



Manuel de Terán-Álvarez, 1904-1984

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Publicado en *Geographers. Bibliographical Studies*, vol. 11,
1987, págs. 145-153.

Geography in Spain developed as a scientific discipline after the Civil War of 1936 to 1939: earlier it was restricted, with very few exceptions, to mere descriptions with no explanations. Manuel de Terán Álvarez, who made a major contribution to the development of this new geographical approach, was connected for most of the time with the Universidad Complutense in Madrid and the Instituto de Geografía Juan Sebastián Elcano of the Spanish Research Centre, the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas. His forty-six years of teaching, the precision and depth of his scientific work, his association of geography with a wider cultural outlook, his liberal disposition and deep humanism, all have left a strong imprint on his disciples. Manuel de Terán was also the only Spanish geographer to be recognized by other scientific communities for he became a member of the Real Academia Española de la Lengua, where his wide humanistic culture was much appreciated.

1. EDUCATION, LIFE AND WORK

Manuel de Terán Álvarez was born on 28 October 1904 in Madrid into a middle class family with six children with was not immune from financial troubles. His first education was provided by his mother, Dolores Álvarez Dumont, as was customary in some circles at that time, but in 1914 he entered the Cardinal Cisneros secondary school, where he completed his secondary education with merit in 1920.



His scientific orientation came from his early youthful years. Through his father, don Luis de Terán, well known as a writer and also as a translator of he came into contact with the intellectual circle of the Ateneo de Madrid and with some members of the 98 group, whose outlook was that Spain should turn from her imperial past to a productive literary future in which fundamental and abiding values should be upheld. Among the supporters of this movement he had a particular respect for Valle Inclán. At the secondary school there was an excellent teacher of the natural sciences in don Celso Arévalo, and through him Manuel de Terán developed his concern for nature study, particularly of botany, that was to become one of his life interests and the root of his geographical vocation.

In 1920 he enrolled as a student at the Universidad Central de Madrid, now the Universidad Complutense, in the historical section of the faculty of philosophy and the humanities. He followed the family tradition of studying the humanities rather than the natural sciences and under the regulations of the time took seventeen examinations, with high marks in most of them. Only one of these was in geography, listed as «political and descriptive geography» and taken in the third year of the course, which shows the poverty of geographical studies in a Spanish university during the 1920.

He graduated from the university in 1925. There he had encountered a number of teachers who developed the broadly based cultural and humanist character so marked in his intellectual and professional work. Among these teachers was the medieval historian don Claudio Sánchez Albornoz, from whom Terán said he had learned the taste for methodological precision, and the art historians Elías Tormo and Manuel Gómez Moreno who fostered his artistic appreciation. Under Gómez Moreno Terán wrote his Ph.D. thesis of 1927 en «Artistic Vocabulary in the XVI and XVII centuries» a subject which seems remote from his earlier interests in natural science but in which he showed some elements of his later work, notably in purity of language, in clearness of expression and in the study of placenames.



At the university he went to some lectures by the philosopher Ortega y Gasset, with whom he came into close contact and by whom his work was influenced. He was also in touch with the would-be famous Socialist leader Julián Besteiro, whose character impressed him strongly when, in the last days of the Civil War, he had confidential conversations with him in the besieged city of Madrid a short time before it surrendered.

Among his teachers was also Eloy Bullón, professor of political and descriptive geography from 1907 whose lectures on the history of geography, including those on the great discoveries and on the personality and achievements of Humboldt, had a strong influence on his later development. Terán's years in the university brought him into contact with a group of classmates who were later to direct their professional lives towards geography, either in university or secondary school teaching, mainly people like José Gavira Martín, Rafael Martínez and José María Igual Merino. This generated an atmosphere which favoured reading and discussion of the geographical works of the time as well as of works by the 98 group, whose landscape descriptions proved to be a good introduction to a deeper geographical knowledge of various Spanish regions.

