Place-Names and Linguistic Reconstruction. The Case of Prehistoric Sardinia
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Abstract
Pre-structural investigations of the substrata of vast areas around the Mediterranean (Iberia, Sardinia, Etruria) have missed their target because individual sections of the semiotic triangle (in particular, meaning) have been singled out in the study of place-names. This paper will be based on a large corpus of Central Sardinian microtoponyms (1000 c.) and on a new hypothesis concerning the reconstruction of Palaeosardinian, already well-received by the international scientific community; it will propose a critical revision of methods of analyzing toponyms in order to reconstruct unattested phases in non Indo-European languages. Moving from this new structural presupposition, the paper will first of all discuss, using examples from Sardinia and elsewhere in Europe, the advantages of applying the following postulates in combination:

(a) structural (distributional and frequential) and typological examination of forms: past limitations (observation of single attestations in areas with discontinuous historical and linguistic connections; danger of homophony) and present benefits (detection of rules of formation within the substratum language and of interference with the superstratum languages; exclusion of homophony);

(b) structural analysis of meaning: (2a) on the basis of the attributed denotations and linked to the reconstructed signifier; (2b) connected interlinguistically with a signifier in a typologically similar language; limits and results (problems involving metonymy and referential contiguity; decisive contribution of translations in superstratum languages; complementarity of geo-synonymic roots).

Secondly, the paper will consider the theory’s requirements of productivity (= recursiveness of the morphemes deduced from segmentation) and predictability (= application of the former, with their respective meaning, to other extra Sardinian cases), as well as its possible exploitation in reconstructing Trümmer sprachen.

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1. Aims
The principal aim of this paper is to illustrate, using a paradigmatic example, the validity of the prehistoric reconstruction of a linguistic domain by means of a rigorous method of structural and typological research into toponyms, supported in a second phase by a detailed interlinguistic comparison with systems that are related from the typological viewpoint.

The stratigraphical reconstruction of a linguistic domain by means of a careful examination of toponyms is a heuristic premise which needs no particular comment since there are many well-known precedents: one needs only quote Hans Krahe’s meaningful title, Ortsnamen als Geschichtsquellen (1949), or the fundamental analyses of archaeological digs and proto-historic interpretation of Prehellenic Greece carried out by his predecessor at Göttingen, August Fick in Vorgriechische Ortsnamen als Quelle für die Vorgeschichte Griechenlands (Göttingen, 1905-9).\(^1\)

The second premise mentioned above, concerning the advantages for reconstruction of a close interlinguistic comparison between languages that are typologically similar, is still quite an experimental methodology, though already tested for some Mediterranean Trümmer sprachen.\(^2\)

Bearing these premises in mind, I will attempt to illustrate the definite progress made in deciphering Palaeosardinian by means of a specific toponymical analysis, and in my

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\(^1\) Krahe (1949), Fick (1905).
conclusions I will give two examples of possible interpretations of onymic forms from ancient Iberia, provided indirectly by Palaeosardinian evidence.

2. Substratum and Place-Names: Defining the Fields of Research

The prehistoric reconstruction of a linguistic domain through place-names is based on the assumption that the underlying substratum in the area has left traces of its organizational principles in toponyms, and that these may in some way help in outlining programmatically the areas and methods of research into substratum and place-names.

2.1. By substratum (< substrātum) I refer to a language previously spoken in a region that has been replaced by a second, dominant language. The process of replacement needs to be carefully examined since it provides precious clues as to the language that has disappeared. Indeed, as Uriel Weinreich pointed out some time ago, every linguistic contact or conflict leading to the disappearance of a language, produces phenomena such as borrowing and interference before this disappearance. The end result of replacement, A (substratum language) > (replaced by) B (dominant language), actually conceals a more complex process of linguistic variation (Labov), which may be summed up as follows: A > A/B > B/A > B. Stages II and III are essential for us, and in a sense reflect what psycholinguists have defined as the passage from a Learning experience (a native people learns the second, dominant language, or L2) to one of Acquisition (the dominant language becomes L1, or mother tongue). As far as the names of the places inhabited by part of the population settling there are concerned, it is during these two stages that two particular types of toponyms are formed, which are extremely useful for deciphering the language that has disappeared, as well as for determining the relative chronology of phonetic processes involving both competing languages.

