

## Toponyms as ‘landscape indicators’

Joan Tort i Donada, Alexis Sancho Reinoso

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### Abstract

In this paper we explore the relationship between “place names” and “landscape” (considered a form of areal differentiation) from both theoretical and practical points of view. Based on specific toponymic examples drawn from Catalonia, most interpreted in accordance with field observations and etymological analyses (in particular, those of the most prominent Catalan onomastician, Joan Coromines), a series of reflections are made on the relation between *geographical space* and *place names*.

The two main ideas that support our arguments are these: a) the landscape is a ‘key concept’ (at a range of different scales) for the interpretation of the original meaning of geographical proper names (or toponyms); b) an adequate training in the observation (or direct perception) of landscape (i.e. Sauer’s ideas and proposals regarding the “morphologic eye”) is an invaluable support for all scholars (not only philologists) concerned with studying the etymology of place names.

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## 1. Theoretical background

### 1.1. Toponymy in the epistemological sense: a discipline of convergence

Toponymy, the branch of onomastics concerned with the study of toponyms or place names, has been considered by most scholars to be a *discipline of convergence* (or of “synthesis”), i.e., a discipline concerned with a multiplicity and variety of knowledge and which can, therefore, be approached from many different perspectives. In practice, toponymy can be said to involve a considerable number of fields of understanding – fields that do not stand in juxtaposition to one another but which are rather very closely interrelated. From this perspective, we believe that it genuinely responds to the profile of knowledge that Edgar Morin, in one of his recent works (Morin, 2001), identifies as *interdisciplinary*: i.e., one which overlaps with other fields without becoming blurred, which forms relations on the basis of reciprocity and which rules out the possibility of a simple hierarchical relationship. By virtue of its interdisciplinary nature, the relationship that is established between toponymy and the rich diversity of subjects that converge in its study is not so much one of competition but rather one of instrumental cooperation.

In general, scholars have referred to the interdisciplinary nature of toponymy in a variety of ways. Some have emphasised the subjects that find themselves most closely interrelated in the discipline, while others have stressed the importance for toponymy of adopting a given analytical approach. Jean Poirier, for example, speaks of the three main blocks of “auxiliary sciences of toponymy” which are, according to his criteria, history, geography and linguistics – and, within linguistics, dialectology and phonetics (Poirier, 1965). Dauzat, by contrast, stresses above all the psychological and sociological aspects of toponymy; in particular, when pointing out that “this science [toponymy] constitutes from the outset a wonderful chapter in social psychology. By showing us how the towns and villages, land holdings and fields, rivers and mountains have, through the ages and in different contexts, been named, we obtain a better understanding of the popular spirit, its mystical and realistic tendencies, its means of expression” (Dauzat, 1971: 9). Elsewhere, using arguments founded in the actual nature of the discipline, Querol defends the need for open epistemological attitudes. Because, he argues, “toponymy studies a field that contains so much information that there could well be an infinite number of ways of recovering it; and none of them should rule out the others; in

this way, the door is left open to possibilities that from various points of view nobody might ever have thought of proposing” (Querol, 1995: 65).

We shall complete this initial reflection with the arguments of Henri Dorion presented in support of the interdisciplinary nature of toponymy; arguments that at their heart stress the need to insert toponymic research within the general coordinates of *space* and *time* (Dorion, 1984: 103):

“Let us first recall that toponymy, in common with many of the human sciences, is inscribed within the dual dimensions of space (the toponymic function) and time (the toponymic memory). Toponymy has, therefore, an essential relation with geography (place names being its basic vocabulary) and with history (to the extent that the names are witnesses over time to a given man-place relationship). The place name is a linguistic sign and, as such, is of interest in semiology; it is the expression of the perception of a behaviour that involves psychology, above all social psychology. Finally, the morphological and semantic analysis of the name, both its origin and subsequent evolution, are the concern of linguistics and psycholinguistics, while the synthetic and synoptic analysis of large sets of names is the job of sociolinguistics and this can lead to actual sociological studies.”<sup>1</sup>

## 1.2. *Toponymy and geography. Reflections of classical geographers on the links between “places” and “place names”*

Here we reflect on various ideas and points of view expressed by classic authors, especially as regards the discussion concerning the links between *geography* and *place names*.

### a) *Vidal de la Blache*

In the classical tradition of French geography, any reference to Paul Vidal de la Blache seems inevitable. The paragraph that follows, which is taken from a work dated 1888-1889, includes an interesting reflection on the sense of *noms de pays* as the most suitable denomination for ‘corographical names’ (place names at the mesoscale):

“Characteristic names are rarely lacking at the point of contact between markedly different regions. But the circumstances that call our attention change and are expressed differently in the local lexis” (...) These names (*noms de pays*) are not simply administrative or scholarly terms; they are *names in daily use*, by that we mean the local farmers know and use them. To the extent that they are a product of local observation they cannot, logically, refer to large land areas: they are limited in space, in keeping with the horizons of those that use them. (...) When we have tried to examine their meaning, we have found that they do not allude to one simple characteristic feature, but rather to a whole set of traits that refer at the same time to the land, the waters, the crops, the settlement patterns. *Here, therefore, extracted from the natural setting, we see the connections that the land as our point of departure shares with man as the recipient*, and which, as we stated at the outset, should be the object of geographical study! (...) To understand all that the teaching of geography requires of him, a teacher would struggle to find a better exercise and a more effective guide than these “*noms de pays*”. *They are, effectively, what I would call the living sources of geography.*”<sup>2</sup> (Vidal de la Blache, 1888-1889: 5) [The italics are ours]

<sup>1</sup> Authors’ own translation.

