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From the cós and cursa pedestre to cross-country and running

A history of running as physical exercise and foot races in Catalonia

Introduction

People have reused and reinterpreted historical elements which are deeply rooted in their own culture, together with contributions from other cultures and even features which are pure invention, to build a sense of national identity.

In Catalonia this process, the *Renaixença*, began in 1833 with Carles Bonaventura Aribau as the leading figure in founding the movement. Working with Joaquim Rubió i Ors (“Lo Gayté del Llobregat”), he laid

the foundations for a long period that was to conclude with the nationalisation of a large part of Catalan society. The revival of language and customs fostered by these writers was the beginning of an ideological development reaffirming the national identity of the Catalan people. The process of defining the cultural sense of Catalonia as a people has been strongly influenced and in some cases hindered by dominant external cultural traditions, such as the Andalusian ideology and Spanish purist attitudes prevalent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the military dictatorships of the twentieth century, and cultural globalisation since the 1960s. For

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Paraules clau: cos, cursa de la cordera, esports tradicionals, pedestrisme

Palabras clave: cos, carrera de la cordera, deportes tradicionales, pedestrismo

In the ethnological heritage of Catalonia physical exercise and sports involving movement have played an important role. In connection with this theme we have undertaken a historical review of the ancient foot races known as còssos. Primary documentary resources and other research work lead us to reflect on the loss of Catalan cultural heritage and revise the place of the Catalan running tradition in the country's collective consciousness.

Dins el gran conjunt d'elements que conformen el patrimoni etnològic de Catalunya, les expressions vehiculades a l'entorn de l'exercici físic i del joc motor són profusament presents arreu. Efectuem en aquest context una revisió històrica de les curses a peu ancestrals anomenades còssos. El suport de les fonts documentals primàries i d'altres investigacions ens conviden a reflexionar sobre la pèrdua del patrimoni cultural català i, alhora, a ressituar la tradició catalana del córrer en la consciència col·lectiva del país.

Dentro del gran conjunto de elementos que conforman el patrimonio etnológico de Cataluña, las expresiones vehiculadas al entorno del ejercicio físico y el juego motor son profusamente presentes en todas partes. En este contexto, efectuamos una revisión histórica de las carreras ancestrales llamadas còssos. El soporte de fuentes documentales primarias y otras investigaciones nos invitan a reflexionar sobre la pérdida del patrimonio cultural catalán y, al mismo tiempo, a ressituar la tradición catalana de correr en la conciencia colectiva del país.

example, the decline of *deports*¹ or games for pleasure and physical development (Torrebadella and Planas, 2011) has meant a very significant loss in our own popular culture.

Games involve a sense of play and many of the distinctive cultural characteristics of a people. As Janer (1982) says, we should not undervalue the paedagogical task of recovering the popular games of our ancestors and (re)discovering, via them, forgotten customs and symbolic rituals or language that has been lost. So, in line with Janer's recommendation, we shall apply a "subversive" ecological ideology to the recovery of popular culture.

The introduction of what we refer to as modern sport in Catalonia at the beginning of the twentieth century was not only a result of the social circumstances of the time but was also influenced by a long tradition of participation in games and *deports* (Brasó and Torrebadella, 2015). Artells (1972) reports that, as well as the popular games of the period (skittles, throwing the *barra*, tag, races, jumping, hitting targets, *pelota*, lifting weights, etc.), "shows of strength were also common, in the form of contests between groups. For example, they would see who could put a sack of corn onto his shoulders most quickly, or who was able to lift a weight or pick something up with his teeth" (Artells, 1992: 28-29).

Artells (1972: 30) adds that "These popular sports were spontaneous, democratic and open, requiring no codification or regulation, such as the creation of clubs or associations to which one had to belong in order to participate."

One of these *deports* was the *cóssos*², ancient foot races rooted in the popular culture of some Catalan towns. As Capdevila says (2007: 286), these races had "a magical and religious origin, linked to the cycle of nature, like all the rural sporting activities that were finally replaced by the rise of football after the second decade of the twentieth century".

Recent studies have catalogued the *cóssos* by location: those recorded by Capdevila (2009, 2012) were mainly in L'Urgell while Juli Suau (2013) focuses on the Pla d'Urgell area.

