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A genetic study discovers that Basques and Berbers have a similar origin...

Spaniards are more similar to North Africans than to Europeans.

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Comparative genetic analysis of Basque populations, the rest of Spain, Sardinia, and Algeria has led to the conclusion that the genes of the initial Iberian populations predominate in the Basques, which partly escaped the subsequent Celtic, Roman, and Arab invasions. Among their ancestors, according to the HLA genes studied by Spanish scientists, the white North Africans of more than 10,000 years ago, from whom the current Berbers descend, would predominate. The rest of the Iberians mixed more with the invaders, especially Celts and Arabs.

By studying the frequency of HLA genes, the relationship tree of human populations throughout history can be drawn up. This is what the researchers led by Antonio Arnaiz, professor at the Complutense University, have done with Basques from San Sebastián, Spaniards from Madrid and Algerians from Algiers. Similar studies are now being carried out in the Moroccan population. HLAs are highly variable genes that are used to single out individuals in paternity studies and populations in anthropological studies and to select donor-recipient pairs in transplants. In previous studies it had been found that the Basques, Sardinians and the rest of the Spaniards are closer in the kinship tree to the African populations than to the rest of the European populations,

through the strait

The study of HLA genes in a population of Algiers, the first to be done in this detail, points out Arnaiz, shows that Algerians have a large component of genes from the white paleo-North African population (the current Berbers), who occupied the North African territory before the Arab invasions of the 7th century. The genetic kinship of the Algerians thus turns out to be very close with the Spanish population in general, with the Basques and also with the Sardinians, another population that has remained relatively isolated, due to its insularity. This would show either that the Iberians populated in some pre-Neolithic times in North Africa or that North

African white settlers crossed the Strait of Gibraltar to the Iberian Peninsula. The latter would be more likely,

The common genetic origin of Basques and Algerians matches the similarities found by some linguists between the Basque and Berber languages, spoken by the members of this ethnic group who currently live in North Africa.

These results have been presented at the conference on the European Human Genome, held on November 9 and 10 in Barcelona, where they were corroborated, according to Arnaiz, by two other works, one of them on the Y chromosome of Sardinians and Basques, and another with reference to the Algerians. The works have been published in scientific journals, the latest in *Human Immunology* and *Tissue Antigens*, this year.

For the sample of Spanish Basques, 82 people from San Sebastián with characteristic Basque surnames in the last three generations have been taken. For the rest of the Spaniards, 176 people from Madrid have been taken, considered as a representative sample of the Spanish population in general given the great immigration that has occurred since the beginning of the industrial revolution.

Genetic and cultural isolation

In the case of the Algerians, it has been based on the study of the DNA of 106 citizens of Algiers who had not received European genes for at least three generations. The studies have been financed in part by the Fondo de Investigaciones Sanitarias. According to the studies, the Basques would represent a relative genetic and cultural isolate of the initial Iberian populations. McEvedy and Jones, in their *Atlas of Populations*, recalls Arnaiz, they start from the fact that the ancient inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula received a significant mixture of genes from the Celts of Central Europe (50% of new genes) during the first millennium BC. Then the contributions of other invaders were more commercial and cultural than genetic, with the exception of that of the Arabs, who in number of about 30,000 (among them many Berbers) mixed with the approximately four million inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula in the eighth century.