<sup>2</sup> Authors’ own translation.

b) *Pau Vila* (Catalan geographer closely linked with Vidal de la Blache's geographical school) Vidal's invocation of place names as "living sources of geography" was to be echoed by those authors that were to fall directly under his influence. Such was the case of Pau Vila in the Catalan-speaking world. Indeed, in one of this scholar's most significant works, his monographic study of Cerdanya, published in 1926, we find a very clear echo of Vidal's words. It occurs specifically when Vila refers to the basic characterisation of this district based on two pairs of names (la *Plana* and la *Muntanya*; la *Baga* and la *Solana*), all four popular in origin, which capture the essential physical traits of the territory:

"*La Plana* and *la Muntanya* (the 'plain' and the 'mountain') make up the two main natural divisions of la Cerdanya and together correspond to the rocky nature of the terrain and to the succession of different phases in its existence over the geological ages. [...]. The vaguely east-west orientation of the axis of the Cerdanya basin results in such a clearly characterised climatic division that the people can readily identify the two parts: one, facing the sun nearly all day long, is called *la Solana* (the suntrap), and the other, in the shade, with little exposure to the sun, is known as the *la Baga* (the shady place). These differences in sun hours give rise to a range of natural and human features in the landscape." (Vila, 1984 edition: 31-43)

c) *H. C. Darby*

Likewise, the theoretical contribution of H. C. Darby – *Place names and Geography* (published in 1957) – on the links between geographic space and place names constitutes a short but significant source of ideas on the subject. The following paragraph serves as a good example:

"To all who travel about the countryside with a glimmer of curiosity, and to all who read, or even glance at, maps, place-names must always be of great, and often of tantalizing, interest. (...) In the same way that [place-names] concern the history of society so they concern the history of landscape, for it was places that were being named, and the characteristics of those places are often reflected in their names.

"At this point it must be said that the relationship between place-name study and geographical enquiry is not that of one-way traffic. Sir Allen Mawer, time and again, pointed to the danger of an exclusively philological approach to the study of place-names; and he stressed the need for a first-hand acquaintance with places as well as with their names. 'The conclusions of the philologist', he wrote, 'must in every case be checked by the evidence of topography derived from maps, from first-hand knowledge, or from special inquiry.' *Local knowledge of the countryside frequently provides a clue to the meaning of a name.*" (Darby, 1957: 387) [Italics are ours]

d) *Carl Sauer*

Arguably one of the most interesting contributions on the subject (in both practical and methodological terms), associated in this case with classical geography in the English-speaking world, has been made by Carl O. Sauer and his key concept for geographical analysis: the idea of the *morphologic eye*.

According to Sauer, the *morphologic eye* is primarily associated with cartography and maps, which constitute the starting point for the work of all geographers. For Sauer, maps are in fact the "key" to geographic knowledge (providing the geographer with a likely interpretation of the surrounding space): "The map speaks across the barriers of language; it is sometimes claimed as the language of geography." (Sauer, 1956: 289). If we accept this idea (the map as the *language of geography*) then we must logically conclude that toponyms are the specific *significant units* of this language: "the words of the geographer".

According to Sauer, the concept of the *morphologic eye* is founded essentially on *observation* and is of particular concern to naturalists. “Geography and natural history are indeed related by their manner of observation. Much of what both [geographers and naturalists] identify and compare lies outside of quantitative analysis.” And this is their specific way of operating: “An innate aptitude to register on *differences* and *similarities* is joined to a ready curiosity and reflection on the meaning of likeness and unlikeness.” (Sauer, 1956: 290) [italics are ours]

This is the definition of the “morphologic eye” as proposed by Sauer: “A spontaneous and critical attention to form and pattern”. Or, in other words: “The sense of significant form”. (Sauer, 1956: 290)

This understanding of the “morphologic eye” begins with observation (as a specific means of perception) but is extended with the need to link perception and language. Words (and names) are important from the outset in this process. Sauer’s arguments are worth repeating here:

“Geography as explanatory description of the earth fixes its attention on a diversity of earth features and compares them as to their distribution. In some manner it is always a reading of the face of the earth. We professionals exist not because we have discovered a line of inquiry or even own a special technique but because men have always needed, gathered, and classified geographic knowledge. The names we apply professionally to the items or forms that we identify and perhaps even to the processes we pursue are commonly and properly derived from many vernaculars; we organize them into a vocabulary of wider and clearer intelligibility. Often the languages of primitive peoples and the dialects of our own cultures provide us with more meaningful terms than does literary speech. A familiar illustration is in the meaning of land, vegetation, and cultural forms for which we borrow from local speech and extend their application to other areas.” (Sauer, 1956: 290-291)

Or an alternative way of referring to the same idea: “The topical and local geographical vocabulary of languages is a substratum of learning that still awaits exploitation, both for the identification of kinds of our phenomena and for comparative cultural insights.” (Sauer, 1956: 291)

In the following paragraph Sauer refers to a specific kind of name, geographical names:

“In addition to such naming of geographical categories, both physical and cultural, out of popular speech, *we add retrospective knowledge of past conditions from the study of geographical proper names.*” (Sauer, 1956: 291) [italics are ours].

We should add that time, identified by Sauer as geography’s “fourth dimension”, represented for him a key concept in order to move from *description* to *explanation*. To achieve this, geographical proper names (that is to say toponyms) play, he claimed, an essential role: they are, in themselves, an “expression of time”.

### **1.3. The geographical basis for research in toponymy: six ‘methodological principles’**

Elsewhere we have alluded to the need to formulate a methodology for the geographical study of toponymy. It is our belief that this geographical approach can be best expressed, scientifically speaking, by applying a series of “principles”. To date we have established six of these, based on available empirical evidence (supported wherever possible by the existing literature). They are *transparency*, *analogy*, *exceptionality*, *territorial significance*, *persistence* and *reciprocity between toponymy and anthroponymy*. In previous studies, we have addressed the principles of transparency, exceptionality and territorial significance (and return to them again here). The remaining three we deal with here for the first time.

These six principles constitute, to our mind, a ‘methodological basis’ of common interest for the geographical study of toponyms founded above all on the observation of *significant forms*, derived from field work and the direct perception of reality. In the sections that follow we offer a theoretical explanation of these principles. In section 3, we consider their practical nature and apply them to the interpretation of 42 toponyms in Catalonia that have a meaning that is directly or indirectly related with the landscape.