Finally in these same years he came into contact with Juan Dantín Cereceda, then a senior teacher of agriculture in the San Isidro secondary school in Madrid who went travelling around Spain with Ortega, Martínez Ruíz, Azorín and Baroja and was the author of the *Physiographic Summary of the Iberian peninsula* (1912), among other works which are thought to be pioneer studies in modern physical geography; he also met Eduardo Hernández Pacheco, a geographer in the School of Sciences. With both of them Terán made a series of trips and field studies that aroused his natural sciences interest and brought him nearer to the discipline of geography in which both his interests in natural science and in history could develop.



An important event favouring this orientation was his incorporation in 1924, a year before finishing his university studies, as an assistant teacher of geography and history at the Instituto-Escuela en Claudio Sánchez Albornoz's suggestion. The Instituto-Escuela was founded in 1918 as an experimental research and pedagogical methods school, with the idea of undertaking in the future a reform in depth of secondary school education. In the Instituto-Escuela they pursued purposes that agreed with Terán's temper and that, as he remarked, was in accord with the aims of the Institución Libre de Enseñanza: these included the global and harmonious formation of the character, combining the study of physical and natural science and humanities and also combining study and sport —Terán remembered that with an Anglo-Indian teacher he introduced rugby football at the Instituto- in general relating life and observation to Nature.

He remained in the Instituto-Escuela until it was suppressed at the end of Civil War, first as an assistant and from 1931 as a senior teacher, except for the school year 1930-1931 when he won a competitive examination for a secondary school post in geography and history and went to the Instituto de Calatayud (Zaragoza). This time was basic for the crystallization of Terán's character as well as for his private and professional life; it was then that his liberal ethos, his zeal for a higher intellectual, moral and aesthetic level, and his humanistic outlook were reinforced. As his son remarked, in the Instituto-Escuela Terán found a moral code and a life programme, «a general living reference framework that was thrilling, creative and exalting, both intellectually and emotionally».

At the Instituto he met his future wife (they married in 1930), doña Fernanda Troyano de los Ríos, his loyal supporter and inseparable companion to his death. Her relationship to don Francisco Giner de los Ríos bound him even more firmly to the purpose of the Instituto-Escuela, as well as to another famous relative and future Socialist minister of the Republican government, don Fernando de los Ríos. Also through the Instituto-Escuela Terán became associated with the Residencia de Estudiantes where various spanish cultural figures met. There his contacts with the



principal, Alberto Jiménez Fraud and also with García Lorca, Buñuel and Dalí added new elements to his artistic and cultural sensibility.

Another feature of the Instituto-Escuela's influence on Terán was of professional and intellectual importance. His teaching vocation was reinforced with the practice of an innovative and creative pedagogy —Terán remembered with admiration the influence of don José Castillejo— that included excursions intended to integrate and relate all the aspects of the area, and there is no doubt that these helped the emphasize his orientation towards geography.

In this period, which closed with the end of the civil war in 1939, he began to combine his two teaching vocations: the secondary school and the University.

In 1928, a year after taking his Ph.D., he was appointed to be assistant lecturer in Geography in the Universidad Central, but he discarded the university work in 1930 when he went to the Instituto in Calatayud. There is no record of his re-entering the University when he returned to Madrid in 1931.

The Civil War and the subsequent post-war period were a traumatic experience for a man of Terán's liberal character and marked sensibility. It was a period that he himself said, paraphrasing the poet Antonio Machado, «to remember I do not want to». His continued residence in Madrid through the city's war period, the family's separation, the suppression of the Instituto-Escuela, the purging enquiry that, at the end of the war declared him to be politically persona non grata which meant his removal from his professorship, were all painful experiences. In these circumstances and indeed through economic necessity he gave, like friends in similar trouble such as Professor Tierno Galván, classes preparing for the Escuela diplomática; the material used in these classes was a basis for one of his most important works, *Imago mundi*. The scope of teaching was comparable with that laid down by the Asociación de sociedades de derecho internacional in 1936: in it Terán developed work on political geography and introduced the ideas not only of



Ratzel but also of various modern German, British and French authors including Eckert, Maull, Hennig, Vallaux, Siegfried and Ancel.