Modern sport developed in England as a recreation for middle class society following the rise of capitalism, urban growth and the industrial transformation that took place in the nineteenth century (Elias and Dunning, 1992). In the case of Catalonia it dated from the Bourbon restoration and was particularly significant in late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Barcelona (Lagardera, 1992; Pujadas, 2010; Torrebadella-Flix, Olivera-Betran and M-Bou, 2015). In this process, which Elias and Dunning (1992: 34) call "sportization", we must distinguish the old physical activities and sports (Lagardera, 1996). Although some of these activities or games are absorbed by sportization, as is the case of fencing or *pelota*, others are excluded from this new area of recreation (Brasó and Torrebadella, 2015, Capdevila, 2009, 2012). It is thus necessary to distinguish the origins of the old sports and games from contemporary sports (Lagardera, 1996). According to Bourdieu (1993, 2008), we can identify two distinct models. Sport has a bourgeois origin and grows in line with the process of civilisation (Elias), or the development of education and trade, which implies a reduction in the levels of violence associated with traditional physical and recreational pursuits (Elias and Dunning, 1992) while defining a model of social distinction (Veblen, 2008).

In this article we pay special attention to the history of the *cóssos* to show how the distinctive features of a people, which were

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By *deports* we understand traditional open-air games played in Catalonia before the arrival of competitive physical activities originating in Anglo-Saxon countries, which reached us in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and which we would call *esports*.

2

Cós: "[pl. *cóssos*] In certain festivities a race on foot or horseback and other popular games in which a prize can be won" (IEC, 1995: 510).



once the living expression of its traditions, can be erased from cultural memory. Today we are recovering some of the traditions (festivities, events, customs, crafts, cuisine, words, games, etc.) that were on the point of being forgotten or disappearing: there is a post-modern revival of popular culture which emphasises ethnic experience in the face of globalisation (Capdevila, 2016). In this study we shall trace the role of games and *deports* in our traditions with a view to helping to (re)position the *cóssos* in our country's collective consciousness.

The methodology we have applied is based on historiographical techniques using primary documentary sources. The findings of recent research have also contributed to the constructivist interpretation and critical study we present.

The *cós* between tradition and renovation

Sport in Catalonia has been rooted in the activities of the popular classes since long

ago. So much so that we can find evidence of popular races as early as the fifteenth century. Capdevila (2009, 2012) and Suau (2012, 2013) have identified documented events in towns in Lleida (1476), and in Bellpuig (1558), Vallfogona de Riucorb (1603) and Torà (1644). In 1580 there were foot races and horse races in Bellpuig, in which the Duke of Cardona gave the prize of a sword to the winner of the foot race (Bach, 1972: 111).

But the reward most prized by the winners was to take home a lamb. Consequently the events became known as the “race for the lamb (or lambs)”. The name is still used for the *cós* in Albesa, held every year on August 16 (Saint Roch's day), which can be considered the oldest race still taking place in Catalonia, as there are records of it taking place in 1590.

Pere Anguera (1992: X), when speaking about the foot races in the districts of Reus, mentions that in 1756 the Municipal Coun-

“The Sant Pere *Cós* in Plaça Mercadal, Reus”. Source: 1.000 imatges de la història de Reus d'Albert Arnavat. (ca. 1920)



cil discussed the problems arising from the races in which chickens, hens and lambs are given as prizes, with young and old competitors in scanty clothing that gives rise to “scandal and profanity” and that the tradition of holding such races remained alive throughout the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century.

The races were traditionally linked to pagan rituals (which were subsequently transplanted into religious festivities) to mark the conclusion of the harvest (Capdevila, 2012; Dalmau and Solé, 1985; Garganté, 2011; Suau, 2012, 2013). Amades (1987: 483) identifies the races as a possible survival of the ritual of sun worship. As we shall see, the *cóssos* were organised to mark the festa major or a saint's day, thus constituting an opportunity for people to congregate and enjoy themselves. The fittest young men in the locality would take part in the races, sometimes with strong competitors from neighbouring towns and villages. As Lagardera (1996) says, this type of event was part of a symbolic and magical ritual, and had, moreover, a clear local nature (in a particular community) which could not be exported to other communities, as was to happen subsequently with sports (Bourdieu, 1993, 2008).