#### a) *Principle of transparency*

Simply put, this principle points to the idea that the living toponymy of a given territory tends to be largely “transparent”. That is, that a large number (albeit this proportion may vary from one place to another) of the toponyms used in a given geographical region can be interpreted in their literal sense (that is, without any need to resort to etymological interpretations) by the everyday speaker (or user) of the language. By way of example, names that exemplify the principle (as long as a semantic shift has not occurred) include: Grey House, High Forest, Sacred Mount, Long Street, Broad Street, Old Square, Station District, Market Square, New Cemetery, etc.

In practice, underpinning the principle of transparency lies the constant fact alluded to by linguists: that the basic component of the toponymy of any place in the world is the *common lexicon* of the language used in that territory. This situation has a significant consequence: the etymological research of the toponymy of a given geographical area tends to be based on a “selection” of that toponymy. In other words, on the “most interesting” place names from the linguistic point of view – which are normally those with the most opaque meaning and the ones that are most difficult to decipher by the everyday speakers of the language.

Although there is no evidence that this principle has ever been expressly formulated – other than an allusion made to it in Tort (2003), it has been mentioned indirectly by numerous authors. Moreu-Rey, for example, in an earlier study (1982: 12), claims: “There are a great number of place names whose meaning is clear and readily understood.” Terrado, also, reminds us (1994: 54), as a methodological principle, that the etymology of a toponym should be sought, initially, within the frame of the language spoken (or which has been spoken) in the territory in which the toponym lies. Coromines, moreover, reflects on these questions in a theoretical article dedicated to Catalan toponymy and reaches a highly significant conclusion (1965: 17): “Often the appearance of a place will guide us to its meaning.” This constitutes a means of referring to toponyms of a transparent nature via an indirect mechanism: in other words, placing this quality of “transparency” *in relation to* the specific geographical physiognomy of the place in question.

#### b) *Principle of analogy*

The principle of analogy can, by and large, be considered a complement of the principle of transparency. If the main characteristic of the principle of transparency is that the toponym can be interpreted directly (i.e., in close alignment with its literal meaning), what characterises the principle of analogy is that we can infer the meaning of the toponym based on a relation of similitude that the place name suggests. When this principle applies there is no direct “toponymic transparency”, but rather an indirect link: the correlation between the toponym and its meaning occurs through an allusion to an external concept. The toponym is able to suggest to the individual, by means of similitude, a living representation of its original meaning (and it does so without our having to resort to the etymological interpretation of the place name).

An analogy can be defined generically as a ‘relationship of similitude between different things’, and is a typical mechanism employed in the creation of the common lexicon. It



should therefore come as little surprise that we should find them frequently employed as toponyms.

An example of the application of the principle of analogy in the creation of a Catalan toponym is provided by the place name *Montserrat* (which we have chosen as one of the ‘landscape indicators’ in section 3 of this article). This name, formed by the root MONT (> “mountain”) and the adjective SERRAT (equivalent, in Catalan, to the idea of “serrated, jagged”), presents a clearly analogous mechanism of formation: it establishes a relationship of similitude between the profile of the mountain and the serrated edge of a saw.

#### c) *Principle of exceptionality*

Also known as the “principle of relative negativity”, this principle was first formulated by the Russian toponymist F. P. Savarensky (Dorion: 1998). It can be summarised as a particular type of toponymic behaviour in which place names, in given contexts, reflect the *exceptional characteristics* of a place before its *typical characteristics*. In reference to this principle, Dorion and Poirier, from the Quebec school, point out (1975: 93) that certain names “bear testimony, by the very fact of their occurrence, to the relative absence or the rarity of the phenomenon to which they refer.” This is the case, they claim, of the high frequency of names alluding to water in the driest regions of North Africa and Central Asia. Dorion expands on this consideration elsewhere:

“The exceptional excites the memory more than the typical, and therefore any person will tend, more naturally, to inscribe in their memory – or in a name that conserves that memory – something surprising rather than something more commonplace (...). In no place like the Sahara do we find so many names formed from roots referring to water. That which is strange and vital deserves to be recorded, located, highlighted, signalled – as if marked by beacons.” (Dorion, 1989: 4)

#### d) *Principle of territorial significance*

The principle alluding to *territorial significance* is located midway between the two principles described above. We refer specifically to it in Tort (2003). In fact, its logic lies halfway between that of the preceding two: it points specifically to those phenomena that we consider *significant* in the territorial field; a category that we can situate halfway between the “habitual”, the normal, repeated phenomena that respond to the principle of transparency, and the “singular”, or unique, unusual behaviour, typical of the phenomena that respond to the principle of exceptionality. In this context, “*the territorially significant*”, we believe, corresponds to an aspect of the geography of a given place that stands out in some way, or is relevant, with respect to the other features of that place (even though, often, that “relevance” is not explicit; and, consequently, requires a prior geographical understanding and interpretation on the part of the observer).

A toponymic example discussed by the French geographer Paul Vidal de la Blache can usefully illustrate the idea of territorial “significance”. In a text that is today considered a classic (Vidal, 1888-1889: 4), he explains that in the extreme west of the Massif Central in France (between Étampes and Orléans) lies an area known by the name of *Terres Froides*; near this zone, but lying further to the west, there is a very closely related toponym: *Terres Chaudes*. The two areas are adjoining and are both flat, with few features to distinguish their respective morphologies. A literal interpretation of the toponyms would suggest a significant difference in temperature between one place and the other, but the reality, according to Vidal, is that the difference is not one of *climate*, but rather of the *nature of the land*. The name *Terres Froides* can be explained by the fact that the rock substrate here is impermeable; the water does not flow resulting in increased humidity and mist. By contrast, the neighbouring *Terres Chaudes* lies on limestone soils, so that the water filters through and its external

physiognomy is typified by dryness. Little wonder therefore that the different nature of the places leads to them being known as “cold lands” in the first case, and “hot lands” in the second. Yet, the perception of this highly *significant* difference from the physical perspective is only possible using our knowledge (albeit minimum) of the geography of the place; a knowledge that is closely related with the very important method for studying the territory, namely *observation* – the importance of which was stressed above when discussing Sauer’s contribution.

