first person to circumnavigate the globe. This informative book is full of lively anecdotes that illuminate an otherwise obscure culture. Narrator George Guidall rises to the challenge of the text, which includes many Basque terms, and interprets beautifully.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The author is an entertaining story teller, peppering the chapters with recipes for classical dishes that reflect Basque history, from the famous cod whose sauce arises from the cod itself to the elusive baby eels. There's a bit of recycling here, as others mentioned, from earlier works like 'Cod' but that's inevitable given the subject matter. The daunting overview of the sweep of Basque history, over 3000 years that is known, is accomplished with great competency. Little known tidbits about this enigmatic people are nicely expounded upon, such the fact that the Basques likely and regularly crossed the North Atlantic in pursuit of cod and whales before Columbus' fateful journey and that they were pioneers of iron manufactory at the birth of the industrial age. The problem is that the

work often comes across as an apologia for some of the darker elements of recent Basque history. The author can't seem to help himself but blend in bits of his own politics (decidedly Left) giving a pass to 'enlightened' leftist revolutionary & radical trends in the Basque nationalist movement and uses labels of 'Right' and 'Left' in the 21st century context for movements and personages of the 19th and early 20th conflating matters that unfortunately mislead. Discussions of the Civil War and its aftermath are unavoidable and it's here where the author unfortunately lets his bias through the most. Mr Kurland all too often becomes an apologist for pretty questionable actions by ETA (who adopted the violence of the 'anti-colonialist' Left), straying into polemics instead of conveying a balanced discussion of a complex struggle. At one strange point, a discussion of past events breaks into the present for a tutorial about what Basques actually want, and that doesn't seem include independence. Franco is accurately portrayed as the authoritarian brute that he was, foisted into power by the Nazis, but also someone not as numbingly dumb as Kurland would have us believe, that he couldn't deftly played both sides against the middle well into the depths of the Cold War and two generations after Stalin, Hitler and Mussolini were rotting in their respective graves. The price, of course, was retarding Spain's cultural and economic development through most of the 20th century, something that cannot be disputed. The author glosses over the true nature of the Republican side, who notwithstanding their name, rapidly devolved into Useful Idiots for Stalin. He fails to recognize that they were as much stooges for this monster as Franquistas were for Hitler, perpetrating crimes as heinous as the Fascists during their brief reign. There was a damned good reason entrepreneurial, capitalist Basques did not simply throw in their lot with a faction that became dominated by dogmatic Marxists, but instead kept them at arm's length even after the Guernica/Gernika slaughter. Despite the book's shortcomings, much can be gleaned here about a nation whose saga begins before recorded history and ought to inspire curious readers to delve deeper into their story.

I really enjoyed this book, as a way to learn about my heritage on my father's side of the family. Learning about the history of the Basque people, the reasons for the difference in culture between French Basques and Spanish Basque was very interesting. It really was the introduction I've been missing to the culture. I'm not 100% sure about the historical accuracy of some of the information in the book, but I felt that the author let us know when he was offering a possibility rather than fact. All in all, I was very happy for the attempt at offering as much information as possible, and adding grains of salt when they were required.

About half this book comes easily up to the high and entertaining standard of Mark Kurlansky's work. But a great deal of the modern era gets bogged down in petty details of horrible deeds. Up to the Carlist wars the tale flows smoothly with loads of interesting tid bits. This is a fascinating nation, one of the nations of the world which has remained a nation without being able to form a country. I just think he got bogged down in the repression imposed by Spain on Basqueland, the execution, and arrests, the shootings, murders and bombings. These are all important parts of the Basque history but the history goes back 2,000 years and more. But I am not discouraged. This is Kurlansky book number three for me. Going to order out his book on the Caribbean next.

I have always had a curiosity about the Basque and gained a great deal of information about the people, their history, and their customs from this book. I was amazed at the amount of influence the Basque have had on the cultures of other Europeans and Americans as well. The author describes the sea fairing exploits of these hardy people and suggests they actually may have been the first Europeans to visit North America before the Vikings. He notes that Christopher Columbus' flagship, Santa Maria, was built by Basque shipbuilders and Basque seamen made up a good percentage of the crew on the initial voyage to America. The author spent a great deal of literary space in the description of Basque culinary specialties including detailed recipes. While I personally do not think I would partake in most of these meals, it was interesting to find out what to expect in Basque restaurants. There are numerous illustrations and maps to supplement the author's descriptions of people and places. I enjoyed reading it.

I greatly enjoyed the history but didn't think the book particularly well-written. At times, it jumped around with recipes and anecdotes that could have well been left out. I very much liked Mr. Kurlansky's book: COD and have purchased: SALT to read sometime soon, so in general, I enjoy his books. My travels into Basque Spain prodded me to finish the book, otherwise, I would likely have not finished it.

Very interesting history book. I was amazed to discover how little I knew about the Basque people and their suffering. I was amazed at their tenacity and will to keep their customs and history alive. I recommend reading this book before visiting Spain.

This book is a very good attempt to show the roll the Basque people have played in history and exposing the outside world to their rich culture in the heart of Western Europe. But the author seems

to have been laboring under the misimpression that Culture = Food. Not being a major "Foodie".. I found large passages 'skip-worthy' and would have loved to read more on the Pre-Christian faith of Basqueland, along with the Art, Music, and Literature of the people down through the centuries. Some places in the book add color to the topics by quoting poems or the lyrics of songs.. but there is no focused effort to give the reader a sense of the musical heritage these snippets come from, and generally nothing on the Artistic expressions of the Basque people other than a long line of photos of men wearing the Basque hat.

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