In 1941 he went back to the university as an assistant lecturer and in 1942 he was reinstated as a secondary school senior teacher. After a short stay in the Isabel la Católica secondary school, he went to the Beatriz Galindo school in Madrid, where he taught until 1970, when he asked for leave to devote himself entirely to university teaching. In the instituto he had splendid colleagues, among whom were the poet Gerardo Diego and Carlos Vidal Box, who shared his abiding love for the natural sciences. At the university Terán became a lecturer in 1944 and a reader in 1948. In 1951, when his former teacher don Eloy Bullón retired, Terán won a competitive examination for the first geography chair in the school of Philosophy and Letters of the Universidad central, Madrid, and there he remained to his retirement in 1975.

During this period, undoubtedly the most productive of his life, Terán served various scientific institutions and gave courses outside the university, attended congresses and conferences and became generally known as one of the makers of modern Spanish geography. Of special significance was his attendance as professor at the course given on general and Pyrenean geography at Jaca in 1946. The aim was to prepare future researchers in various aspects of geography that many policy makers knew to be inadequately developed in Spain at the time, largely because geography had little support in the Spanish universities. Beyond doubt the aim was achieved, for many who attended the course at Jaca now hold chairs in universities or posts in the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas. The two subjects expounded by Terán, both to be published in 1951, were the Cartographic representation of population density and The rural habitat: problems in methods and cartographic representation. The exposition of Terán showed his



wide scientific and general cultural education, his conceptual and methodological precision and his revealing and suggestive ideas.

It is important to stress his participation in this enterprise, but even more relevant is his work at the Instituto Juan Elcano of the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, established in 1940, which he joined soon after its opening when it was directed by don Eloy Bullón. Four years later, in 1944, he became its secretary and he retained this position under the direction of don Amando Melón y Ruiz de Gordejuela until 1972, when he became the director. He was the director until 1976 when, after his retirement, he was appointed to be Honorary Director. His activities in the Instituto were constant: he organized courses and seminars where the latest bibliographical novelties were discussed and key themes of the geographical field were studied under

conceptual and methodological approaches. Above all, he promoted the journal *Estudios Geográficos* from 1942 onwards and even on the day of his death, 7 May 1984, he finished an article, «From Mythos to Logos» for this journal. His contribution to the work of the Instituto Elcano was immense and he was also closely associated with the Instituto de Estudios africanos, an enterprise that was in association with the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, of which he became an honorary councillor. This body provided funds for Terán to stay for a time in Fernando Poo, on which he produced a monograph in 1962.

Terán's eminence in education at various levels was recognized in 1952 for when the Prince, later King Juan Carlos, returned the Spain Terán became one of the team of professors responsible for his education. In 1959 he went to the USA as visiting professor in Middlebury College, where he gave courses on the geography of Spain and of various American countries: later on he collaborated in the courses which Middlebury College, as an institution of university status, organized for their students in Madrid. He delivered various lectures and courses, mainly in the



sixties and seventies, in the Instituto de Estudios políticos, the Instituto de Cultura hispánica, the International University of Santander (the major centre for summer courses in Spain), and in the school of Hispanic Studies in Soria where he had Julián Marías, the philosopher disciple of Ortega y Gasset, as a colleague in the Cultural Centre Politeia, and in almost all of the Spanish universities.

Of special significance was the teaching he gave in the courses on urban features at the Instituto de Estudios de la Administración Local, because they spread geographical ideas among other professionals interested in the study of the city. A synthesis of his teaching at the courses given in 1965-1966 was published as a monograph in 1967, *The city as a form of land occupation and space organisation*, in the *Revista de Estudios de Administración* local series: many of the working principles of contemporary Spanish urban geography are stated in this work.

Terán also collaborated with international bodies, notably with the cultural division of the Council of Europe which entrusted him with the Spanish section of the *Vocabularium geographicum* published in 1967 and the revision of geographical textbooks for secondary schools. He had the enterprise to attend various international congresses; in 1961 he acted on behalf of Spain, together with Ramón Ezquerro, in the congress held in Goslar (Germany); in 1962, he organized and chaired the one held in Santa Cruz de Tenerife; in 1963 he went to Ireland and in 1964 to Reykjavik. He also attended meetings with geographers from France, Belgium and Italy, organized with the same aims by the Foreign Affairs Ministry and held in 1962 in Paris, and in 1964 and 1965 in Madrid.