From the nineteenth century onward in Tarragona, Lleida and some parts of Valencia we find abundant written documentation of the word *còs* used in the sense of a race between young runners competing for a prize or a jewel. In some dictionaries (Ferrer, 1836; Labernia, 1844; Saura, 1859), we find that the word *còs* [sic] has the same Latin root as the noun *corsus* (race) or the verb *corso* (run), which would correspond to the Spanish *cosa* or *cosso*. The words *còs* and *coso* have been used to describe the place where one runs, the street along which people normally go or the square in which bullfights and other events take place³.

Bofarull (1880: 143) makes the following comment on *còs* [sic.]: “This word is a contraction of *cors*, an older, more explicit word

which has the same meaning as the old Spanish *cosa* in one of its senses, both referring to a race, something related to running”.

The *Diccionari Català, Valencià Balear* gives the following information under the entry for *còs*: “races; action of running or competing with animals or vehicles to win a prize, especially in a town's festa major or in neighbourhood festivities. As used in L'Urgell, Segarra, Noguera, Segrià, Conca de Barbera, Priorat, Camp de Tarragona, Ribera d'Ebre, Terra Alta, etc.”.

In Lleida the *corderes* or *cóssos* take place in towns and cities such as Àger, Agramunt, Albesa, Alcarràs, Aitona, Arbeca, Balaguer, Belcaire d'Urgell, Bellpuig, Bovera, Castellans, Corbins, El Poal, Guimerà, Guissona, Juneda, La Granadella, Les Borges Blanques, Linyola, Lleida, Maials, Maldà, Mollerusa, Pons, Tàrraga, Vallbona de les Monges, Verdú and Vilanova de Segrià. (Capdevila 2012; Suau, 2012, 2013).

The statesman Pascual Madoz (1847: 2014) tells us that “races between men called *cosos*, in which a lamb, chickens or other similar prizes are given to the winner” are a regular form of entertainment in many towns. These races were not unnoticed by foreign travellers:

“Having rested in Lérida for three days, we left by carriage for Barcelona and after passing through Bell-lloch, Sidamunt and Mollerusa we ate in Golmes, which is four leagues away. The four towns we have just named have no outstanding features but the fact that in Golmes it was a feast day for some religious celebration or other gathering gave us the opportunity to observe some games that attracted our attention. The first was *la morra*, the origins of which go back to Roman times. The two players have to show their right hands at the same time, holding out one or more fingers. The game consists of guessing the total number of fingers the two players will hold out. Another event was the races or *cosos*. There were races for men and for women, the prize for the men

3

In older dictionaries the word appears with a grave accent but we shall write it with an acute accent, as it appears in the *Diccionari de l'Institut d'Estudis Catalans*.

being a well fattened lamb. The prize for the women was a rooster and two hens, but it was more difficult for them to win it, as they had to run with a pitcher full of water on their heads without spilling a single drop. During this lively gathering we also saw two bouts and several games with balls and skittles. Golmes has a population of three hundred and sixty-two and

is in the judicial district of Llérida, Solsona diocesis. (Mellado, 1848: 65)

The traditional roots of the *cóssos* are also expressed by one of the leading figures of the *Renaixença* in Lleida, Lluís Roca Florejachs, who presented a poem at the first *Jocs Florals* in Barcelona in 1859, entitled “*Los cóssos*” (Pelay, 1866: 479-481):

The *cóssos*. Popular festivity.

*Today, on this special day
people are in formal attire,
the festival has arrived,
Our Lady of the Rosary.
The plants are coming to life,
after dying in the cold;
The mists have gone,
the sad mists of winter.
Day by day the fine weather
gives us greater pleasure;
April brought us beautiful flowers,
May is sure to bring us more.
Everything reflects new life;
everything breathes new pleasure.
The joyful spring rules the world,
covering it with a rich cloak of
beauty.
There is a great tumult
in the streets and squares:
today is the feast
of Our Lady of the Rosary.*

*The dawn chorus announced it
in the early hours:
now the bells ring out
to proclaim it.
The people are restive with joy.
The clock strikes ten.
Time to go! Time to go! The young
people
are getting ready for the race.
Come to the hermitage, girls.
Bring roses and carnations.
Before the races start
We'll dance a while for May.
The big prize is a lamb,
whoever wins it will be very lucky:*

