

# *El Muelle del Cay* of Santander City (Spain) and the Two Big European Maritime Traditions in the Late Middle and Modern Ages. A Lexicological Study of the Words *Cay* and *Muelle*.

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## Abstract

The place name *Muelle del Cay* was part of the street map of Santander city in the 18th century.

*Muelle del Cay*, made up by the combination of the neologism *muelle* plus the ancient word *cay*, is a tautology since both these words mean 'wharf'. The etymons are Latin *molem* and Gaulish *caio*.

The purpose of the present study is to give an accurate idea of its geographical distribution along the two big nautical areas in the Medieval European maritime world. The linguistic legacy of *caio* is used along the West Sea whereas *mollem* is found along the Mediterranean. Thereby in the Mediterranean area we can find results such as: Catalanian *moll*, Italian *molo*, Spanish *muelle*, Greek *μόλος*. However, in the Atlantic area, the results are: Portuguese *cais*, Basque *kaia*, French *quay*, English *quay*, German *kai*, Swedish *kaj*, Norwegian *kai*, Flemish *kaai*, Danish *kai*, Estonian *kai*.

The existence of the Cantabric place name *Muelle del Cay* in the 16th century breaks off the exclusive distribution of these words due to the political change operated in the Iberian Peninsula with the union of the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon.

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## Introduction

Santander is a sea port city located on the North coast of the Iberian Peninsula. It is the capital of the Autonomous Community of Cantabria, in the Kingdom of Spain. Santander is a well-known name nowadays thanks to the Bank of Santander, whose origins were linked precisely to the development of maritime trade through its harbour in the 19th century.

As evidenced by its first archaeological vestiges belonging to the times of the Roman Empire (perhaps the *Portus Victoriae* of the classical fonts which speak about the Cantabrian Wars), the reason for its existence was the port and its commercial traffic.

The physiognomy of the medieval or modern city and port is almost unrecognizable at present. The disappearance of the old enclosure at the end of the 18th century, the filling-in of the docksides in the next century, the transfer of the port activity to new quays far from the urban area and finally the Great Fire in 1941 and the subsequent urban reorganization do not allow us to recognize the primitive structure of the streets and quays easily.

Fortunately, we can contemplate the appearance of the city in 16th century due to the existence of an engraving belonging to the *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*, a collection of descriptions and views of the most important cities in the European Modern Age.



Fig. 1. Santander apud *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* (detail)

We can appreciate the two docksides, inside and outside the wall. The medieval one takes refuge in the river between the two medieval quarters La Puebla Vieja (The Old Town, surrounding the cathedral) and La Puebla Nueva (The New Town, just in front), connected by a bridge. The Cathedral, stone buildings, King's Castell, enclosure, quays, bridge and Atarazanas (shipyards) were the features of the medieval city. The Renaissance dockside was outside the wall, composed of three quays, the most exterior still in construction with a crane at its bottom. These quays were known as Muelle de Anaos (Quay of the Naos, i.e. of the ships), Muelle Largo (Large Quay) and Muelle del Cay (Quay of the Cay).<sup>1</sup>

### ***El Muelle del Cay*, a Toponym in the 18th Century**

The focus of our study is an old toponym of the old city: *El Muelle del Cay*. The place name *Muelle del Cay* appeared on the street map of Santander city in the 18th century.

We can see this in several plans drawn up in relation to the projected expansion of the city towards the east, outside the wall. In the cartographic records we can read place names like Muelle del Cay (Quay of the Cay), Puerta del Cay (Gateway of the Cay).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Casado Soto (1990).

<sup>2</sup> VV. AA. (1985); VV. AA. (1998).

