



AGIRREAZKUENAGA, Joseba (director), et alii.
 La articulación político-institucional de Vasconia:
 Actas de las *Conferencias* firmadas por los representantes de Alava, Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa y eventualmente de Navarra (1775-1936)
 Bilbao: Diputación Foral de Bizkaia, 1996. 2 v.

As this long title explains, in these great volumes the authors, professor Joseba Agirreazkuenaga of the University of the Basque Country, and his assistants, historians Eduardo Alonso Olea and José Antonio Morales Arce, collect the whole texts of the acts that Basque political and administrative provincial organs, called Deputations, and occasionally Navarre too, celebrated between 1775 and 1936, the acts and informs done in Madrid by Basque deputies and senators, from 1825 to 1908, and also, as annexes, the documents of the conference that some of the three deputations celebrated between 1688 and 1774.

A vast collection that takes more than 1.700 pages, and becomes a major historical source. Until now, these conferences were known by Basque historians, but rarely used as historical source or interpretation element. Is this great hole in our historiography that comes to fill professor Agirreazkuenaga's work, because it is not only a mere collection of documents –and it is quite important–, but also a deep and sage explanation to this phenomenon (these documents are accompanied by an introductory study by professor Agirreazkuenaga), indispensable to understand our reality.

In Basque historiography, provinces have received all the importance, despite a common vision. As Joseba Agirreazkuenaga says: "The lands and districts [comarcas] of Iberian Vasconia developed institutional processes, in some cases converging ones, in some other cases diverging ones". It is due to a special characteristic that nowadays also marks our politics: every province or, as it is said in today's Estatuto de Autonomía, the superior law that rules Basque Country Autonomous Community, "historical land", has its own rights and institutions, and under all, there is a common subtract. Only researching both of these two sources can we understand right what has been and what is Vasconia as a political community.

This political articulation must be seen, as Joseba Agirreazkuenaga insists, in the context of the building of the Spanish state, that was cause of conflicts and was at the beginning of Carlist wars along Nineteenth century. It is a modern phenomenon. Conference system was really established after 1793 agreements. In 1795, after the Convention war, it happened a fracture in Basque society, and arisen new cultural and socio-economical basis, those of the industrial revolution.

From 1839 on, the conference system arrived at its greatest development, and, as Agirreazkuenaga says, "the decade of 1860's could be compared with a kind of confederate Basque government". Inflexion point can be situated at 1876, because of the abolition of Fuegos after the so called Convenio de Bergara. In all that period, in Agirreazkuenaga's opi-

nion, not only is surpassed a provincial concept of politics, but also Fueros receive a truly dimension of public law, because inhabitants of the Basque country begin to consider themselves as political subjects of rights and obligations derived from that. Fueros, then, must be reformed, in terms of integration in Spanish liberal state and Constitution (and then born liberal fuerism), or in traditional terms, regaining the spirit of “ancient law” as, some decades later, finishing the century, Sabino Arana does (“Jaungoikoa eta Lagi zarra”, “God and ancient law” was his motto). This is a theory based on the fundamental idea of “historical rights”, that would be later accepted by the Spanish Constitution of 1978, and Autonomy Statute of Gernika (1980).

From 1876 on, Basque autonomy turns into tax autonomy, specially when long terms agreements or pacts are signed between Basque provinces and Spanish government. This fact required an effort to bring all politics near from each other, and go to Madrid with a clear unitary negotiation aim. Once fiscal and economic security was won, voices for a wider political and administrative autonomy were heard. Conferences are now assemblies and, as Agirreazkuenaga says, they play a role of collective representation organ, something like an embryonic parliament. In 1917 it was designed the first project of a political autonomy for the Basque country, a great step between conference system and an Autonomy Statute, through the bridge of the proposed Regional Administration Council. In 1918, deputation of the three Basque provinces plus Navarre founded the Society of Basque Studies. It was the first attempt to create common organs, and survives just to our days.

Maybe not such a radical interpretation as Agirreazkuenaga proposes –“The origins and formation of the various political cultures, such as Basque and Spanish nationalisms in the Basque Country– could and must be again interpreted at the light of this fabulous political –institutional experience of the conferences”– but a singular element for tight understanding of configuration of a political and administrative autonomy, and a very useful source for historians that will be obligated to consult them (and, if possible, completed; Agirreazkuenaga's team has done, no doubt in it, an exhaustive work) the next decades.

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