Let us consider a few examples which I will then extend to Palaeosardinian.

A first particular type of place-name is hybrid and consists of two subtypes. In the bilingual phase characterizing stages II and III, mentioned above, a place name in A may be simply ‘translated’ by B. This is the case of Vall d’Aran (Lat. vallis = Basque haran), Chateaudun (Lat. castellum = Gaul. dūnum), Mongibello (Lat. mons, montis = Arab. gibel) and Río Guadiana (Lat. rivus = Arab. wadi). A hybrid toponym may also have a complex meaning, given by an element of both A and B, fused together in a composite form, as in Germ. Tob-wälder, which is an exact rendition of the Old French syntagma li neiri jurs, both meaning ‘Schwarzwald’, ‘silva nigra’, but in the former with tob- < Gaul. *dūbu- ‘black’ (see Dove or Dou-glas), and in the latter jurs < Gaul. *jŭris, thus *dubu(s) juris. Similar cases have been discussed by Wolfgang Haubrichs for the border regions of Romania submersa, such as Eugen-dorf, with Ivaniumé- followed by the Germanic term for ‘village’, and further hybrids have been recorded in the circumeuskerian regions (cf. Turrúbia < iturri + rubeam in La Rioja).

A second type of bilingual place-name is that where an adjective from language A continues to refer to a geomorphological name in language B, with precise translations of the syntagma in many toponomastic formations in the dominant language. An example from Eastern French is the type sapin double, still with Gaul. dubu-, which reflects the normal sapin noir. Or again in Sardinia the monte nieddu ‘black mountain’ type which translates the hybrid monte mele, with mele < *bel ‘black’, as will be illustrated below.

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3 Weinreich (1977 [1953]).
5 Krahe (1954).
6 Haubrichs (1994).
2.2. Place-names as an aid to reconstructing the substratum, and thus the linguistic prehistory of a region, is the second preliminary point which I would like to consider and discuss briefly. I will concentrate on two methodological aspects only, concerning gathering information and expressing the referent. Toponomastic investigations have always privileged place-names with a literary tradition (Graeco-Latin, medieval, modern) and that generally coincide with macrotoponyms: names of towns, villages, rivers, mountains. However, different critical works have revealed correctly that toponyms transmitted by literary texts have very often been the object of corruption and alterations, of scribal errors even. The very fact that the tradition gives two or more names for a single location demonstrates just how untrustworthy a textual tradition may be. Clear proof of this are the many examples of double or multiple names given for Spanish toponyms in Ptolemy’s works, and the same goes for Sardinia. This is well-illustrated by the numerous inaccurate toponyms in the Rationes Decimarum Sardiniae, that is, the tithes paid by Sardinian townships to the ecclesiastical authority, as well as by several modern names, such as the well-known Golf’Aranci ‘Bay of oranges’, which is actually Golfo de li ranci ‘Bay of crabs’.

It is far more difficult, but far more fruitful to systematically collect microtoponyms or Flurnamen, that is names of hills, high grounds, ridges, streams, torrents, gorges, different kinds of wooded or open lands, and in general the geomorphological characteristics that have always enabled man, from the earliest settlement of a given area, to get his bearings and divide up the habitable spaces. Obviously, in this last case, the necessary verification must be carried out with recourse to oral tradition, which, on the one hand, is more trustworthy than written tradition since the names will only be functional through the generations if they remain comprehensible, while on the other, it is a well-known fact that in spoken language phonetic changes (dissimilations, assimilations, various other phenomena) are frequent and the researcher must always be able to associate any abnormalities to rules of linguistic change in the dominant language. Compared to a corrupt literary transmission, which will never produce a satisfactory etymological result, oral transmission will always lead to an acceptable result, as long as the possible phonetic phenomena that may alter a form are kept in mind.

The task of exploring place-names must be completed by a detailed analysis of the denotata, that is the places named. It is important that the description of the places feature all the main traits that could have led to the particular name. Among these are the chromatic qualities of waters, mountains, gorges, etc., that may be found in such well-known names as Aranbeliza, Schwarztal, Valfosca, Vaubrun, or in Peñarroja, Cimarossa, Iturrigorri (‘red spring’).