#### e) *Principle of persistence*

This principle refers to what we consider a fundamental aspect of the nature of place names: namely, their *location in time*. This aspect is quite inseparable from their existence in space (indeed, it is inconceivable that a toponym can be understood solely in terms of its *spatial* dimension, since its meaning in space must necessarily refer to some point in time, be it the immediate present, the recent past or the distant past).

The principle of persistence – or duration – defines the tendency of many toponyms to *persist* (i.e., “to endure over time”, surviving even longer than the language in which the toponym originated). To some extent, the principle of persistence explains why a given toponym arises and maintains a direct correspondence over a long period of time with a *place*. In many cases this correspondence is maintained despite the changes that might affect the language in which the toponym was originally coined, and despite the physical changes that might be recorded in the geographical area to which the toponym is applied.

Various scholars in Spain, without having expressly formulated the principle of persistence, have referred to it implicitly in various studies. For example, Menéndez Pidal claims, in the following paragraph extracted from his leading work, *Toponimia prerrománica hispánica*:

“Place names are a living reminder of peoples who have long since disappeared, names that have been transmitted from generation to generation, from tongue to tongue, and which by unbroken tradition reach our ears on the lips of those that today continue to inhabit these same places, rooted in the same land as their remote ancestors. The daily need to name this land over the millennia unites the words of today’s inhabitants with the words of the earliest inhabitants.”

Rosselló Verger makes a similar appeal when he writes: “Toponyms are unusual words, not at all commonplace, that defy the usual approaches applied by grammarians. They are more resistant than other names; they are stubborn and obstinate. They do not always adhere to [linguistic] laws. Time and again they yell out at us, making themselves heard. But they always end up bewitching the speaker.”

#### f) *Principle of reciprocity (or reciprocal interference) between toponymy and anthroponymy*

The principle of reciprocity between toponymy and anthroponymy refers to a very straightforward onomastic fact: toponyms and anthroponyms, in their existence as proper names, have a mutual influence on each other.

In other words, a toponym (a place name) can give rise to an anthroponym (the name of a person), in the same way that an anthroponym can give rise to a toponym. This reciprocal relationship, which is verified with the passing of time and which can be considered a universal tendency, can be of great relevance in the determination of the etymology of a given name. In practice, the etymology of a name which, in its origins, is linked with a “place” has a very different nature to a name originally linked with a “person”. In the first case, the etymology has a *spatial* reference (that is, it expresses some quality of the geographical environment that it names). In the second case, by contrast, the etymology

logically tends to express some type of condition or circumstance relative to the individual or to his or her personal or family environment.

A major consequence of this “etymological ambivalence” is that when a place name is of anthroponymic origin, its etymology will be of little interest from a geographical point of view. This should be borne in mind by the researcher, insofar as the mutual interference between the place name and the anthroponym can mean that with the passing of time it becomes impossible to establish with any rigor if the name was originally applied to a place or to a person.

## 2. Toponyms as ‘landscape indicators’. Catalonia and its geographical landscape as a case study

In this section we propose undertaking a practical study of toponyms from the perspective of the geographer. Specifically, we present the case for the study of certain place names as “landscape indicators”: that is, as names that, because of their characteristics or meaning (real or metaphorical), often become an essential (and highly efficient) tool for an accurate interpretation of the landscape or of the specific geographical area to which they refer.

We focus our study on forty-two examples drawn from Catalan toponymy. This selection is we believe highly representative of the diversity of landscapes at a range of scales (in certain cases we might even speak of “microlandscapes”) throughout Catalonia. The forty-two toponyms are divided between the three main geographical domains of the region – the Pyrenees mountains, the inland territories and the coastal strip, and their distribution, as can be seen in the map, is highly homogenous (see map attached).

This approach enables us to go beyond the strictly linguistic level and to consider the potential value of the work of Joan Coromines (the most prominent figure in the history of Onomastics in Catalonia). This scholar, thanks above all to his onomastic dictionary (entitled *Onomasticon Cataloniae*, running to eight volumes, in which he examines more than 45,000 place names), provides us, thanks to his detailed geographical observations and descriptions, with a richly expressive picture of the “landscape areas” (related with toponyms), of the Catalan lands (the so-called *Països Catalans*, corresponding to those territories where Catalan language has some official status).<sup>3</sup>