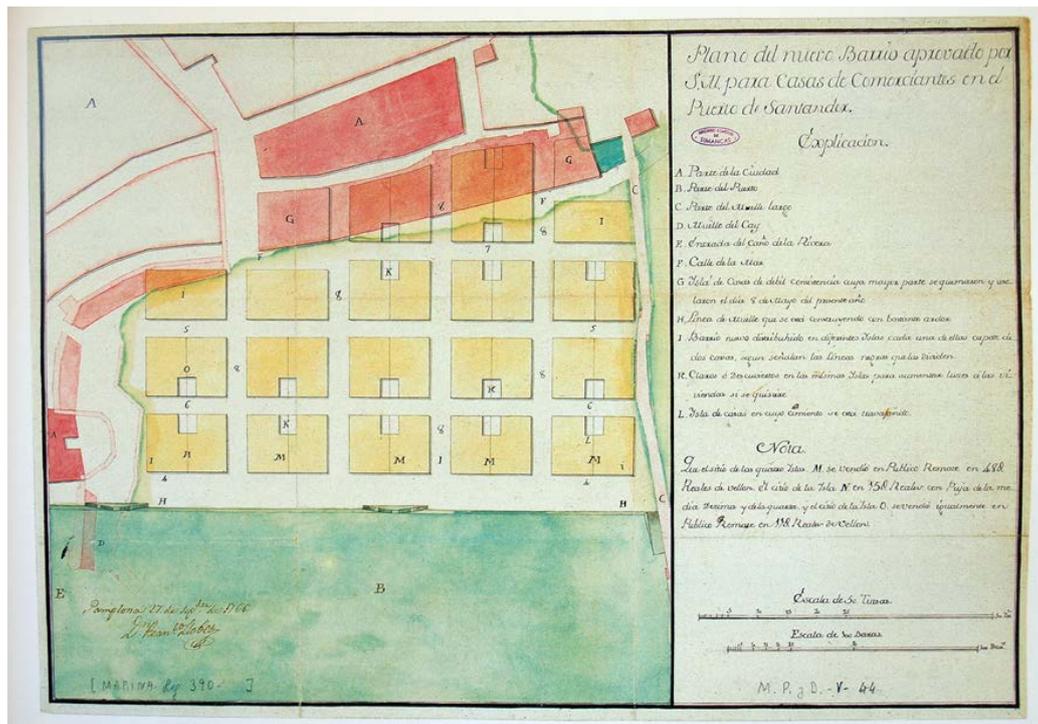


Fig. 2. Llovet (1766)

Also in the City Council Book of Agreements from the Municipal Archives we find the place names Muelle del Cay (Quay of the Cay), Sitio del Cay (Place of the Cay), Puerta del Cay (Gateway of the Cay), Cañón del Cay (Cannon of the Cay) (Blasco Martínez 2005, 2010).

*(1747-09-14) y hecho el desembarco en el muelle largo de la calle del mar le acompañaron [al Arzobispo de Burgos] hasta ponerle en la Insigne Iglesia Colegial desta dicha villa... concluidas estas [ceremonias] se ejecuto la misma de acompañamiento hasta llegar al sitio del cay en el que se embarco a cosa de las nueve de la mañana (A.M.S. Pleno 10 f.15v, apud Solórzano Telechea (1996)).*

At that time, the quay still existed physically, back to back with the old wall, and its name was *Muelle del Cay*, giving the determinative *del Cay* to the surrounding area.

But this situation changed at the beginning of the 19th century. According to the project of the city expansion, the quay was demolished together with the wall. The toponym survived for a few years, denominating the new square formed in the free space, but it was finally renamed as Plaza del Príncipe (Prince Square, referring to the birth of Queen Elisabeth the Second's son, the future king of Spain Alfonso XII) and the old toponym disappeared (Simón Cabarga 2001).



Fig. 3. The old exterior dockside superimposed on the present-day city. In purple colour, Muelle del Cay; the orange line marks the enclosure; the yellow one, the coast line.

Nowadays, nobody knows the name or the location of the quay, unless you visit the archeological point in the center of town, far from the actual water line of the bay.

## Creation of the Toponym

If we review the documentary records about the docks and quays in the ports located along the North coast of the Iberian Peninsula (Cantabria, Asturias and the Basque Country), we can find that the only word meaning ‘quay’ was *cay* /*kai*/ (variants *cae*, *cai*, *contracay*) until the first third of the 16th century.

### Santander

(1428-02-27) *Et todas las dichas plaças tienen por costaneras...et por delant, la plaça que disen de La Llana; e de parte del vendaval, la Calçadilla que desçiende a la calle e Cae de los Toneleros; et por detras, la dicha calle e Cae de los Toneleros.* (ACS. Fernández González 1994: 268)

### Laredo

(1497-06-10) *Sepades que por parte del Conçejo, iustiçia, regidores, cavalleros, escuderos, oficiales e omnes buenos de la villa de Laredo nos fue echa relación diziendo que la mar avia fecho mucho daño e derrocado muchas torres e parte del muro de la dicha villa e que para su remediar hera nesçesario de se hazer **un cay de cal y canto**...* (Cuñat Ciscar 1998: 359)

The first record we find which includes the word *muelle* in Santander dockside is dated 1542. All the records are in connection with the new harbour structures which were under construction during that century.

*(1542-08-05) Convenia que se hiciese un muelle e contramuella que comenzase desde la Iglesia Colegial de los Cuerpos Santos hasta las peñas de herbosa, que podria aver cuatrocientas brazas poco mas o menos (A.M.S. A3, nº 29, ff. 6-10)*

Since this year and for the next two centuries, both nouns – the old *cay* and the new *muelle* – coexist in the documentary records. With the passing of time the neologism *muelle* wins the conflict and finally in the 18th century the word *cay* loses its appellative function and lives as an opaque toponym, ready to serve as a determinant to the neologism *muelle*.