I will now discuss briefly some methodological principles that may be applied in the reconstruction of a linguistic domain using place-names.

3. Methodology in Toponymic Reconstruction

Research into the reconstruction of a language that is known only by its microtoponyms, must avoid having recourse to simple formal comparisons with other languages, before verifying a possible typological or genetic affinity. Methode gegen Zufall means avoiding the risk of simple homophony and relying on the sole response of rules of evolution and comparison of rules, as we have learned from Antoine Meillet. It is only by working with rules that we may avoid, for example, linking Basque haran ‘valley’ to Hittite haran ‘eagle’, or Galician año (agnus) to Spanish año (annus); vice versa, despite the apparent difference, we will be able to

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7 Different examples of such cases are to be found in Villar (2000) and Curchin (2008) on Palaeohispanic toponyms. About the unreliable testimony of Martial refers Miquel Dolç (1951, 79: *Tuetonissa and *Toutonissa).
8 Meillet (1982 [1921-36]).
associate Armenian erku ‘2’ with Russian dva ‘two’, or Spanish salvado with N. Sardinian thalau ‘bran’ and, in the field of toponomastics, Val Rouris and Val Rodrigo.  

When clear typological or genetic clues are missing an internal reconstruction must be carried out, based exclusively on the structural analysis of the toponyms. This kind of analysis, along with the rules of distribution and frequency which it will produce, will provide the necessary interpretative key to distinguish the Lautgesetze (sound laws) of language A from those of language B. In this way, for example, August Fick was able to list several infixes from the pre-Greek substratum, such as -σσ- in Λάρισσα or -νθ- in Κόρινθος, while in my research into Palaeosardinian I was able to point to the fact that the phonemes /o/ and /u/ are clearly alternatives, which explains doublets such as Ósana/Úsana, Óspinu/Úspinu, Oleri/Uleri, Loceri/Luceri. With a good command of language B’s evolutionary rules it is also possible, when lacking an adequate taxonomy, to give correct explanations for toponyms that might appear to belong to language A, as in (Valdor)redible in Cantabria, which reflects ripa Hiberi > ripa Hibre > riba Ible > ribible > redible, or Sardinian Báidu, with prosthetic b- plus áidu ‘passage’, Lat. adĭtum. Obviously, in an internal reconstruction, verification of the meaning must be set aside and, at most, may be indirectly considered by inspecting the denotata. Thus, the Palaeosardinian segments -mele, -nele combine with signifiers that are linked by the meaning ‘dark, with little sunlight, shady, opaque’ (gútturu ‘gorge’, baku ‘depression’, mountain, terrain, etc.).

Naturally, no meaning can be applied imperatively to forms obtained through internal reconstruction, because these meanings could reflect metonymic or secondary values, as is quite clear in the polysemic Basque and Gaulish terms haran and nantu, both meaning ‘valley’ as well as ‘river’.

Finally, external reconstruction, that is, based on comparison with a third language. This may only be put into practice once a relationship or organizational affinity has been established by structural and typological analysis. In this case the language acting as a tertium comparationis also provides useful semantic information for the forms compared, and helps to refine the unresolved segmentation in language A. All these aspects occurred in the case of Palaeosardinian, as we shall see in the following point.

4. The Reconstruction of Palaeosardinian

Now that I have illustrated the premises for setting about reconstructing a substratum on the basis of toponomastic data, I will briefly outline my reconstruction of Palaeosardinian, or its identification as a lateral variety of Palaeobasque, in a hypothetical Stammbaum (pedigree).

