

# The Toponym *gradus*

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COROMINAS DRAWS ATTENTION<sup>1</sup> to a form-meaning variant of Span. *grado* 'grade': "La acepción 'puerto en la desembocadura de un río' se desarrolló en catalán y en la lengua de Oc, partiendo del escalón que forma la barra; del cat. *grau* se tomó el cast. *grao*." This explanation is perhaps too limited, both in terms of time and of space; the word in question can be put in a tradition and analyzed on a Mediterranean scale. We suggest as a starting point Gr. *klímaks* 'landing stairs' (e.g., Strabo XVII, 792 Meineke, ... *hóste tèn megístēn naún epì klímakos hormeîn* "... so that the largest ship can come alongside the landing stairs"). Among the various alloemes (or meaning variants) of Gr. *klímaks* that were taken over by Latin<sup>2</sup> may also have been the maritime one: Lat. *gradus* is used 'de *gradibus* per quos acceditur ad aquam, cisternam, flumen.'<sup>3</sup> Characteristic of this maritime term is its application to the landing stairs of harbors that were situated at the mouths of rivers or channels. Thus, already in late antiquity, in the fourth century, *gradus* appears in reference to the mouths of the Rhône in Ammianus and in the *Itinerarium Hierosolymitanum* and the *Itinerarium Antonini maritimum*.<sup>4</sup> A second area of the term, with similar referents and also of ancient tradition, is in the northern Adriatic. Lat. *gradus* continues in the name of the island of *Grado*,<sup>5</sup> which in late antiquity was called, with a variant, *ad aquas gradatas*. The latter designation survives in Old EVenet. *gradata* (recorded in 1294) 'una serie di gradi o una scala posta ai margini dei canali, affine di entrare ed

<sup>1</sup> *Diccionario crítico etimológico de la lengua castellana*, II, 762.

<sup>2</sup> Walde-Hofmann, *Lateinisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, I, 615, s. v. *gradior*.

<sup>3</sup> *Thes. Ling. Lat.*, s. v. *gradus* [col. 2149].

<sup>4</sup> DuCange, s. v. *gradus*. For the *Itinerarium maritimum*: O. Cuntz, ed., *Itineraria romana* (Leipzig, 1929), I, 81 [two records].

<sup>5</sup> Weiss ap. Pauly-Wissowa, *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, s. v. *gradus*.

uscire agiatamente dalla barca<sup>6</sup>; in ModE Venet. *gradada* 'orlo della banchina, ciglio della riva (in un porto)'<sup>7</sup>; and the E Venetian placenames *Gradada* 'porto di Leme' and *Isole Gradate*.<sup>8</sup> In this derivation of the Adriatic toponyms *ad aquas gradatas* and *Grado* from *gradus* 'landing stairs,' we are in agreement with the lexicographer Mutinelli,<sup>9</sup> the historian Kretschmayr,<sup>10</sup> and the etymologist Olivieri.<sup>11</sup> Others have proffered different explanations, based on the application of *gradus* 'step,' not to landing stairs, but rather, in a figurative sense, to the configuration of a landscape.<sup>12</sup>

The medieval and modern reflexes of *gradus* 'harbor near the mouth of a river or a channel' can be divided into two groups, the one centering around 'harbor,' the other around 'channel.'

(1) *Grado* 'harbor.' This is the more widely distributed of the two.<sup>13</sup> It is found in three areas: (a) In the northern Adriatic, the island where the harbor of Aquileia is situated is called *Grado*, in local pronunciations *Grao* and *Gravo*.<sup>14</sup> (b) Near Pisa can be found a placename (*San Piero a Grado*),<sup>15</sup> first mentioned in the *Passio S. Torpetis* (probably of the sixth century) as *Gradus ad mare* and *Gradus Arnensis*.<sup>16</sup> The basilica occupies the place where, according

<sup>6</sup> F. Mutinelli, *Lessico veneto* (Venice, 1851), p. 196, s.v. *gradata*.

<sup>7</sup> E. Rosamani, *Vocabolario giuliano* (Bologna, 1958), p. 447.