### 2.1. Catalonia as a toponymic landscape

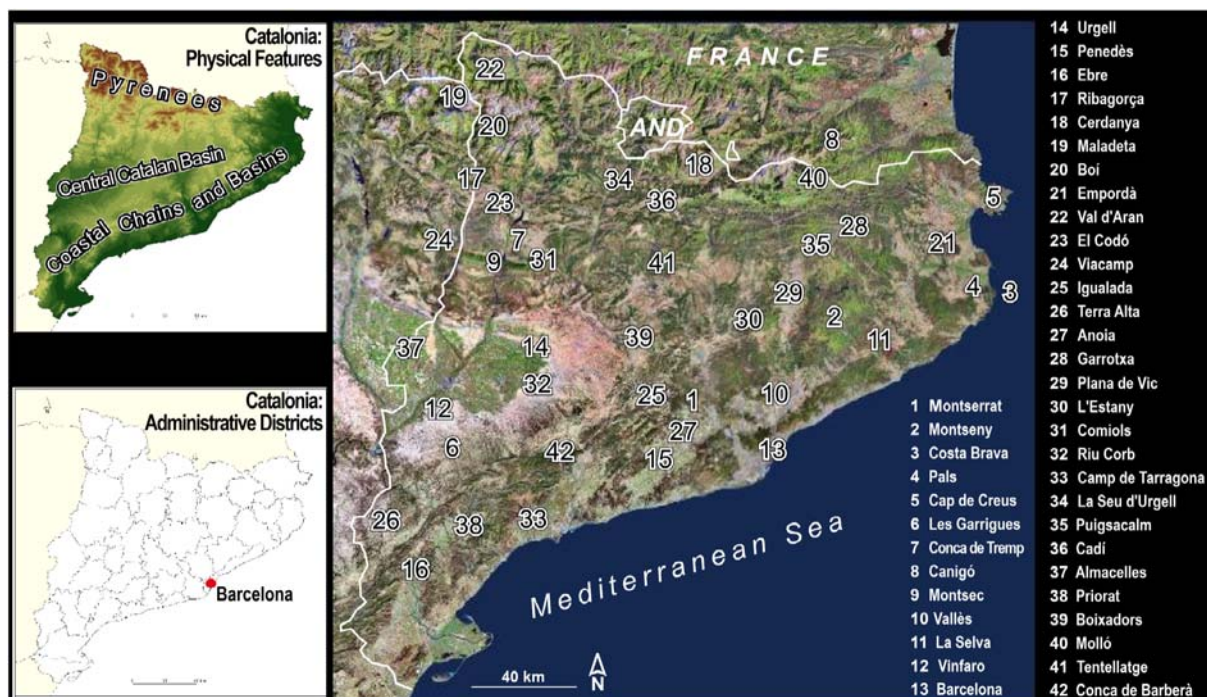
Occupying an area of some 32,000 km<sup>2</sup> (if we limit ourselves strictly to the boundaries of today’s Autonomous Community), Catalonia is one of the regions of south-west Europe that best captures (albeit on a small scale) the geographical diversity of the European continent – and, especially, that part of the continent lying within the Mediterranean basin (Deffontaines, 1958). The three main areas in which geographers divided Catalonia – the Pyrenees, the Central Catalan Basin and the Coastal Mountain Chains and Basins (Solé Sabarís, 1958) – together reflect a model of morphotectonic structure (based on alternating alpine mountain ranges and great intermediate sedimentary plains) which is repeated throughout the northern strip of the Mediterranean.

A decade ago, we sought to test this interpretation of the three major geographical areas, based on the *connection* between certain toponyms and their respective landscapes (Tort, 2004). That study represented an initial proposal for the use of toponyms as ‘landscape indicators’. Here, employing the same method, we seek to offer a summary of the geography of Catalonia based on a selection of forty-two toponyms (shown on the attached map). It is, in

<sup>3</sup> Most of the etymological interpretations of toponyms included in this section are taken from Coromines’ onomastic dictionary - *OnoCat*. Those that are not are taken from Coromines’ etymological dictionary - *DECat*. See final references for full details.



short, an attempt to present Catalonia as a *toponymic landscape*. The selected toponyms are presented according to the above mentioned 3 major geographical areas. Many of them are illustrated with a photography. Note that the assigned numbers do not have any relevance as they just follow an internal logic.



**Map:** Location of each of the 42 selected toponyms in Catalonia. On the left side, practical information on the geophysical as well as administrative features of Catalonia is presented.

#### a) *Pyrenees*

The Pyrenees, which occupy the northern third of Catalonia, constitute a mountainous landscape par excellence. The range runs from west to east, between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, over a distance of more than 450 km, and virtually all its eastern slopes lie within Catalonia. A total of 17 toponyms (from the 42 selected) correspond to this area and are as follows:

- 22- Vall d'Aran (< ARAN). Basque, 'valley'.<sup>4</sup> Based on its etymology, the Catalan form is an evident tautology, since the Vall d'Aran is, geographically, one of the main valleys on the northern slopes of the Pyrenean chain of mountains.



- 19- Maladeta (< MALEDICTA). Latin, participle of MALE DICERE,<sup>5</sup> 'to curse or damn'. The name alludes to the popularly held belief that the mountain was "out-of-bounds" (or damned) because of its altitude and isolation.



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<sup>4</sup> *OnoCat*, II, 212.

<sup>5</sup> *OnoCat*, V, 150-151.



- 20- Boí (< VALLE BOINAM < VALLIS BOVINUS). Latin, first recorded reference 945.<sup>6</sup> ‘Valley of the cows’: pasture has historically been the source of the area’s wealth. Principle of territorial significance.



- 17- Ribagorça (< RIPACURTIA). Latin,<sup>7</sup> ‘the land of the little river banks’. Principle of territorial significance.



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<sup>6</sup> *OnoCat*, III, 45-46.

<sup>7</sup> *OnoCat*, VI, 385-386.

- 23- El Codó (< COS COTIS). Latin,<sup>8</sup> ‘rock’. Allusion to most prominent features of the local environment. Principle of territorial significance.



- 24- Viacamp. *Via campo*, 1077, Latin,<sup>9</sup> allusion to the ancient pass joining the Pyrenees with Central Catalonia/Aragon over the centuries. “Via”= way; “camp”=lowlands.
- 9- Montsec (< MONTE SICCUM). Latin,<sup>10</sup> ‘dry mountain’ or devoid of water. Principle of transparency.



<sup>8</sup> *OnoCat*, III, 455.

<sup>9</sup> *OnoCat*, VIII, 8.

<sup>10</sup> *OnoCat*, V, 381.



- 7- Conca de Tremp (*Conca* < CONCHA). Latin, shell of a mollusc. Analogical, albeit transparent, toponym: in Catalan, *conca* means a large eroded basin.<sup>11</sup> *Tremp* is the village located in the centre of this basin. Principle of analogy.



- 31- Comiols (< COLLES MADIOLOS). Latin,<sup>12</sup> allusion to “the middle mountain pass”, a mountain pass of great importance in the southern sector of the Pyrenees. Principle of territorial significance.



- 41- Tentellatge (< TINCTILIAGINEM). Latin,<sup>13</sup> name of a plant with excellent properties for dyeing, widely used in traditional rural areas. Principle of territorial significance.

<sup>11</sup> *OnoCat*, III, 421.

<sup>12</sup> *OnoCat*, III, 417-418.



- 34- La Seu d'Urgell. *Urgell*, name related to the root word URTX, pre-Roman,<sup>14</sup> ‘spring, source, well’ [hypothesis]. *La Seu* here is the name of the city, from medieval times. Principle of territorial significance.