4.1. Traditional research into the substratum of Sardinian was based on simple homophony between words and toponyms with the structures of very different languages. Everything changed when research began into the clearly non-Latin toponyms of the central area, Barbagia and its surroundings, using a structural method. An experimental investigation of about 1000 microtoponyms, mostly gathered from oral tradition, brought to light a vast amount of productive structures, that is roots which, by being associated with suffixes and combined together, lead to whole new series. By following this method, I was able to discover the linguistic type of Palaeosardinian, an agglutinative language like Palaeobasque or Iberian, and not inflectional like Indo-European languages. The following are a few, brief examples:

\[(1) \text{ol-ai, org-ai, orri-ai, tal-ai;}\]
\[\text{os-ele, ost-ele, sun-ele, turr-ele;}\]
\[\text{ós-ana, óv-ana, tal-ana.}\]

proving that there was a period of bilingualism during which the new occupants translated produce new compounds, pointing to a true agglutinative type.

goríia, Iíkoríé/ Igoríí seem to reveal a protobase with an initial unvoiced plosive, *kor that will be established later through external reconstruction:

compounds involving Semitic and Latin terms, of particular significance for the chronologies

4.2. External, or interlinguistic, reconstruction was the real key to understanding the segments deriving from internal reconstruction. The identification of the agglutinative linguistic type made it possible to compare Palaeosardinian to Paleobasque and, surprisingly, to recover dozens of roots with meanings clearly applicable to toponyms: haran ‘valley’, istil ‘well, lake’, o1(h)a ‘primitive hut made of branches’, horri and hosto ‘leaves, branches’, hobi ‘cave’, (i)turri ‘spring, source’ and also the colours ‘black’ in *bel/mel and ‘red’ in *kor/gorri. The meaning of composite terms referring to geomorphological features or colours becomes immediately evident, as in: ost-ol-ai < hosto +olha + -ai ‘primitive hut made of branches’; ov-ost-ol-ai ‘primitive huts made of branches sheltered beneath a rock (hobi)’; turri-kore ‘spring with reddish waters’; duru-nele ‘dark, black terrain’ (*dur = lur ‘land, earth’); bidu-nele ‘black, dark path; dark pathway in thick wood (bide)’; arau-nele ‘black, dark, shady valley’ (Bsq. haran and Aranbeltsa).

At this point in the interlinguistic reconstruction, interference plays an important part and is reflected in hybrids, translations and compounds with complementary bases.

As far as hybrids are concerned, we have already seen that from Semitic (Phoenician) and Roman times compounds were formed with Palaeobasque terms for colours, bel(-tz) ‘black’ or gorri(-i) ‘red’.11 In effect, many Palaeosardinian compounds have Latin translations, proving that there was a period of bilingualism during which the new occupants translated terms belonging to the substratum: alongside ri(s)u-nele we find ri(v)u nigheddu ‘black river’, and also turri-kore = funtana ruja ‘spring with reddish waters’, arau-nele = badde nieddu, monte mele = monte nieddu, thiku-nele = fiku niedda, i-kor-é (equivalent to Ribagorzan Bigüerri and West-Catalan Igüerri and Basque hibi-gorri) = badu ruju ‘red ford’.

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11 It should be pointed out that several ancient (Aquitanian: Bai-gorríxo, Lur-korr) and toponomastic products (in Spain, for example, OSP. Ila-corre > Llagüarres, in Sardinia doublets such as Fili-kore/Fili-gorri, Istini-gor-ia, I-kor-é/ Igor-i) seem to reveal a protobase with an initial unvoiced plosive, *kor(r)-, which scholars of Basque only accept as a variant influenced by the context (by a preceding dental fricative or affricate: lats-k-< lats-g-). It would be worthwhile to consider the methodological difficulties in such a conclusion, which in effect is a-historical, and does not allow the reconstruction of a satisfactory etymon for the undocumented stage (and cf. Aitz-gorri/Legazpi but Az-korri/Getxo).
as well as the three attestations of Sard. *padenti arrúbia ‘red forest’ = littu-koro (a hybrid littu < *élíctum ‘oak wood’) = arte-gor-ia (Basque arte ‘holm oak’ + gorri ‘red’).

Apart from hybrids and translations a third category exists, which is also rarely used in toponomastic research: these are compounds in which one component glosses or specifies the other approximately, though keeping to the same semantic field, thus indirectly confirming the primitive meaning: tale-turri = *tala ‘pond’ + iturri ‘spring’ (‘spring whose waters flow into a pond’); erriu ‘river’ istini-gor-ia = istin(-ga) ‘marsh’ + gor(ri) ‘with reddish stagnant waters’ (Basque Istinígorri-eta); riú lo(-i)-korri = ‘river’ + loi ‘flood plain’ + gorri ‘reddish’; orgó-r-isti = orga ‘spring, wet terrain’ * isti.