*(1551-05-03) Las condiciones con que la villa de Santander y los señores Justicia de Regymiento della en su nombre dan a hazer y mandan poner en pregones y Remate la obra de cantería de muelles que quyeren hazer dende el muelle nuevo hasta el bucaron de la bastida y frontero del cay viejo desta villa son las segstes*

*(1627-07-16) ...mandaron que ninguno de los dichos carreteros pueda llevar a los muelles y cay desta villa ni descargar en ellos piedra ninguna por cuanto los dichos muelles y cay son de mucha utilidad y provecho a esta villa*

*(1775-08-09) La posesion que esta ciudad tiene immediato al Muelle del Cay en la que acordaron se hagan cocinas con su cubierta y defensa para que las embarcaciones puedan comodamente cocinar” (A.M.S. Pleno 13, ff. 141v-142v)<sup>3</sup>*

Then the emergence of the toponym will be possible. *Muelle del Cay*, made up by the combination of the neologism *muelle* plus the ancient word *cay*, is a tautology since both these words mean ‘quay, wharf’. The etymons are Latin *molem* and Gaulish *caio*.

## Study of Each Noun

### CAY

We can confirm the Celtic origin of Gaulish *caio* because of its existence nowadays in the Celtic languages: Old Irish *cai* ‘house’, Welsh *cae* ‘fence’, Old Breton *cai* id. The Celtic root is *\*kaguiom* (Bloch-Wartburg 1975: s.v. *quay*)

Gaulish *caio* evolved into old French *cay*, (actually *quay*) and from the French ports that word was probably exported along the Atlantic and Baltic coasts to other countries.

The present cognates are: Portuguese *cais*, Basque *kai*, French *quay*, English *quay*, Flemish *kaai*, Danish *kai*, German *kai*, Polish *keja*, Swedish *kaj*, Norweian *kai*, Estonian *kai*.

<sup>3</sup> Vide all the records in González Rodríguez (2014).



Fig. 4. Geographical distribution of *cay* and *molo*

## MUELLE

The Latin word *molem* ‘mass, block’, through its Greek form *molos* in the Oriental side of the Roman Empire, was extended over the Mediterranean ports (DCECH s.v. *muelle*).

In the Mediterranean area we can find nowadays results such as: Catalanian *moll*, Italian *molo*, Spanish *muelle*, Greek *μόλος*.

## Conclusions

Clearly, the geographical distribution of each word draws a revealing map which maintains the two large old nautical areas in Medieval Europe.

The linguistic legacy of Gaulish *caio* is used along the Atlantic and Baltic Sea whereas *mollem* is found along the Mediterranean.

The reason for this wild and restricted expansion of the two terms is, as we think, because of the existence of two big nautical traditions. Natural and geopolitical factors are in the base of that: different navigation conditions due to different waters and climates, different situation of maritime trade and traffic in medieval times in each area.

Even different legal texts were written for each area: the *Rôles d'Oléron* (Laws of Oleron) in Atlantic and Baltic coasts and the *Libro del Consulado del Mar* (The Book of Maritime Consulate) in the Mediterranean. They were destined to regulate the traffic and trade in each area (Serna Vallejo 2004).

Similarly, the lexicon studied acts with the same character of general validity in respective nautical area.

The present Spanish word meaning 'quay' is the Mediterranean one, but it was not always like that in the past.

As is well-known, the Iberian Peninsula is located at the west end of the Mediterranean and Atlantic seas and the Straits of Gibraltar is the geographical point which connects both seas and becomes a strategic place. In such a way the Iberian Peninsula participates in both maritime areas and commercial influences. As we just saw, in medieval times each word existed for each coast. The situation changed in the Renaissance.

In relation with the political change resulting from the union of Castilian and Aragon kingdoms in 1479, an amount of words, specially related to nautical activity, were transferred from the Catalan language to Castilian one.

The actual Spanish *muelle* is a neologism from Catalan, and it came into the language in the 16th century, as we have checked in the documentary shown above (Colón Domenech 1967). There are also phonetic reasons that do not allow thinking in a direct origin from Latin *mōlem* because the expected evolution from the Latin *mōlem* to Castilian is *mole* 'mass, block'. Another different case is the Spanish *muelle* meaning 'soft', that comes from Latin *mollem* with identical meaning and becomes a homonym.

Due to the traditional strength in the Cantabrian ports, despite the official force of dictionaries and the learned language, the local word *cay* meaning 'quay' survived for two centuries coexisting with the neologism *muelle* 'quay'. Finally, the local word became semantically opaque and disappeared, remaining as a toponym.

## Final Remarks

The existence of the Cantabrian place name *Muelle del Cay*, breaking off the exclusive distribution of these words, reveals a piece of history for not only Santander city but for all the North coast of the Kingdom of Spain.

Let us add other toponymies contending with the old word *cay* on the North coast. In Gijón, the main port city in Asturias, there is the street map name called *Calle Contracay*, just located in the access to the old dockside, now underground below the Plaza del Marqués. Also on the Asturian coast, in the little fishing village Ribadesella there is a fountain called *La Fonte del Cay*, located on the quay and from where the ships were supplied with fresh

water in the past time. Finally, in Tazones, another Asturian fishing village, exists *La Piedra del Caiz*, a large stone below the quay as it is now.

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