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Basque Scholar Feature: Jon Bilbao

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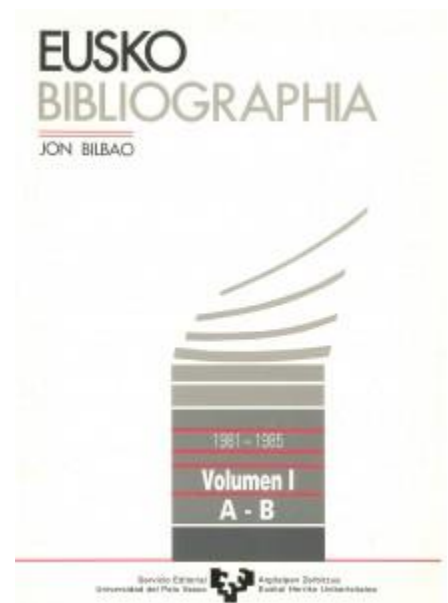


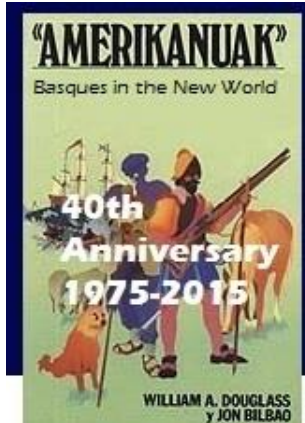
“The Father of Basque Bibliography”

JAIO/Born: Cayey, Puerto Rico; 1914

HIL/Died: Getxo, Bizkaia; 1994

Editor’s note. This is an ongoing series of profiles of Basque scholars. Oftentimes scholars in general--and Basque scholars specifically--toil in seclusion and general anonymity, so this is an effort to introduce the scholar and his/her contribution to Basque Studies.





An academic scholar is heavily dependent on the quality of the sources that are used during the research phase. Here we feature the late **Jon Bilbao** whose scholarly work facilitated the research of others in Basque Studies. His magnum opus *Eusko Bibliographia* established the standard reference work on any aspect of Basque scholarship. He labored at this for over thirty years, making the work of future researchers much easier as he was able to point them in the right direction. His other major publication (as co-author with William Douglass) was the seminal book *Amerikankuak* that also went on to transform the academic investigation of the Basque Diaspora. This year that book celebrates its 40th anniversary of publication.

Jon Bilbao was born in Cayey, Puerto Rico, in 1914. He was educated in Spain, receiving a degree in sciences from the University of Valladolid in 1932. Between 1932 and 1936 he conducted graduate work in medieval history and Spanish literature at the University of Madrid. During the Spanish Civil War he served as an officer in the Basque army. When Franco's forces prevailed, Jon Bilbao came to New York.

He enrolled in Columbia University where, in 1939, he received his Master's degree in Spanish literature. In 1939 Jon Bilbao moved to Boise, Idaho to study the Basque language and to try and organize support among the Basque-Americans for the Basque government-in-exile. He then went to Berkeley where, between 1940 and 1942, he continued his studies at the University of California. Between 1942 and 1944 he was employed as a Spanish instructor at New York University. In 1944 he accepted the post of associate editor of the *Revista Belga* and later of the magazine *Ambos Mundos*. In 1945 he became a Ph.D. candidate in linguistics at Columbia University.

In 1947 Jon returned to Europe. In 1948 he was one of the organizers of the VIII International Congress of Basque Studies held in Biarritz. Between 1947 and 1957 he served as co-editor of the journal *Eusko Jakintza: Revue des Etudes Basques*. Between 1951 and 1954 he resided in Cuba where he had family business investments. While there he conducted the library research that resulted in his first book, *Vascos en Cuba: 1492-1511*, published in 1958. In 1954 Jon returned to Europe and resided in his ancestral town of Getxo, Bizkaia. In 1960 he was expelled from Spain for his Basque political affiliations.