In conclusion, internal reconstruction and linguistic comparison have made it possible to clear the mystery surrounding Palaeosardinian, whose roots frequently show that it has preserved reconstructed stages of Protobasque (such as *dur with /d/ for modern lur with /l/ ‘land’, or perhaps *kor, -R/*gor, -R ‘red’, such as Aquitanian latskorrí and baigorrí /baikorrí-). In Lakarra’s Stammbaum, at the head of which stands Protobasque, Palaeosardinian appears to be an archaic and isolated branch, whose configuration helps in understanding several evolutionary paths of modern Basque. During the long process of the Iberian colonization of prehistoric Sardinia, Palaeobasque first, then Iberian, left many elements that survive in the place-names of the Palaeosardinian substratum. I would like to conclude briefly by illustrating how some Palaeohispanic enigmas may be interpreted with recourse to Palaeosardinian, following the method employed here.

5. The Contribution of Palaeosardinian to the Linguistic Reconstruction of Old Iberia

I shall now briefly outline two examples of external reconstruction using interlinguistic comparison, starting out from Palaeosardinian. The first reconstruction concerns a Protobasque base and clearly reflects an evolutionary process connected to the position of Palaeosardinian in the Basque Stammbaum. Instead, the second concerns an Iberian base for which it is possible to provide a parallel formation in Basque, but within the frame of a Basque-Iberian Sprachbund.

5.1. The exo-ethnonym *ibero or *ibero and the name *Iberia remained a mystery until Palaeosardinian was able to produce all the reconstructable stages of these names. In reality, in Sardinia traces of *Ibera and *Ibera are to be found in toponyms indicating ‘valley through which water flows’, linked formally to other structures with the same meaning, which reflect all the preceding stages of a reconstructed evolution for Basque (h)ibar ‘valley through which a river flows’: badde (*valley’) úr-bara > úr-bera > ú-bera > i-bera > ibera. For Palaeobasque, Lakarra provides a precise reconstruction for *hur-bar ‘water within’ > *hurbar > *hubar > hibar ‘valley’. Actually, Basque toponyms also present forms with -é-, Uber(aga), Iber(ondo), Iber(gain) to be explained with a simple common rule of vowel harmony caused by initial closed vowels:13 indar > inder ‘strength’, buzten > buzten ‘glue’. Hence, there can be no doubt that in Sardinia Ibera and Ibera which indicate, like the river Ebro, ‘river flowing through the valley’, are the products of *hur-bar. All things considered, Hugo Schuchardt was partly right in claiming that the term Iberia was linked to the name of a ‘river’ in Basque, on the basis of which Ebro was created. The Iberians were ‘the population settled along the river-banks of the huge valley’, as the Rhēnānī or the Nantuātēs. I have discussed elsewhere the circumstances that led to the Iberians adopting the ethnonym.14

