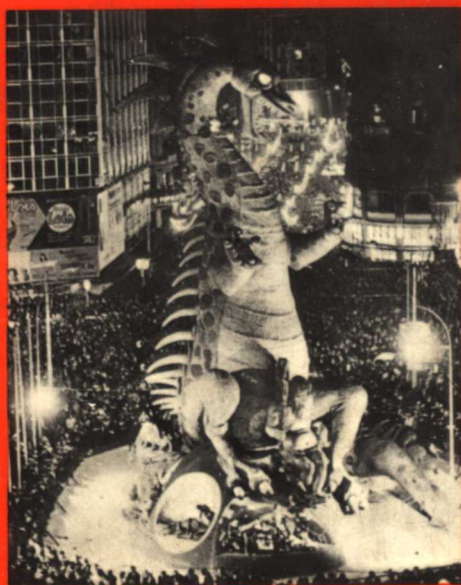


SPAIN

From Repression to Renewal

E. Ramón Arango



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Winter fair and ramparts, Ávila
The cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, La Coruña
Fallas, La Plaza del Caudillo, Valencia

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For
J. TAYLOR ROOKS

In memory of
ERGASTO and CAROLINE ARANGO

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1

The Setting

GEOGRAPHY OF SPAIN

Spain is haphazardly cut into regions by mountains arranged as if the creative forces of nature had gone berserk, blindly slashing the surface of the land.¹ After Switzerland, Spain is the highest country in Europe; its lowlands are limited to the valley of the Guadalquivir River, parts of the valley of the Ebro River, and a thin edge of coast along the Mediterranean and the Bay of Biscay. It is not the extreme height of the mountains, however, that gives Spain its topographical character. Its tallest peaks—the Mulacén in the Sierra Nevada, near Granada, and the Pico de Aneto in the Pyrenees—are only 11,411 ft (3,480 m) and 11,116 ft (3,390 m), yet the elevation of the Iberian peninsula is so high that the average altitude of Spain is 2,165 ft (660 m).

The Central Meseta

The dominant topographic structure of Spain is, in fact, not the mountains but the high interior tableland, the *meseta central*, which ranges from 1,700 to 2,700 ft (518 to 823 m) above sea level. The meseta is divided by the gaunt central sierras, of which the most prominent are the Sierra de Guadarrama and the Sierra de Gredos, which arch to an altitude of nearly 9,000 ft (2,743 m) from the southwest to the northeast of Madrid. The northern, smaller portion of the meseta includes the regions of Leon and Old Castile; the vast southern portion encompasses New Castile, La Mancha,

Rivers, Mountains, and Provinces

and Extremadura. This massive plateau dominates the country's geography and is responsible for the climate, the rainfall, the temperatures, and the vegetation that are the most characteristically Spanish. The meseta has also dominated Spanish history and politics, and it has influenced the national character sufficiently to make the "average" Spaniard more Castilian than Andalucian, Aragonese, Galician, Catalan, or Basque.

The meseta is a relentless and uninviting land where life for the most part has been a basic and elemental struggle to survive. It constitutes the major part of what is called "dry Spain," and most of the plateau receives no more than 20 in. (51 cm) of rainfall a year. The "continental" climate produces intensely hot summers and bitterly cold winters, with wide variations of temperature between day and night during both seasons. January lows average about 34°F (1.2°C); in the summer, temperatures often rise to 100° F (37.7° C) at midday and then drop to 70° F (21.2° C) during the night. Sparse and stunted *matorral* is the natural vegetation of the parched tableland. Where there is sufficient water, evergreen shrubs may grow as well, and stands of dwarf oak and conifers form modest woodlands in some areas. Where water is scarce, so is plant life. Wheat is the primary cultivated crop, and potatoes, barley, and rye are grown in certain areas. In La Mancha around Valdepeñas, extensive vineyards produce large quantities of undistinguished wine. Sheep, goats, and pigs are raised on the meseta, but the most exotic livestock is the fighting bull, bred there, as in Andalucia, for the ring.

