

*Extract from Jose Miguel de Barandiaran's "Dictionnaire  
Illustre de Mythologie Basque"*

*Translation by Byron Zeliotis (translator's additions bracketed in italics)*

**Saroi:**

“ Park” or pastures around a shepherds hut”.

There was a custom of assigning to each shepherd or group of shepherds a plot of land.

This plot close to pastures corresponded to a space, which provided refuge to the herd and where one built a hut or shelter.

This plot of land is known by the name ‘sel’; but the most popular names are **saroi, sarobe, korta, gorta** and **cayolar**.

It (*the sel*) had a central marker stone called “**austarri**”, “ stone of ashes” or **korta-arri**”, “stone of pasture”.

The form of the ‘sel’ varies from one region to another. In Biscay it exists as two types: those of winter or ‘**korta-nagusi**’, ‘big sel’, which present themselves in the form of a circular enclosure with a diameter of 494 metres, and those of the summer or **korta-txiki**, “small sel”, with a diameter of 244 metres. In Guipuzcoa the sel had the same dimensions and form as the **korta-txiki** of Biscay. The sel of Baztan was a little smaller than that of Guipuzcoan. It had a quadrilateral form according to ‘**Auto otorgado por el valle y Unibersidad de Baztan** (Pamplona1748):

“ the measure and distance of each ‘sel’, and that of the most common is of one hundred stadiums\* squared... each (*sel*) enclosing a surface area of ten thousand square stadiums”.

In each ‘sel one placed five marker stones (prismatic stones that were pushed deep into the ground); one in the centre with a cross engraved on its top looking towards the other four marker stones placed on each vertex of the said sel, and on the five marker stones one would place their witnesses (*engraved logos?*) on tiles facing two directions (*perhaps like the pitched roof of a house*).

In 1153 one would speak of saroi in the area called Bezula-Mayor near Orhy, according to the archives of **Syndicat de Soule a**

**Muleon** cited by Marcel Nussy-Saint Saens (**A contribution to an essay on the custom of Soule. Bayonne, 1942**).

The 'sel' evoke or reproduce the form of the old Pyrenean cromlechs\*\*, with their 'austari – a central “stone of ashes” -, in the manner of an urn containing the ashes of the dead (*and often found*) in these types of monuments.

The areas of distribution of the summer 'sel' around the countryside corresponds to the zoning of pastures in the mountain, and that is also the case for dolmens\*\*\* and of a large proportion of the cromlechs of the Iron Age.

(Bibl: 9c (VII, pp.9-13 – 9a(1942,p.4 and 5)-J.R. Iturriza, **Historia Genera de Viscaya** p.75(Barcelona, 1884).

---

\* A “stadium” was an old unit of length. It was also used in ancient Greece although its size varied from one place to another.

(“A 'stade' was a 'stadium', and different stadiums had slightly different lengths. But as a unit of measurement, a stade is 600 feet, where 6 feet = 1 fathom (the distance between the fingertips when the arms are stretched out horizontally), and 1 foot was, in our terms, about 29.6 cms.” R.Waterfield”)

\*\* “Cromlechs” are the denuded remains of burial chambers. The stones that you can see in the picture below would originally have been covered over with an earth mound. This type of monument is often referred to as a dolmen, quoit or cromlech depending upon which part of the country you are in. When the mound is eroded away you're left with a table like structure. In this case the capstone is 8 feet by 6 feet in size with the supporting stones standing 4 or 5 feet high.”

(ref) <http://www.henge.org.uk/anglesey/bodowyr.html>



*Picture of a cromlech in Anglesey. Wales. British Isles.*



*\*\*\*picture of dolmen "The Devil's Den" in Wiltshire England.*