*he can boast about it at the fairs.
Such a fine lamb is hard to find.
He who wants to win it
needs to run hard,
from the back of the hermitage
to Plaça de la Creu.
Come on, young men: nothing
ventured,
nothing gained, the people say.
The girls are waiting for you:
be courageous, boys.
Whoever wants more, more must
say;
whoever is able, more must run.
It's quarter to eleven, hurry now!
Another quarter of an hour and
you'll be late.
Four runners are standing ready,
all handsome young men:
Jaume, Pere,
Tito and Pep.
They take off their espadrilles
to run faster.
They all remove their jackets and
caps,
for caps and jackets slow them down.
Now the four line up;
the tumult grows and grows:
all the village wants to know
how well they will perform.
Some of the girls hurry
to see them close up.
A steward mounts his horse
and goes ahead to clear the way.
The clock strikes eleven
Clear the way! Clear the way,
everybody!*

*The steward shouts,
going ahead,
spurring his horse on.
Behind him the four runners
race off,
in search of victory.
Clear the way! Clear the way!
Be courageous, boys!
Come on! Come on! Come on! Come
on!
Run faster if you can;
don't be afraid of the distance!
Run hard, don't weaken.
However weak your legs feel,
don't give up, keep running!
You can sit down afterwards.
They're approaching in line,
they're coming to the Cross
and it's Pere,
Pere who arrives first.
The lamb! Give it to him! Give it to
him!
He's won it, it's his.
Isabel, his fiancé,
is waiting anxiously for him.
He wants to give her
the lamb. Well done!
Let us give them both
our heartfelt congratulations,
let them live together
happily for ever.
And may Our Lady of the Rosary
let him always win *cóssos* on feast
days.*

Lluís Roca Florejachs (1859)

Announcements for these races can be found in some of the programmes for the festa major in Lleida. In 1863/4/5 the course for the *cordera* race began at the Gardeny fountain or munitions dump and ran to Sant Joan Church. We may suppose that these races were held every year, as they were firmly rooted in tradition. The programmes for 1883 and 1884 still contained a *cordera* race⁴.

In 1887, the race for the lamb started in Rambla de Ferran and went along Blondel, Sant Antoni and Font del Governador to Gardeny, returning via Acadèmia, Sant Antoni, Major and Paeria, ending in Plaça de Sant Joan⁵.

With the growing popularity of races (as we shall also see below), some individuals specialised in the event, making their stamina another means of subsistence. It became common to see runners (also known as *andarrins*) challenge each other at the festa major in large towns. In Valls, the winners had their prizes and the public could bet on the participants⁶. A news item in *La Vanguardia* commented that “two famous runners are in Tortosa and will compete with each other, exhibiting their skills to the public by running round Plaza de Alfonso XII 100 times in an hour and a half”⁷.

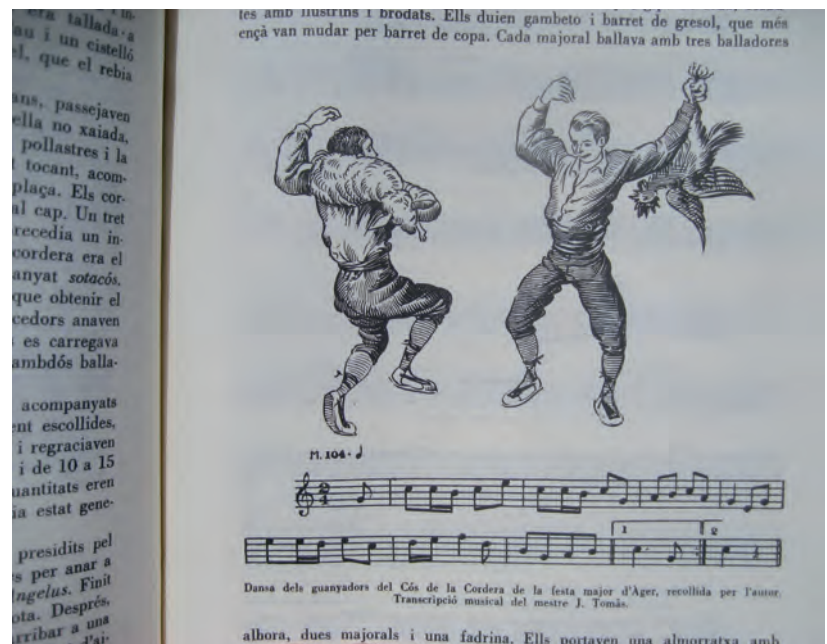
We have references to the race up to the Serra de Sant Eloi in Tàrraga in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. J. Segura describes it as follows:

“Watch them barefoot in shirtsleeves and shorts, with kerchiefs round their heads. Who will win the lamb? From there you can see all the changes of leader in the fiercely disputed contest. Now they’re going up the slope, their fists clenched, their arms bent at the elbow, pumping alternately, their faces yellow and dripping with sweat. It’s not just the prize that drives them on, it’s also glory. The people look at them, applauding them in their moment of triumph. Tomorrow the winner, just like the Romans in their finest

age, will be guiding a plough pulled by two mules”. (Segura, 1890: 266)

In the *Costumari català*, Joan Amades describes races for a lamb in Vila d’Àger, La Noguera, the site of a very important market in the Middle Ages. During the festivities for Saint Vincent, on January 22, this town was the setting for a dance by the winners of the *Cós de la Cordera*. It was a *jota* in which the winners of the race carried their prizes on their shoulders: the lamb, the chicken and the string of onions.

“The band played and accompanied those carrying the prizes as far as the square. The runners were in shirtsleeves with shorts and kerchiefs round their heads. A pistol was fired to start the race. A man on horseback went ahead to clear the route.” (Amades, 1987, vol. I: 582).



4 Institut d'Estudis Ilerdencs: Programmes for the Festa Major in Lleida, nineteenth century.

5 *Diario de Lérida* (1887) 10 May: 3.

6 “Noticias de Cataluña” (1883) In *La Vanguardia*, 22 June: 4.

7 “Noticias regionales” (1889) In *La Vanguardia*, 18 March: 2.

Dance of the winners of the “cós de la cordera” in Àger (1987).

JOAN AMADES

The first to reach the square and touch the lamb was the winner. The runner-up was the *sotacós* and the third to arrive won the onions. This is the origin of the expression “you didn’t even win the onions” referring to the person who comes fourth in a race.

When the dance finished, the prizes were offered to members of the public who could buy them, the money raised being used to cover the cost of the festivities. At night there

was a dance, during which the musicians sang a serenade to each of the winners. In Àger the *cordera* race still takes place on 15 August.

La Granadella is another place described, where on 15 September (the feast of Saint Nicomedes) a race for a lamb took place and sometimes a race for 12 stones. These races in La Granadella were popular until the end of the 1930s. A runner known as “Cal Cetro” was an outstanding participant.

The race for the stones consisted of running round a square a certain number of times. At one point in the square there was a heap of stones and runners had to take one each time they passed until none were left. The winner was the one who had the most stones and had, therefore, run round the square most times. This race also took place in other parts of Catalonia (Amades, 1987; Rocafort, 1991).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century modern sport was beginning to flourish in cities and large towns. In small towns, however, people continued to participate in the traditional local games linked to popular culture and rural life (Amades, 1987; Capdevila, 2012) that had been passed down over the generations. At the beginning of the twentieth century, therefore, the *cóssos* were still very popular in Lleida. The most successful runners included: Miquel Lladó from Castellldans, Francesc Batalla from Vilanova de Segrià, Bonaventura Tilló from Cal Pitxell, Ramon Bellmunt from Cal Matabous, Joan Morell from Arbeca; Bonaventura Baldomà from Roselló; Jaume Florensa from Corbins, and Jaume Gòdia from Alpicat.

We find other explicit references to the *cós* in Sant Eloi, Tàrraga, in the poem “Santaloy” by Francesc Pera, who described the race as follows in 1901: “Watch how they run up/ poor lads/ come on, quickly/ let them get by/ the lamb/ is the big prize...” (Capdevila, 2012: 55-56). Another reference, dated 1902, says that “if it does not rain,

the traditional *cóssos* will take place, some of them using the *Middle Ages* system”. We do not know exactly what the *Middle Ages* system⁸ meant, although it is known that in one race in the 1920s a young competitor ran up to Sant Eloi barefoot with a piece of bread in his mouth (Torrebadella, 2011: 433).