Andalucia and the Guadalquivir River Valley

The meseta ends in the south at the Sierra Morena. Between these mountains, which for centuries impeded movement to and from the meseta, and the Betic Cordillera, which defines the southern Mediterranean coast and includes the Sierra Nevada, lies the valley of the Guadalquivir River in the region of Andalucia. This is Arab Spain, today's tourist Spain. The color and vibrance that the casual traveler mistakenly associates with all of the country is found here, and

while the projection of the imagery of heat and sun and cool water in shaded patios is inaccurate beyond Andalucia and parts of the Mediterranean coast, it does give evidence of the extreme variety and vivid contrasts to be found on the Iberian peninsula.

The climate of Andalucia is more benign than that of the meseta. The summers can be searingly hot, but the winters are mild, with January temperatures in the 50°F range (10° to 15.6°C). Summer temperatures along both the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts may rise to the upper 90s F (35° to 37.7°C). Away from the gentling influences of the ocean and the sea, the inland area between Seville and Cordoba, called by natives "the African frying pan," has been known to reach temperatures past 110°F (43.3°C), heated by the *Leveche*, a hot, arid, and sometimes dust-filled wind blowing from North Africa.

Like the meseta, Andalucia is part of dry Spain, but the natural vegetation is Mediterranean, not continental. Where water is sufficient, oak, pine, and even dwarf palms grow; where water is scarce, natural vegetation is primarily scrub. The olive, which grows throughout most of dry Spain, is cultivated most extensively in Andalucia. Jaén, close to the eastern apex of the Guadalquivir Valley, is the center of the largest olive-producing region in the world. Grapes also thrive in Andalucia, but with the exception of Malaga wines and the extraordinary sherry produced around Jerez de la Frontera in the province of Cádiz, Andalusian wine is inferior.

The land along the Guadalquivir, tilled since a millennium before Christ, began to flourish after the Arabs who arrived in A.D. 711 developed the *huerta*. The *huerta* (Latin) or *vega* (Arabic) is irrigated, intensely cultivated land that still produces most of the same crops grown in Muslim times: onions, artichokes, asparagus, strawberries, pomegranates, figs, melons, oranges, lemons, sugar (cane and beet), rice, and tobacco (this last crop unknown to the Arabs). The *huertas* may be found almost anywhere in dry Spain where good soil can be irrigated, and this centuries-old farming technique still produces the highest agricultural yields in Spain.

The Maritime Zone

North of the central meseta, extending from the Pyrenees in the east through the Basque lands and Asturias to Galicia on the northwestern corner of the peninsula, is maritime Spain. The least-known part of the country to the present-day traveler, this region should give the final lie to the image of Spain as all sun, heat, and aridity. This is "wet Spain," with its temperate climate, relatively mild winters, and comfortably warm summers. Winter temperatures on the coast range between 45° and 50°F (7.2° and 10°C); summer temperatures range between 65° and 70°F (18.3° and 21.2°C). It rains in this region every month of the year, with a regularity and dependability unknown throughout the rest of the country, and the sky is often overcast, softening the light and giving the region a mild and mellow atmosphere.

The outstanding topographic characteristic of maritime Spain is mountains. In the east, the Pyrenees, which resemble the Alps, rise to 11,116 ft (3,390 m) in the Pico de Aneto. The average height throughout most of the range is 5,000 ft (1,525 m). West of the Pyrenees and beyond the lower Basque Mountains lie the vast Cantabrian Mountains, which are almost as high as the Pyrenees. The Cantabrian Picos de Europa (Peaks of Europe), so called because they are supposedly the first European mountains one sees when approaching the continent from the ocean, rise to 8,688 ft (2,648 m). The Cantabrian chain slopes down in the west to the plateau of Galicia, which ends at the sea, forming in many places a coastal landscape of rocky shore and pounding surf.