- 18- Cerdanya (< KERRETANIA). Pre-Roman name alluding to ‘the land of kerretani’ – *kerretani* being the name of the ancient settlers of the region.<sup>15</sup> The name was mentioned by Strabo and Pliny, and may be of anthroponymic origin.



<sup>13</sup> *OnoCat*, VII, 261.

<sup>14</sup> *OnoCat*, VIII, 152-157

<sup>15</sup> *OnoCat*, III, 356-360.

- 36- Cadí (< CATINUS). Latin, *Katinus* in 1004.<sup>16</sup> According to Coromines, this is an analogical application of ‘bowl’ to the mountain range that presents a similar form.



- 8- Canigó (< KANIKONOS). Pre-Roman toponym.<sup>17</sup> Also according to Coromines, the name may have a metaphorical meaning: the legend of ‘the white giant’ applied to one of the highest mountains in the Eastern Pyrenees.



- 40- Molló (< MUTULUS). Latin, *Molione* in 936,<sup>18</sup> ‘landmark’. This is a place that has a border location – between different valleys – in the Eastern Pyrenees.

<sup>16</sup> *OnoCat*, III, 175-176.

<sup>17</sup> *OnoCat*, III, 239-242.

<sup>18</sup> *OnoCat*, II, 212. *DECat*, V, 755.

- 28- Garrotxa. Catalan word of local use, alluding to rugged, steep terrain. Principle of transparency. The origin of the word can probably be traced to pre-Roman root GARR-<sup>19</sup>.



- 5- Cap de Creus (*Creu* < CROCE). Latin,<sup>20</sup> probable ‘sacralisation’ – the Christian cross as a symbol, by means of toponymy, of a rugged and inhospitable place at the eastern end of the Pyrenees mountain range. *Cap* is the Catalan form for ‘cape’.



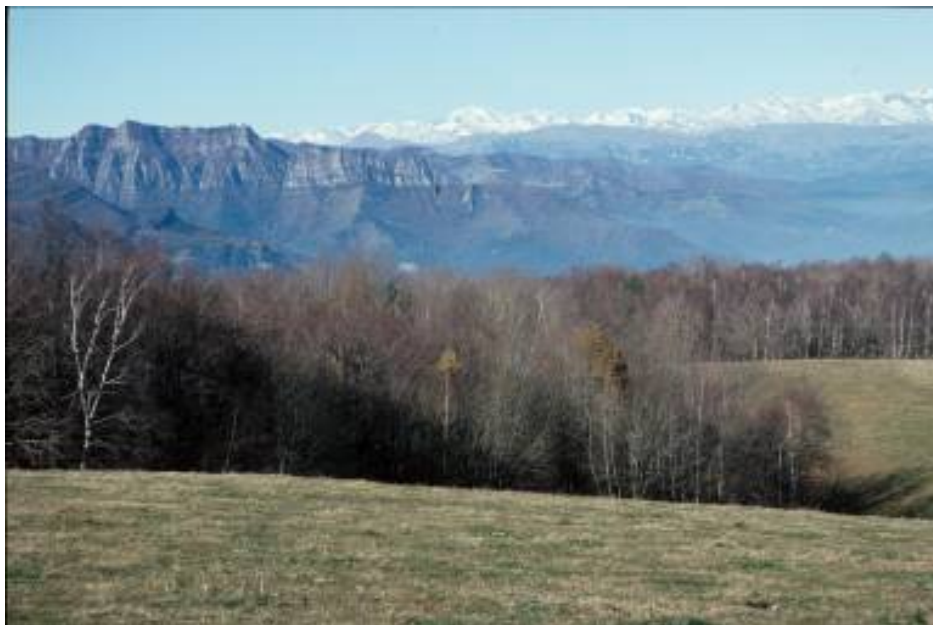
<sup>19</sup> *OnoCat*, IV, 325-326. *DECat*, IV, 401-403.

<sup>20</sup> *OnoCat*, III, 466.



b) *Central Catalan Basin*

- 35- Puigsacalm. *Calm*, Catalan word of local use, from pre-Roman root KALMIS,<sup>21</sup> alluding to the idea of ‘plateau’. The whole name, *Puigsacalm*, means etymologically ‘mount of the plateau’. Principle of territorial significance.



- 29- Plana de Vic. *Plana* is a common Catalan word of Latin origin (PLANUS), and current use to refer to a ‘flat area’, ‘plain’.<sup>22</sup> *Vic* is the name of the city at the very centre of the *Plana*. Principle of transparency.
- 30- L’Estany. As *plana*, *estany* is a Catalan word of Latin origin (STAGNUM), and current use alluding to the idea of ‘little lake’. First reference was to *Stagnum* in 1083.<sup>23</sup> The name refers to the village historically located at the lake side, the lake being drained in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Principles of transparency and territorial significance.
- 39- Boixadors. Toponym formed from the Latin root BUXUS.<sup>24</sup> As common word, *boix* is the name of a shrub – *Buxus sempervirens* – frequently occurring in the inner highlands of Catalonia. Principle of territorial significance.

<sup>21</sup> *DECat*, II, 437-440.

<sup>22</sup> *DECat*, VI, 580.

<sup>23</sup> *DECat*, III, 750. *OnoCat*, IV, 149.

<sup>24</sup> *OnoCat*, III, 48-49.



- 25- Igualada (< AQUA LATA). Latin,<sup>25</sup> alluding to the idea of ‘wide stream or creek’: probably the natural conditions of the place where the city of *Igualada* is located. Principle of territorial significance.
- 27- Anoia (< AMNUCULA < AMNIS). Latin,<sup>26</sup> alluding etymologically to the idea of “little river”. In fact, the name is applied to a secondary stream in inland Catalonia, tributary of the Llobregat river. In modern times the name is also applied to the whole river basin, as geographical name. Principle of territorial significance.



<sup>25</sup> *OnoCat*, IV, 437-438.