At the International Geographical Union he was the Spanish representative in the Geographical Terminology working group, with which he was collaborating when he died. He also attended the congresses held at Lisboa (1949), Stockholm (1960) and London (1964); he read in the first and last, papers on «Vie pastorale et



économie d'élevage dans la province de Santander» and «Labour and the demographic pattern in Greater Bilbao».

He was a member of the Real Sociedad geográfica de Madrid from 1930, and for many years served on its council: in 1978 he became its Honorary President. From 1971 he was also a member of the Instituto de Estudios madrileños, a study centre devoted to the history, geology and sociology of Madrid: he was a director of the work on Madrid sponsored by the Instituto in 1978. On the foundation in 1977 of the Asociación de geógrafos españoles he was made an honorary member.

After his retirement, recognition of his teaching and his extrageographical activities came with the award by the Universidad Complutense of its gold medal in 1982, and his election as a member of the Real Academia Española de la Lengua in 1975. Professor Terán received the gold medal in an emotive ceremony where he delivered a synthesis of his university teaching and his farewell to a university he never visited again. In 1975 he was elected as a member of the Real Academia Española de la Lengua: he was the only geographer to be granted such a distinction, and the award was in part a recognition of his interest in language, already clear in his doctoral thesis.

His participation in the Commissions for technical and humanities vocabularies in the Academy has resulted in significant accuracy for many terms related to geography and even in the introduction of some new ones in the last edition of the *Diccionario de la Lengua Española*. In 1976 he was elected as a member of the Real Academia de la Historia, where he worked during his last years on various questions related to the history of geography. His inaugural addresses to the two academies, named «Earth relief forms and its language» (1977) and «De causa montium» (1980), were linked to some of his first intellectual interests.

2. SCIENTIFIC IDEAS AND GEOGRAPHICAL THOUGHT



Terán's wide humanist culture is shown in his scientific work by frequent quotations from Plato, Aristotle, St Augustine, Avicenna, Dante, Nicholas de Cusa, Fray Luis de León, Spengler, Spencer, Descartes, Duhamel, Bergson and others, as well as in his references to novels to illustrate his form of regional analysis, which in fact anticipates modern geographical trends. In this it is easy to recognize the influence of the 98 group and the later 27 group, who wanted to open Spain to new artistic and intellectual ideas and forms, and his love of literary enterprise is also seen in the writing of poetry at various times in his life. On the scientific side his work also shows the aim of integrating cognate studies closely allied to geography, such as those of sociologists, historians, anthropologists, geologists and botanists. Terán's work shows his commanding understanding of the Spanish language through which he achieves a presentation of ideas that is at once clear and lit by imagery.

The geographical work of Terán was closely influenced by the Instituto-Escuela and also by the teaching of Ortega y Gasset, in which he found the idea of geographical intuition. His interest in the forms of acculturation and landscape humanization is derived from Ortega y Gasset as well as his reading of the works of German philosophers including Max Scheler, from whose work he quotes. Perhaps the most extreme expression of detailed observation of surroundings comes in his essay published in 1984 *Herbarium leaves and other things*, but this only emphasizes his view that a geographical writer must be «integrated» with the area studied, that he must «live in it and feel it». This is in accord with the modern emphasis on behavioural and phenomenological trends and in the ceremony held in his honour in 1982 he said that he felt an affinity with «perception» ideas in geography.



He had a concern for the social relevance of geography: he was interested in a geography (in his own words) «alive and human», a geography centred on man, in a geography able to «make a home from things». This outlook appears in his paper titled Ethical aspects of nature conservation (1966) and underlines his readiness, in the 1960s, to take part in various urban planning schemes connected with the metropolitan area of Madrid and with other towns including Bilbao, Guipuzcoa, Seville, Vigo and Oviedo.