The natural vegetation is like that of much of Atlantic Europe, with oak, chestnut, beech, and open grassland. Higher up, in the piedmont of the Cantabrian and Pyrenean chains, there are heathlands and peat bogs, and higher still are conifers. At the summit of the mountains one finds true Alpine vegetation. Cultivated crops include corn, rye, potatoes, some wheat, apples (primarily for cider in Asturias), and grapes (for local wine). Pigs and cattle are the major livestock, and the largest dairy farms in Spain, supplying most of the nation's milk and cheese, are found here. The Galicians are

also the fishers of Spain, and the waters off Galicia furnish the extraordinarily varied fish and shellfish that make Spaniards the largest consumers of seafood in Europe.

The Ebro River Valley

Between the Pyrenees to the north and the massive and forbidding Iberian Mountains to the south lies the trough carved by the Ebro River, which drops from its source in the Cantabrian Mountains to empty into the Mediterranean south of Barcelona. In general, the climate of the valley is continental, like that of the central meseta, and the seasonal and unreliable rainfall is rarely heavier than 16 in. (41 cm) a year. The scanty natural vegetation is due to this aridity, and much of the landscape is badlands, with deeply furrowed and fantastically shaped hills cut by watercourses called *arroyos*, which are dry except in flood times. With irrigation, however, certain areas of the valley are fertile, and the huertas of Zaragoza and Lérida, like those in the Guadalquivir Valley, are extremely productive. With proper protection against the cold, these huertas are able to grow almost any crop that does well in Spain, including subtropicals; the Rioja basin in the upper valley produces the finest table wine in Spain.

The Levant

The Levant is the purest Mediterranean region of Spain. It lies along the eastern coast from the mouth of the Ebro River south to the Cabo de Gata below Almeria. Like the meseta and Andalucia, the Levant is a part of dry Spain, with annual rainfall between 15 and 25 in. (38 to 63.5 cm), but between Cabo de Nao, halfway between Valencia and Alicante, and Cabo de Gata, precipitation decreases so dramatically that dry becomes semiarid, with rainfall no more than 4 to 5 in. (10.2 to 12.7 cm), the lowest in Europe. The semiarid zone is like a small piece of North Africa in Europe. The climate and vegetation resemble that of Andalucia, but average temperatures drop as one moves north toward Catalonia, and in the semiarid zone, esparto grass replaces scrub as the most common natural plant. Cultivated vegetation

grows close to streams or in irrigated huertas like the ones found in the Guadalquivir and Ebro valleys. Murcia, Lorca, and Alicante are major huertas, and the huerta of Valencia contains probably the richest soil in Spain. Crops include tobacco, cotton, noncitrus and citrus fruits, almonds, sugar, rice, cereals, olives, grapes, mulberries, and hemp, but dates are the unique crop, grown in Elche in the oasis-like Huerta del Cura, the largest grove of date palms on the European continent. Gazing at the Huerta del Cura, an unknowing visitor might well believe this land to be Arabia.

THE PEOPLE

The origin of the earliest inhabitants of Spain remains mysterious. No one knows how the Basques got to Spain or from where they came; no one is certain where the Iberians came from or who they were. Anthropologists speculate that the present-day Basques are perhaps the descendants of a primitive Cro-Magnon people who lived in the Pyrenees and along the shore of the Bay of Biscay. Scholars feel more certain that the Iberians were Hamites from Saharan Africa.

The Phoenicians are the first people who can be accurately accounted for historically. They came in the eleventh century B.C. from what today would be Syria and Lebanon, attracted by the copper, gold, mercury, and silver in what is now Andalucia. The Phoenicians came primarily as traders, not as colonists, yet they lived along the southern Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts of Spain for almost six centuries. The Greeks arrived in the eighth century B.C. Like the Phoenicians before them, they came to trade and to exploit mineral wealth, but they also brought agricultural skills with them and, it is believed, introduced the grape and the olive. The Greeks produced the first written accounts of Spain, based in part on Phoenician chronicles, and the earliest existing Spanish works of art have strong Hellenic characteristics.

The Celts came to Spain from their homeland along the Rhine while the Phoenicians and Greeks were moving into the south. The Celts, however, came to stay. They arrived in two waves—the first about 1,000 B.C. and the second about