Between 1961 and 1964 he continued his bibliographic research in many European libraries. In 1964 he returned to the United States where he taught at Georgetown University, the United States Naval Academy, and Washington College (Chestertown, Maryland) before joining the staff of the Basque Studies Program of the University of Nevada System in 1969. Since that time he has conducted extensive archival research throughout the American West and in Latin America regarding Basque immigration. In 1975 this resulted in publication of the work *Amerikanuak: Basques in the New World* of which he is the co-author with William Douglass.

[Biographical excerpt from *Anglo-American Contributions to Basque Studies: Essays in Honor of Jon Bilbao*. Eds. William A. Douglass, Richard W. Etulain & William H. Jacobsen, Jr. Desert Research Institute Publications on the Social Sciences, No. 13, 1977. For a free pdf download go to <https://basque.unr.edu/books-print.html>

Jon Bilbao and William A. Douglass were the original founders of the Basque Studies Program that later became known as the Center for Basque Studies.

*They collaborated on many projects, including the publication of the seminal book **Amerikanuak** that spanned the history of the Basques in the Americas.*



Jon Bilbao retired from the Basque Studies Program (now the Center for Basque Studies at the University of Nevada, Reno) in 1980. By this point his sustained effort to chronicle all publications written by or about Basques yielded 15-volumes with a half million citations. With a team of bibliographers, Bilbao continued indexing Basque works until his death in 1994. Although his later work was not published in book form, it has been made available through the [Eusko Bibliographia](#) database produced by the Biblioteca Foral, the Regional Library of Bizkaia. The Basque Database at the University of Nevada, Reno also continues this effort.

His work was recognized by various Basque institutions on several occasions including: UNR professor emeritus in 1981, corresponding member of the Basque Academy in 1973 and honorary member since June 19, 1987; partner Bascongada of the Society of Friends of the Country since November 20 of 1981; member of the Hall of Fame in 1988 by the Society of Basque Studies in America, doctor honoris causa by the UPV / EHU since November 9, 1995. A portion of his publications are listed below.

Jon Bilbao's work was not just academic, however, as he also worked diligently to sustain Basque identity. During a visit to Argentina, he learned about Federation of Basque Argentinean Entities (FEVA in its Spanish acronym), which was established in 1955. Bilbao, through the Center for Basque Studies (the then Basque Studies Program) at the University of Nevada, Reno, helped to facilitate a series of encounters among Basque-American associations and individuals, which led to the establishment of the North American Basque Organizations in 1973.



**Ipar
Ameriketako
Euskal
Elkartek**

Jon Bilbao played a role in the creation of the North American Basque Organizations in 1973. Today this federation embraces over forty Basque entities in Canada and the United States, seeking to facilitate collaboration on shared cultural events to keep Basque culture alive.

In honor of Jon Bilbao, a new Chair of Basque Studies was established at the University of Nevada, Reno, to acknowledge the great research that promoted the foundation of the Basque Studies Library at the University of Nevada, Reno. It was created by the Etxepare Basque Institute, on the occasion of the historian and bibliographer's 100th birthday in 2014. The Chair's goal is to internationally support research and knowledge on the Basque diaspora and culture. The Chair's first occupant is historian and Basque Diaspora expert, Pedro J. Oiarzabal (2nd from right-photo Etxepare).



Today's research has been transformed by the Internet, but when Jon Bilbao was doing his early work, it was still the era of large card catalogue cabinets with index cards. Researchers relied on the diligent work of others to provide relevant information, so that they could look deeper into their subject matter by exploring the related sources. Jon Bilbao played that pioneering role in the world of Basque Studies, facilitating the research of others who followed him into the field of Basque Studies.

Eskerrik asko Jon!