In the 1903 Jocs Florals we find another poem about the popular race “Lo cós de la Cordera”. This poem by the poet resident in Maldà, J. Iglésias i Guizard, as part of



his “Costum de la terra”, won second prize.

The races were announced in the press. In 1906 *El Pallaresa* (Lleida) refers to races in Guissona, Aitona, Alcarràs, Bellpuig and Pons. The prizes varied and the winner did not always receive a lamb. In 1907 the first prize in the race at Alcarràs was a calf, while the second was a lamb. Moreover, in that period, a new trend emerged in Lleida when runners began to win cash prizes. In 1906 we find a *cós de la cordera* in the Camps Elisis park. In 1907 some races were held there with cash prizes, although the lamb and

8

La Lloca, revista satírica, Tàrraga, 1904, 1: 3.

Miquel Lladó “Lo Sirera” from Castellldans, with the lamb he won in Albagès at the Festes de les Fonts (1886).

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Sant Eloi cós in Tàrraga. 1920s.
The runners have a piece of bread in their mouths.

PHOTOGRAPH GUMERSINDO PASCUAL
PRIVATE COLLECTION OF PACO PASCUAL

the chickens were also awarded. The 5 km provincial race was won by Bonaventura Tilló from Arbeca, followed by Francesc Batalla from Vilanova de Segrià. The winner received fifty pesetas and the runner up twenty. Other races were organised for local athletes, members of the military and runners aged under 15. Other novelty events were also included, such as the sack race and the pitcher race, over 450 metres.⁹

The foot races (*curses pedestres*)¹⁰ held in the counties of Lleida had a considerable reputation, leading some of the finest Catalan athletes to take part. They included Pere Prat, undoubtedly the first star of Catalan athletics, champion of Catalonia in long-distance and *cros*¹¹ from 1911 to 1917 and Spanish cross-country champion in 1916 and 1917.

Pere Prat, the champion Catalan runner, honoured us by taking part in the *cós de la cordera* event held in Balaguer each year during the Sant Crist festivities.

He is a magnificent figure, tall and admirably proportioned with a bull's neck and deep chest. The other competitors included some very good runners but he eclipsed them all.

As soon as the race began, Prat took the lead, impressing everyone with his strong, elegant style. By the end of the race he had built up a lead of two minutes over the second to finish and was universally acclaimed for his speed.

We offer our congratulations to this friendly sportsman, whose fine performance was a pleasure for lovers of athletics to behold.” (Editorial, 1912: 2)

During the festa major in Lleida in 1914 Pere Prat ran against Bonaventura Tilló, probably the best of the Lleida runners. Prat won all the races plus the high jump¹². The following year the events in the Camps Elisis had become an “Olympic celebration”, which also served to publicise the newly created Catalan Athletics Federation. As well as the usual races, other events were included (races over 100 m, 800 m and 10,000 m, 200 m hurdles, high jump, long jump, shot put and discus). The 10 km race was again won by Pere Prat, second place going to Bonaventura Tilló¹³.

In Tàrraga, in the 1924 Sant Eloi *cós*, the lamb, i.e. the first prize, was won by the distinguished FC Barcelona runner Ramón Bellmunt from Arbeca, second place going

9

El Ideal (1907) 14 and 15 May; *El Pallaresa* (1907) 14 May.

10

Cursa pedestre: “A sport consisting of walking or running” (IEC, 1995: 1374).

11

Cros: “Athletic race on an uneven marked course in open country” (IEC, 1995: 528)

12

El Pallaresa (1914) 16 May.

13

“En Lérida” (1915) In *El Mundo Deportivo*, 15 May: 4. “Ferias y Fiestas de Lérida” (1915) In *El Pallaresa*, 15 September 1915.

to Joan Morell, also from Arbeca. In 1932 this traditional race was still being held and even inspired the occasional verse: “The runner from Preixana; the runner from Cedó; and others who never missed a *cós* in the festa major” (Torrebadella, 2011: 433).