Terán's work shows the influence of French geography as well as of knowledge drawn from classical authors and contemporary German and English writers. At the time when Terán became essentially a geographer, modern geographical trends had not become known in Spain; and the Civil War had cut short the modernizing efforts of figures like Pau Vila, Huguet del Villar or Reparaz, all of whom had to go into exile.

Basic therefore was the scientific orientation he found during a brief stay in Paris during a visit financed by the Junta de ampliación de estudios in 1933. His first travel abroad, it enabled him to establish contact with European geographical literature. He acquired for his library, either then or later through the friendly relations he made, works by Vidal de la Blache, De Martonne, Lapparent, Blanchard, Brunhes, Vallaux, Demangeon, Cholley, Gourou, Le Lannou, Sorre, George, as well as by German authors including Ratzel and Hettner.

Terán found his concept of geography as a «science of landscapes, a description and explanation of regional complexes» in the work of French geographers rooted in the outlook of Vidal de la Blache. But that was not the whole story, for from German geography he learned how to mould many of his studies of such themes, to work on different scales while guarding the regional methodological concept, while from British and American geography he derived an understanding of geographical work on human themes and a critical view of cultural geography. Through these contacts he was able to synthesize and integrate various intellectual



and cultural influences, to impregnate them with his wide humanistic culture and to form a geography that as time went on developed an increasingly social character.

In consequence, through his double calling as a naturalist and a humanist, as an historian and a geographer, he was able to present a subject of wide scope showing elements of a pioneering character that in some ways was to be prophetic of future trends in geography. In some hundred works published he included themes such as the history of geography and of geographical discovery, in his earlier years following the historical interests and teachings of Bullón, as in A pole epic. In his last years, marked by his entry to the Academy of History but also by increasing physical limitations, he was no longer able to practise a «walking and seeing geography» so he interested himself on those themes as clearly reveal the inaugural address he gave to the Academies mentioned earlier in this paper.

Some two-fifths of his publications are concerned with local regional studies and in these the French influence is clearly discernible, though his early papers include a long commentary on one of the first works to be published by a German geographer on Spain, by Niemeier on Lower Andalusia. He wrote important studies of the areas he knew, in varying degrees of detail: these included Castilia la Nueva, especially Madrid and its surroundings, Santander, the Basque country, the Canary islands and Fernando Poo. Mention must also be made of the massive *Imago mundi*. He was the director himself or at times with Solé Sabarís, of the various Geographies of Spain, published by Montaner and Simon or by Ariel, that provide basic geographical material for the country. However, despite his travels to South America, he wrote very little on its countries and regrettably he never finished the work he was preparing on urban trends in Spanish America.

Physical geography attracted Terán early in his career both through his interest in the natural sciences and the practical demands of teaching work in the Instituto-Escuela. His first work on this aspect appeared in *Gaceta Literaria* under the title of



«Our rivers». In time he was to present new approaches and to review classical theories such as Wegener's, and eventually he sought to integrate man and nature. In this he was a prophet of nature conservation and cognate ecological work.

A great part of Terán's work may be classified under the heading of human geography, though it is difficult to classify many of his papers under any single geographical category. Studies of a strictly demographic nature are few in number yet his ideas on population analysis are clearly expressed in various works on human or regional geography, and also in his writings on agrarian and urban themes. In population geography Terán revealed his early conceptual and methodological interests, as in his study of 1951 on the cartographic representation of population density. He was one of the few Spanish geographers whose general population studies went beyond Spain, as in Africa's population of 1963 and World population of 1971. Several papers had a social content, including the article he wrote for the *Arquitectura* journal in 1963 and his paper on labour and the demographic pattern of Greater Bilbao in 1964.

Agrarian themes attracted Terán early in his career, for in them he could develop his double vocation as a naturalist and a humanist with vivid landscape descriptions and reflections on the interrelations of man and environment, relations where he also took into account the social-historic factors. This emerges clearly in his various works on the rural habitat: for example he followed the lines of study favoured by French and German geographers and also by Carl Sauer and his associates in his detailed analysis of the rural home, and of the herdsman's life, both in Santander and in Fernando Poo, and also in his close study of the vegetable and flower gardens of Aranjuez. This last was one of his most representative works.