~jmy

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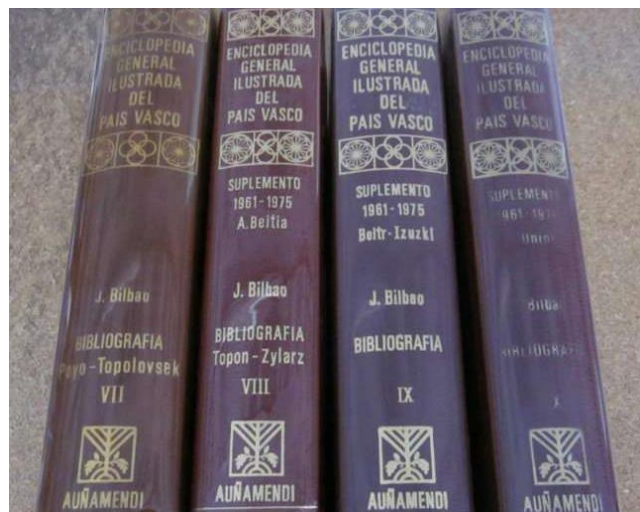
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- *Jon Bilbao, bibliógrafo: referencia del homenaje rendido al amigo de número y bibliógrafo, Jon Bilbao Azkarreta, por la Comisión de Bizkaia de la Real Sociedad Bascongada de los Amigos del País, en Asamblea de la misma, celebrada en Bilbao el 29 de septiembre de 1994, actualizada con textos adicionales.* 1996.

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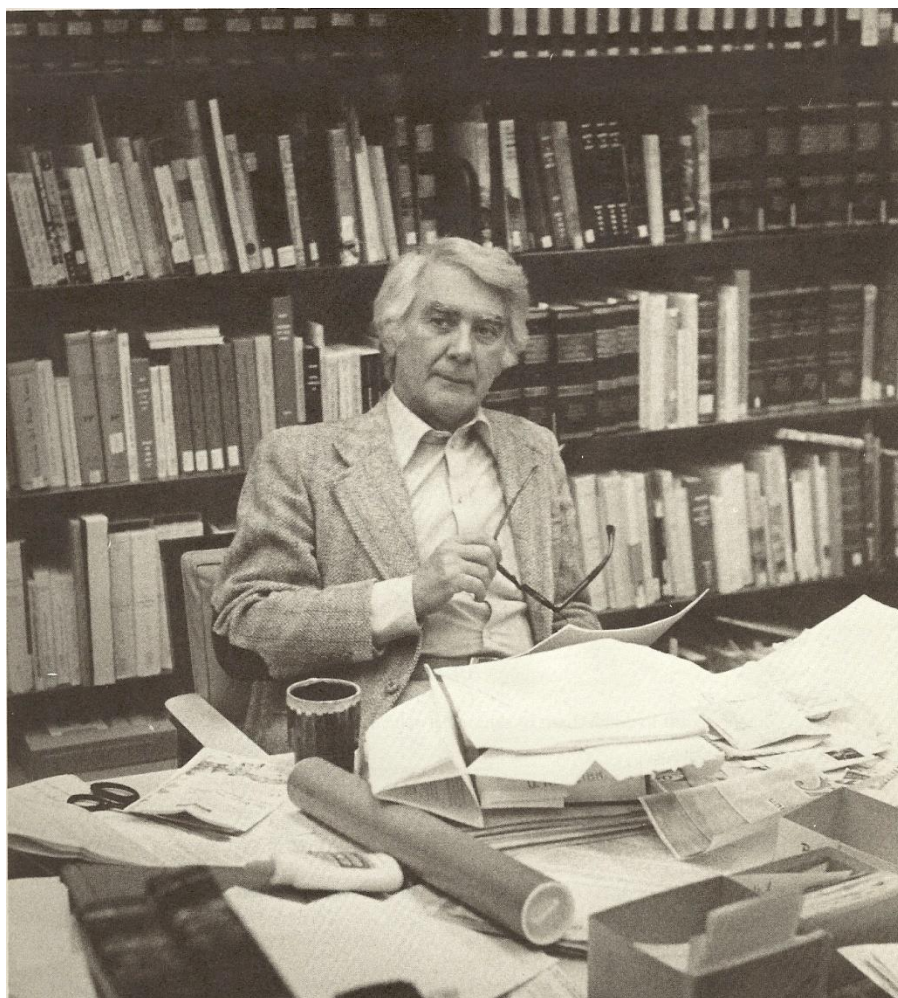
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Jon Bilbao, 1914-1994