During the first third of the twentieth century, in some towns, such as Lleida and Tàrraga, there was a progressive sportization of the *cóssos*, evidenced by the presence of experienced athletes who took part with a view to winning money. Some towns stopped holding traditional races but others tried to preserve them. The *cóssos* continued to be popular but over time, especially with the success of football from the 1920s on, the number declined.

From *cursa pedestre* to cross country

We now move to Barcelona, the first place in Catalonia to host modern sports and the first races for athletes, which would subsequently spread throughout the country. However, we also find a long tradition of foot races here. The participants were the *andarins*, the popular name used in Spain for people charged with taking personal letters or packages from one place to another, covering long distances on foot. The *andarins* knew the region well and used mountain paths and passes where only a man on foot could get through. With the growth of the railways, carriage services and the national post, these walkers gradually lost their occupation.

In nineteenth century Barcelona we find records of some of these individuals, who went to the city to take part in races and win money. On 14 September 1837 the *Diario de Barcelona* announced that:

“At half past four this afternoon Francisco Bonilla will set off from one end of the Paseo de Gracia, running to the other end and back four times. He is informing the public so that they can witness his speed and agility. He is not being paid to run but will be grateful for any donations spectators care to make.”

Physical demonstrations, challenges and wagers related to walkers were very popular during the nineteenth century. On occasion walkers even challenged the best horsemen, their exploits usually being recorded in the press. *El Àncora* on 25 February 1854 listed some of the achievements of Catalan walkers, in connection with the journey from Vic to Barcelona completed by a young walker in five and a half hours.

In the 1880s some walkers used their skills professionally and went from town to town publicly challenging any young runner who dared to bet against them. Barcelona was a focal point for for most of these walkers. They included Bargossi, the famous Italian walker, known as the “locomotive” because of his ability to keep running over long distances. He is said to have beaten all his challengers and his skills were compared with the achievements of other Spanish walkers. On 29 October 1882 Bargossi arrived in Barcelona with a view to offering various displays in the bull-ring. The first was on the day he arrived. He offered a prize to anyone who could run round the ring more times than he did in one hour. He ran against a young fisherman who, although he did not beat the Italian, ran round the ring 125 times (Bargossi managed 139 despite the fact that he had walked there from Sabadell only a few hours earlier). In the second race, on 1 November, he ran against a man riding a horse, spurred on by a bet of 2,000 *reales*. The winner would be whoever ran round the ring most times in two hours. The horse could not complete the two hours and stopped after an hour and a quarter, having completed 123 circuits (Bargossi himself ran two more) (Torrebadella and Arrechea, 2015). This outstanding athlete was also remembered for his races against the Aragonese runner Mariano Bielsa (nicknamed “Chistavín”) (Adell, 1998).

In *La Vanguardia* for 17 November 1882 we see that the “running craze” was in the news, as two Catalan walkers, Josep Biosca

and Pascual Ruano, waiters at busy cafés in the Rambla, planned to run a long race with a view to emulating the achievements of Chistavín. Josep Biosca, from Fonollosa in El Bages, challenged Pascual Ruano to run a straight 2-kilometre race for a bet of 23 pesetas. On the day of the race a large crowd had assembled on the Rambla, some of them betting on the runners. Biosca, “27 years old, single, tall, dark, neither handsome nor ugly to be honest” won by over 30 metres (Editorial, 1882: 1).

These races took place frequently and were very popular, attracting large crowds, who laid bets on the participants. Their success also led to their inclusion in the programme of festivities for the Universal Exhibition in 1888. One such race was on Saturday 1 September in the Parc de la Ciutadella, with

“Next Sunday at four p.m. two runners, one French and the other Spanish, will be racing against each other. The first is M. Davy, who was challenged to a race by Pedro Orcal, from Aragon, almost as soon as he set foot in the city.