<sup>26</sup> *OnoCat*, II, 199-200.



- 32- Riu Corb (< RIVUS CURVUS). Latin, *Rivo Curvo* in 1198.<sup>27</sup> Name of a little river in the Central Catalan Basin, tributary of the Segre river. The allusion to a ‘curved shape’ suggests a geomorphological feature: its meanders having cut into the soft Oligocene strata in this part of the Central Catalan Basin. Principles of exceptionality and territorial significance.



- 14- Urgell. The toponym *Urgell*, originally corresponding to a location of some significance in the Pyrenees [See *La Seu d'Urgell* in epigraph a], was transferred in mediaeval times from northern Catalonia to the south-west, to the Central Catalan Basin, following a period of political expansion on the part of the *County of Urgell*. From that date on, *Urgell* established itself as arguably the most important place name in western Catalonia, being used to identify the large plain around Lleida.



<sup>27</sup> *Onocat*, VI, 400. *DECat*, II, 923-925.

- 37- La Clamor d'Almacelles. *Clamor* < CLAMORE, Latin, first recorded reference 1122.<sup>28</sup> *Clamor* is the name given to the streams or creeks in western Catalonia that are usually dry but which can quickly flood in times of heavy rains [“clamor”= loud noise]. *Almacelles*, name of Arabic origin, is the most important village on the banks of the creek. Principle of territorial significance.
- 12- Vinfaro (< BINFARO). Arabic, name of anthroponymic origin.<sup>29</sup> It can be considered a ‘toponymic landmark’ of the Arabic medieval settlements in the Lleida Plain. Principle of reciprocity toponymy-anthroponymy.



- 6- Les Garrigues. *Garriga*, Catalan word alluding to a small oak shrub, *Quercus coccifera*, which forms the basis of the area’s forest landscape. Principle of transparency. The origin of the word can probably be traced to the pre-Roman root GARR-<sup>30</sup>.



<sup>28</sup> *Onocat*, III, 382. *DECat*, II, 730-731.

<sup>29</sup> *OnoCat*, VIII, 71.

<sup>30</sup> *Onocat*, IV, 324. *DECat*, IV, 390-395.

- 42- Conca de Barberà (*Barberà* < BARBARIANUM < BARBARUS). Latin. Considered a Roman anthroponym.<sup>31</sup> *Conca*, see the comment for *Conca de Tremp* in epigraph a. Principles of analogy and reciprocity toponymy-anthroponymy.



- 26- Terra Alta. Place name formed from the common Catalan noun “terra” and the adjective “alta”, meaning *high land*. This is exactly the original sense of the toponym, being historically created from Amposta, lowland city in the South, and referring to its inland possessions.



<sup>31</sup> *OnoCat*, II, 343-344.



c) *Coastal Chains and Basins*

- 21- Empordà. Regional name alluding to the ‘region of Empúries’. Empúries is an important Roman settlement in the north-east corner of Catalonia, with a coastal location and which played a significant role as a medieval city. First reported reference to *Empurias* in 842, a name of Greek origin meaning ‘market’.<sup>32</sup>



- 4- Pals (< PALUS). Latin, marsh land.<sup>33</sup> Place located on the coast of Empordà, in the North-East corner of Catalonia. Its current environment (which partly consists of marsh lands) corresponds to an ancient bay at the beginning of Quaternary era, highly representative of the sedimentary processes active in the lower plain of Empordà. Principle of territorial significance.



<sup>32</sup> *OnoCat*, IV, 53-55.

<sup>33</sup> *OnoCat*, VI, 147.

- 3- Costa Brava. Toponym officially applied to the north-eastern coast of Catalonia and the Iberian Peninsula. The name, which refers to a ‘wild coast’, was introduced by the tourist industry taking as its reference the *Costa Brava* in Mallorca – first reported reference in this latter case was 1543.<sup>34</sup> Principles of transparency and territorial significance.



- 11- La Selva (<SILVA). Latin, ‘wood, forest’. *Silva* in 1278.<sup>35</sup> This place name, which is highly representative from a geographical perspective, is applied to the wooded lands that separate two specific landscapes in the north-east quarter of Catalonia: the plain of Empordà and the inner corridor of Vallès. Principle of territorial significance.



<sup>34</sup> *OnoCat*, III, 462.

<sup>35</sup> *OnoCat*, VII, 95.



- 2- Montseny (< MONTEM SIGNUM). *Monte signo* in 862. ‘Signal mountain’ in reference to its visibility from the sea, and therefore of great use to ancient mariners wishing to fix their geographical position.<sup>36</sup> This mountain, lying just 25 km from the Mediterranean coast, despite its altitude of 1700 m, is the highest in Catalonia with the exception of the peaks of the Pyrenees. Principle of territorial significance.



- 10- Vallès (< VALLENSE < VALLIS). Latin. *Vallensem regionem* in 827.<sup>37</sup> Semi-transparent toponym, referring to the idea of ‘land of small valleys’. Its landscape has significant geographical parallels with a nearby inland region: Penedès [see the corresponding reference]. Principle of territorial significance.



<sup>36</sup> *OnoCat*, V: 381.

<sup>37</sup> *OnoCat*, VII, 422-423.

- 1- Montserrat. Latin, *Monte serrate* in 888.<sup>38</sup> Metaphorical toponym, semi-transparent, ‘the jagged mountain’, literally ‘serrated edge’. For various geographical and historical reasons, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century Montserrat has established itself as the best example of a mountain symbol in Catalonia. Principles of analogy and territorial significance.



- 13- Barcelona. Name of uncertain etymology. Attributed to *Barkeno* as inscribed on Iberian coins, written in the Iberian alphabet. Dated at least to the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC<sup>39</sup>. Since 1859, and the implementation of the Barcelona Expansion Plan, the *geographical space* occupied by Barcelona represents a significant ‘urban landscape’ designed by Ildefons Cerdà. The place name is probably an example of the principle of reciprocity between toponymy ad anthroponymy.



<sup>38</sup> *OnoCat*, V, 383.