<sup>8</sup> Rosamani, p. 448, s.vv. <sup>9</sup> Mutinelli, s.v. *grado*.

<sup>10</sup> H. Kretschmayr, *Geschichte von Venedig*, I (Gotha, 1905), pp. 30 and 414.

<sup>11</sup> D. Olivieri, *Dizionario etimologico italiano* (Milan, 1953), s.v. *grado*.

<sup>12</sup> Just as Corominas takes the steplike shape of the bank in a channel as the starting point of the semantic development, so DuCange, in the most learned and extensive discussion of the term (in his commentary to Anna Comnena's *Alexias* [Corpus Bonnense, XL; Bonn, 1878], II, 541–544) considers the gorgelike (and thus, probably, steplike) narrowness of a strait as the basis of the *gradus* placenames. B. Marin (ap. Rosamani, s.v. *gravo*) thinks of the gradual sloping of the beach into the water; similarly, E. Migliorini (ap. *Enciclop. Ital.*, XVII, 621, s.v. *grado*) sees in *ad aquas gradatas* a "probabile allusione al tenue declivio della spiaggia."

<sup>13</sup> In the East, incidentally, in a similar development, Grk. *klímaks* is replaced by the Latinism *skála*, which (through the landing stairs in the various ports of Constantinople) becomes a widely used designation of small ports of call and, as such, is the basis of *scala* 'harbor' in the various Western languages (Kahane, "Italo-byzantinische Etymologien," *Byzantinisch-neugriechische Jahrbücher*, XVI [1939–40], 33–58; Kahane-Tietze, *Lingua Franca in the Levant* [Urbana, 1958], no. 841).

<sup>14</sup> Rosamani, pp. 452 and 454.

<sup>15</sup> Olivieri, p. 354.

<sup>16</sup> *ActaSS* Mai, IV, 9 and 17. For the *Passio* cf. *Bibl. hagiogr. lat.* (Brussels, 1900–01), p. 1202; F. Lanzoni, *Le diocesi d'Italia* (Faenza, 1927), I, 598.

to legend, St. Peter first landed in Italy. "The ancient estuary of the Arno, with the harbour of Pisa, must once have been at this spot, before the present coast was formed by alluvial deposits."<sup>17</sup> (c) In Catalonia the term reaches its greatest vitality: Catalan has the appellative noun *grau* 'punt de la riba que serveix de desembarcador; port de mar' and various placenames such as the *Grau* of Valencia and the *Grau* of Tortosa.<sup>18</sup>

(2) *Gradus* 'channel.' The area of this development is the Catalan-Provençal coast. The earliest trace (as already mentioned) is the fourth century placename *Gradus* referring to the mouths of the Rhône. From the Middle Ages on, *grau* toponyms designating channels by means of which a lagoon or a river is connected with the sea (i.e., designating regions located near the mouths of rivers and in swampy regions) are frequently recorded for Provence,<sup>19</sup> from the Département du Var to Roussillon. They appear most densely around the *villes mortes*. Examples: (a) the mouths of the Rhône: *Grau de Peygoulie*, *Grau du Milieu*, *Grau du Piémanson*, *Grau d'Orgon* [the *grau dono* of the portolani]; (b) around Arles: *Grau de Galéjon*; (c) around Aiguesmortes: *Grau du Roi*, *Petit Grau du Vidourle*; (d) around Maguelonne: *Grau de Palavas*; (e) around Agde: *Grau d'Agde*, *Grau de Pérols*, *Grau-Philippe*; (f) around Narbonne: *Grau de Vendres*, *Grau de la Grande Maire*, *Grau de la Nouvelle*, *Grau de la Franqui*.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Baedeker, *Northern Italy* (Leipzig, 1899), p. 393.

<sup>18</sup> Alcover and Moll, *Diccionari català* (Palma de Mallorca, 1930ff.), VI, 393, s. v. *grau*. Aguiló y Fuster, *Diccionari Aguiló* (Barcelona, 1915–34), s. v. *grau*. K. Kretschmer, *Die italienischen Portolane des Mittelalters* (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Meereskunde und des geographischen Instituts an der Universität Berlin, XIII; Berlin, 1909), p. 453, with comments on pp. 586–587.