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14 Blasco Ferrer (i.p.).
5.2. I would now like to conclude my paper at this special meeting held in my native city with a contribution to the name Barcelona, formerly reconstructed on the basis of Bar-kino (TIR K/J-31, 44-46; Mela II, 90; Ora Mar. 520). Bar-keno, Barcinona in Iberian terms and numismatic evidence (ba-r-ke-n-o). There can be no doubt as to its privileged position in Iberian civilization, but so far a suitable etymology was lacking for the primitive settlement, so far ascertained for the Early Neolithicum at Santa Pau del Camp, which must have taken advantage of the ‘deep valley’ bordered by Montjuïc and Tibidabo. In Sardinia, however, there are about twenty toponyms that indicate ‘valleys’, and by semantic contiguity, also ‘torrents, rivers in valleys’, among which I will mention Bar-a, Bar-ai, Bar-i, Baru-nele (with -nele ‘black’ due to the presence of obsidian), Băr-kuri (with ‘red’ due to the ‘porphyry forming the rocks through which the waters flow’), and many others. My hypothesis is that bar- in Sardinia may represent an analogous structure to Palaeobasque *hur-bar. Indeed, in Iberian there is no lack of attested segments of such protoforms as i-bar, bar and others,\textsuperscript{15} so that in this case the Iberian evolution could be autonomous, and its affinity with the Basque terms might only reflect a common development in a Sprachbund situation, to use Trubetzkoy’s term. In my view, then, there is no doubt that Bar-keno/kino is a Palaeoiberian compound, with bar- as a first segment indicating the natural valley in which the Catalan metropolis is situated and which in the past was settled by Layetan Iberians. The second component is also documented in the corpus of Iberian inscriptions,\textsuperscript{16} but has yet to be translated, though a locative meaning would seem to be suitable for the compound, as in so many other cases (Interamnes, Intermontes, Enneberg, Amberg < am Berg, *opi Isaurum > Pisaurn, Sopèña and Basque Atze, Friulan Soclèf < sub+clivum ‘below the slope’, Spanish Trascastillo, Allendelagua etc.). And a further example of this composition frame, with N [settlement] + P [location’s modifier], is provided by the ancient Iberian ‘oppidum’ and also ‘rivus iuxta oppidum’ Rus-kino/Ρωσκίνου (Strabo IV, 1,6; Ora Mar. 565-7), in the South-eastern region of Roussillon. The medieval town of Château-Roussillon was placed in fact on the top of an outstanding hill, visible from the sea. Archaeological evidence has unearthed an overwhelming influence of Phoenician pottery (VII-III b.C.), thus lending a straightforward support to the decodification of Rus- as a Semitic root meaning ‘head; Kopf > ‘top; Kap; prominence’, just as in several Numidian and Mauritanian place-names (Rus-pa, Rus-pina, Rus-gad, Rus-addir). No doubt, hence, that the hybrid compound Rus-kino conceals the same structure as Bar-kino, and that both contain the Iberian grammatical morpheme kino, to which we can safely attach the value of ‘iuxta; near’ (Bar-kino = ‘near the valley’, and Rus-kino ‘near the hill-top’). A last amazing equivalence seems to link the toponymic root ter in Spain and in Sardinia: Vall de Ter and Riu Ter are two typical designations of a highland ‘valley’ and a ‘mountain stream’ of the eastern Pyrenees, which find exact cognates and semantic correspondences in Sardinian Ter-ei (Loceri), a ‘valley shaped by two red mountains’, Teri-teri (Seulo), and Teria (a ‘mountain spring’ at Barisardo), and also in the Iberian morpheme ter- of Ter-cino near Jaén, once again with -kino.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} Such as Ybar, (I)barka and others (Faria 2001).
\textsuperscript{16} For a list of attestations see Untermann (1990).
\textsuperscript{17} For Semitic ros-, rus- see Friedrich/Röllig/Amadasi (1999: 15 §29 and 133 §195b); for Rus- in Ruscino Delcor (1981); a discussion of the transmission in Wissowa (1914, IA/1: 1234-35); critical editions:Lasserre (1966: 131) and Sbordone (1970: 105, C 182). Examples of place-names with prepositions in Pellegrini (1994); Terrado et alii (2000); García Sánchez (2007); Ballester (2009). The root ter- of Ter-cino is dealt with by Untermann (1990, 667).
6. Conclusions

Toponomastic research, if carried out with a sound methodology, may be an aid to identifying the linguistic systems of prehistoric substrata. The structural and typological examination of Palaeosardinian microtoponyms has brought to light the true nature of the linguistic substratum of the island of the ancient *Ili-ensis* (Pomponius Mela II 7,123: note the segment *Ili*[[-*berri*]]), an agglutinative language that would appear to descend mostly from the Basque that has been reconstructed for the Neolithic and Chalcolithic ages, along with several successive inputs deriving from Iberian. Internal reconstruction and interlinguistic comparison between segments of Palaeosardinian and Protobasque toponyms, following the comparative rules set out by Meillet, have shed light on the nature of many Sardinian place-names, and the presence of hybrids and Latin translations have confirmed the meanings indicated. The benefits of discovering the typology of Palaeosardinian are reflected in the identification of different evolutionary stages of Basque and Iberian. Thus, two Palaeosardinian toponymic structures, observed with the necessary rules of development, have to my mind solved the mystery surrounding the exo-ethnonym *ibero*/*ibero* and the toponym *Baríkino* ‘Barcelona’.

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