<sup>39</sup> *OnoCat*, II, 347-348.

- 15- Penedès. Place name derived from Latin PINNA > PINNETA , metaphorical allusion to ‘rocky hill’.<sup>40</sup> *Penedès*, as a regional name, would be the ‘land of small crags or hills’. From the geological perspective, this region enjoys a marked parallelism with the low lands of the Vallès region. Principles of analogy and territorial significance.



- 33- Camp de Tarragona (*Camp* < CAMPUS). Latin, ‘plain, extensive area lying outside the city. First reported reference to *El Camp* in 1315.<sup>41</sup> The name is applied to the physical environment of Tarragona, a medium size plain in Southern Catalonia, surrounded by a semi-circle of hills and mountains and facing the Mediterranean Sea. Principle of transparency.



<sup>40</sup> *OnoCat*, VII, 422. *DECat*, VI, 429-436, entry: ‘penya’.

<sup>41</sup> *DECat*, II, 460



- 38- Priorat. In onomastic terms, *Priorat* is a typical Catalan name for designating places or demarcations subject to ecclesiastical authority.<sup>42</sup> In this case, the name was originally applied (circa 1300) to the possessions of one of the most important medieval monasteries in Southern Catalonia: the Carthusian of Scala Dei. Today it has acquired a broader geographical application, being the name for the *comarca* (a regional and administrative unit in Catalonia) of “Priorat”. Principles of persistence and territorial significance.



- 16- Ebre. Prominent and significant toponym –properly, *hydronym*– not only in Southern Catalonia but throughout the Iberian Peninsula. Mentioned in ancient sources –i. e. Pliny, Livy, Strabo– it would seem to be linked, etimologically, and according to various scholars, with the Iberian root IP-, ‘water’.<sup>43</sup> The river Ebre, or Ebro, presents one of the greatest paradoxes in Spanish geography: despite draining the wettest mountain ranges in Spain –the Cantabrian Mountains and the Pyrenees–, most of its basin lies in the driest lands of Catalonia, Iberian Peninsula and even Southern Europe. Principles of exceptionality and territorial significance.



<sup>42</sup> *Onocat*, VI, 281-282.

<sup>43</sup> *OnoCat* IV: 36-37.

### 3. Final remarks

Below, by way of summary, we offer a number of reflections that serve to highlight the aspects of the preceding analysis which we consider most significant:

- By adopting an interdisciplinary and epistemologically *transversal* understanding of onomastics, the use of toponyms as *landscape indicators* seems to constitute a useful perspective and one that is rich in possibilities for the researcher: on the one hand, because the researcher's interest is, potentially, multi-thematic (and not restricted to a single perspective, as that provided by “linguistics” or “geography”); and, on the other, because their use can be genuinely multi-scalar (and not, necessarily, harnessed to a “micro” or “macro” vision of reality).
- However, in practice, the idea is not one that is easily applied owing to its intrinsic complexity. At the methodological level, certain, often deep-rooted, prejudices must first be broken down (for example, the belief in *specialization* as the “sole direction” to be taken in scientific research, or the progressive division and compartmentalisation of the object of study by the researcher as a guarantee of the reliability of any given work). And, second, an awareness of the need to recover certain practices (today often relegated to a position of secondary importance) must be acquired: including, an emphasis on fieldwork, the use of the comparative method, learning how to observe (in the sense defended by Sauer), the paying of particular attention to local knowledge and persons with first-hand experience of the places, etc.
- From a theoretical and methodological perspective, the six principles that we have outlined should serve as useful points of reference for the researcher in onomastics, especially insofar as they capture the *spatial* and *geographical* characteristics of place (characteristics that, traditionally, have been relegated to a position of secondary importance in onomastics). In short, our view is that these principles can be useful in general for any kind of onomastic research that considers the meaning of names in a global sense (that is, from a historical as well as from a modern-day perspective). In the third section of this study, in which we have applied these principles to forty-two toponyms selected as ‘landscape indicators’ of Catalonia, we have attempted to demonstrate this from a practical standpoint.
- On the other hand, we believe that researchers must know how to turn their attention to certain reference sources. Sources that, because of their global, diverse and plural dimensions, have often been relegated in favour of more specialized approaches. A quite remarkable example of this is provided, we believe, by a number of certain scholars of onomastics of “global” profile, as is the case of Joan Coromines in relation with Catalan. His great *dictionaries*, which in themselves embody this “open” approach to onomastics, and which, as such, are often seen as unreliable from a “strictly scientific” perspective, can serve as an essential tool when seeking to complete the exercise (scientific, also) of *generalization*, essential (as Sauer showed) for shedding light on many facts, processes and circumstances of both the remote and recent past. In the practical part of our study, and specifically in the area considered by way of example (Catalonia), we believe that the possibilities noted are self-evident.

To finish we would like to argue one more time in support of an integrative, open and stimulating form of understanding science that the aforementioned author, Carl Sauer, defended to the hilt. In the article from which we have quoted time and again (Sauer, 1956), he adds a final section whose title is in the form of a challenge: “Beyond formal science”. For the author, the very inadequacies of science and its methods oblige scholars to know how to go further, to a “beyond” that Sauer situates specifically in the terrain of aesthetic experience and the artistic ideal. A path that, according to Sauer, clearly converges with that of the big



questions: the path of knowledge. The paragraph that we quote below provides a clear summary of this:

“Aesthetic appreciation leads to philosophic speculation, and why not? Are not the compositions of nature, the lines of colours of terrain and of mantling vegetation, proper to consider? (...) There is an aesthetics of the assemblage of forms, an aesthetic morphology of landscape, latterly often violated by industrial civilisation. Is not this question of the harmonious landscape also something proper to think upon?” (Sauer, 1956: 299).

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Joan Tort i Donada  
University of Barcelona  
[jtort@ub.edu](mailto:jtort@ub.edu)

Alexis Sancho Reinoso  
University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences  
Vienna  
[alexis.sancho-reinoso@boku.ac.at](mailto:alexis.sancho-reinoso@boku.ac.at)