<sup>19</sup> DuCange, s. v. *gradus*. A. Jal, *Glossaire nautique* (Paris, 1848), p. 799, s. v. *gradus*; p. 801, s. v. *grau*. Rich material on the *graux* of Montpellier, with historical remarks on thirteenth century (and later) channels, ap. A. Germain, *Histoire du commerce de Montpellier* (Montpellier, 1861), I, 44–45, 86–88, 93, 209, 326, 357; II, 201, 257, 445–446; Appendix I, 522–528. The conditions of the *graus* in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are discussed by P. Boissonnade, *Annales du Midi*, XLVI (1934), 98. Kretschmer, *Portolane*, p. 288 *grado di nerbona*, p. 454 *grao de magalona*, p. 455 *grao de passeto* and *grao dono* [two mouths of the Rhône].

<sup>20</sup> Ch. Lenthéric, *Les Villes mortes du golfe de Lyon* (Paris, 1883), pp. 180–183, 251, 261, 346, 348, 367–371, 397; map on p. 351. Lenthéric, *Le Rhône* (Paris, 1892), pp. 365, 456, 464. F. Mistral, *Lou Tresor dóu Felibrige* (Aix-en-Provence, 1879–86), II, 87. A. Longnon, *Les Noms de lieu de la France* (Paris, 1920–29), p. 608.

The corresponding appellative noun is found in Provençal *grau*,<sup>21</sup> Catalan *grau*,<sup>22</sup> and, possibly, OPisan *grau grao*.<sup>23</sup> All these forms show the Catalan variant of the word, *grau*<sup>24</sup> (the Spanish development of *gradus* being *grado* and the Provençal, *gra*<sup>25</sup>). The Pisan record is found in a thirteenth century text, *Lo compasso da navegare*,<sup>26</sup> the oldest Italian portolano, reconstructed on the basis of four Italian versions. Three of these were reductions of a Tuscan original; the fourth, presenting "il volgare italiano non ripulito dall'uso letterario, ma quale era parlato dai marinai, con mescolanza di termini di vari dialetti," shows Catalan traces and probably passed through Catalan hands.<sup>27</sup> That the Pisans knew of the *gradus* placenames in Languedoc is shown by the two records, of 1166 and 1168, of the *Gradus Mergurii* in Maragone's *Annales Pisani*.<sup>28</sup>

To sum up: We have tried to derive the three areas of *gradus* (the Adriatic, Pisa, and the Catalan-Provençal coast) as well as the two semantic shades ('harbor' and 'channel') from a Latin basis that had already had a similar distribution and that contained the semantic potentialities, since these were inherent in the specific locations marked by the toponyms.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Wartburg, *Franz. etymol. Wörterb.*, IV, 205:1b.

<sup>22</sup> Alcover and Moll, VI, 393, s. v.

<sup>23</sup> Accademia d'Italia, *Dizionario di marina medievale e moderno* (Rome, 1937), p. 1324.

<sup>24</sup> P. Fouché, *Rev. Hisp.*, LXXVII (1929), 114. J. Ronjat, *Grammaire istorique des parlers provençaux modernes* (Montpellier, 1930-41), I, 62; II, 108.

<sup>25</sup> In Provence, this indigenous variant *gra* 'canal' coexisted with the Catalan loanword (Jal, p. 798, s. v. *gra*; p. 787, s. v. *goleta*).

<sup>26</sup> B. R. Motzo, ed., *Archivio storico sardo*, n. s., I (1936), 67-112.

<sup>27</sup> Terracini, *Arch. Glott. Ital.*, XXVIII (1936), 176-178.

<sup>28</sup> Muratori, *Rer. Ital. Script.* [ed. nov.], VI: 2, 37 and 45.

<sup>29</sup> In this interpretation we are in disagreement particularly with Meyer-Lübke (*Das Katalanische* [Heidelberg, 1925], p. 61), who thinks that the semantic shade 'werft' (by which he apparently means our 'harbor') was borrowed by Catalan from Venetian (cf. Wartburg, *FEW*, s. v. *gradus*, fn. 8).