In urban geography, Terán's first and indeed major contribution was a paper of some forty pages published in 1942 on Calatayud, Daroca and Albarracín: notes on urban geography. This work expresses his basic urban ideas and presents



Blanchard's scheme: in it the city is regarded as an expression not only of the landscape but also of a society and a culture, as advocated by Wirth and Weber. Terán also explains in this paper the concept of «site» and «situation» as they are still used in Spain: the site is the land on which the city is actually built and the situation its relation to the area in which it is located. He used this scheme also in his study of Sigüenza. This approach is in accord with the historical approach so characteristic of his work and also shows a leaning towards the approach of Tricart in its consideration for the inner organization of the city. He went further in anticipating later developments in his article published in the *Arquitectura* journal. In 1967 he wrote a paper on «The city as a form of land occupation and of space organisation», in part concerned with economic mechanisms as explanations of city organization; and in 1981 his contribution to a corporate work on Madrid shows his interest in the perception of the city. Terán lived at a time when many new ideas were circulating on urban geography and he not only considered these carefully but also applied them to Madrid, where he lived for most of his life: like many people having a lona association with a city he was critical of the changes to be seen.

Finally attention must be given to his study of the history of geographical thought. Terán was the main and indeed virtually the only worker on this subject in Spain until the end of the 1970s. In papers on «Causality in human geography: determinism, possibilism and probabilism» of 1957 and «The present situation of geography and its future possibilities» of 1960 he gives a critical assessment of the work of Vidal de la Blache with the comment that there could be too rigid a dependence on the empirical approach. Four years later, in 1964, in *Human geography and sociology*, he said that the analysis of space should be broad enough to include study of the social environment and that a geographer should be involved in problems of the living conditions within his community.



3. INFLUENCE AND SPREAD OF IDEAS

Terán's influence developed not only through his written work but also through his lecturing and thesis supervision of students: within the university and the Instituto Elcano he directed 32 Ph.D. and 157 M.A. theses with a wide range of subjects, comparable in fact with the range of his own publications, though there was a predominance of studies in regional and urban geography. Most of the authors of doctorate theses are now professors and some are chairmen in Spanish universities, particularly Ovideo, Valladolid, Salamanca, Valencia and León with the Complutense and Autónoma universities of Madrid. Beyond this, his former pupils have adopted various professional careers and they too have drawn inspiration from his teaching.

Even so, it is perhaps the written work of Terán that has been crucial in the formation and development of modern Spanish geography. Inheriting a geography traditionally attached to description in which the only flashes of insight were those of isolated figures like Pau Vila, Terán introduced and spread modern trends of geographical thought, not only French but also German, American and British. He interpreted these trends, purified and interrelated them, but also fused them with his own humanist approach and his wide cultural equipment acquired by tireless reading of pioneering studies in geography. The union of ideas proved to be a major influence in the modern revival of geography in Spain, and was helpful in giving it conceptual and methodological precision.

Thanks to Terán, the scientific reputation of the *Estudios Geográficos* journal was strengthened and indeed it became the first line of communication for Spanish geographers who previously had to rely on publication in the long-established *Boletín de la Real Sociedad Geográfica*, first published in 1876 in Madrid. Until the 1970s, there were few geographical journals published in Spain; the two mentioned and those by geographical societies in Catalonia published through the enterprise of Solé Sabaris (a friend of Terán who was concerned with work at the



InstitutoEscuela); from 1954 the *Geographica* published in Zaragoza by Casas Torres, and the *Revista de Geografía*, published in Barcelona by Vilá Valentí from 1967. Nowadays, there are twenty-seven journals published and *Estudios Geográficos* has acquired the widest national and international circulation.

To the extent that it is possible to speak of a distinct school of Spanish geography, in its creation and its distinctive features the teaching and marked personality of Terán was crucial. This was shown in the assessments given in different Spanish universities by geographers, whether his disciples or not, on the occasion of his retirement in 1975 and his death in 1984.