The competitors will run laps along Calle de Cortes between Plaza de Tetuán and Paseo de Gracia. The race will continue for three hours without stopping, from four p.m. until seven. The amount wagered by the athletes is 1,000 pesetas and the winner will be the runner who has completed the most laps within the time limit. (Editorial, 1892: 2)

The spectacle of the *cursa pedestre* continued almost to the end of the nineteenth century, when the movement to regenerate physical education changed the orientation of these

RETO

Pedro Oleal, vecino de esta ciudad, en vista de haber presenciado la corrida de andarines el domingo pasado, RETO á cualquiera de los dos para dar cien vueltas, jugándome 500 pesetas, para el domingo próximo.

the participation of “famous national and foreign runners” (Editorial, 1888: 3).

In the press of the time we find references to some runners from other regions who came to Barcelona to compete with local athletes. They included Pere Orcal Monsech.

“On Sunday there will be a race between walkers.

Pedro Orcal Monsech from Caspe challenges his fellow countrymen to complete the following course in 25 minutes: Ronda de San Pablo, Ronda de San Antonio, Ronda de la Universidad, Ronda de San Pedro and back to the start. The race will begin at 6 p.m.” (Editorial, 1890: 2)

Pere Orcal was the best runner in Barcelona for a decade, taking on all the runners who visited the city. One of them was the French runner M. Davy.

events with the formation of the first gymnastics associations and the development of contemporary sport. Towards the end of the nineteenth century gymnasiums and sports associations in the city tried to modernise foot races, emulating those organised by athletics associations in England and France. Alberto Maluquer (1916) offers some details regarding these early modern races held in Barcelona:

“The first race of which we have any record was organised in Barcelona on 9 December 1898 by Jaime Vila, an instructor at the “Tolosa” gymnasium, who was distinguished in many areas. To demonstrate the value of his training he prepared his pupils Julián García, Ismael Alegría and Eusebio García (the current master of arms), who, together with fencing instructor Eduardo Alessón and Jaime Vila himself ran from the gymnasium in Calle Duque de la Victoria

Reproduction of advertisement (1883). Reto. *La Vanguardia* (22 November 1883)

to Sarrià and back, a distance of about 14 kilometres, at 5 in the morning, taking only 55 minutes and experiencing so little fatigue that after breakfast they went for a cycle ride.” (Maluquer, 1916: 15-16)

On 10 December 1899, as reported by Alberto Maluquer (1916), an 800-metre race (organised by the “Los Deportes” association) was held as part of a sports festival in Carrer de la Indústria, opposite the “Blau” factory. A total of 8 runners took part, including Juan Gamper, who had recently founded Barcelona Football Club. Albert Serra, sports editor of *La Vanguardia* wrote a report on the race declaring that this sport was “almost new” in Spain (Serra, 1899: 3). In the same year the fortnightly journal *Los Deportes* included an item saying that Barcelona Football Club planned to organise all kinds of contests and athletic events including cross-country and other foot races (*Los Deportes*, 1899). The Club can thus be considered as a major contributor to the birth and growth of Catalan athletics.

Albert Serra outlined the popularity foot races were gaining among English and French sportsmen. The purpose of emphasising this point was none other than to encourage people to take part in races, after those organised by the Spanish Gymnastics Federation (1898-1909) and Hispania AC and Barcelona FC, “whose members include some very good runners, as we shall see in the first festivities organised by these sports associations” (Serra, 1900: 3).

As we can see, these races were considered “sport”, a word whose meaning was clarified by Josep Elias (1900: 2): “We may say that SPORT, a word used widely today although many people do not know what it means, refers to any exercise in the open air. The term comes from English, as a variation of “disport”, which in turn comes from the old French, and indeed old Catalan, “deport” meaning “enjoyment”.

As Alejandro Barba (*ca* 1912: 85) says in the early twentieth century: “In Barcelona foot races found a first class centre of organisation, some highly successful events being held there”. In these early years football clubs and gymnastics associations organised a good number of races of different kinds. But it was not until 1907 that foot races became serious events with a high level of participation. That year the famous *El Mundo Deportivo* race was held in Parc de la Ciutadella (Artemán, 1907).

We should mention here the exploit of Bonaventura Tilló, at the age of 25, who expressly walked from Arbeca to Barcelona to take part. He arrived just as the 10,666-metre race was about to start. Tired from the long journey, he was unable to perform as he would have wished and he finished fourth behind three excellent French runners. After the race Tilló, who ran barefoot, challenged French champion Bouchard, who had won the race, to run against him the following day for a 400-peseta wager but the runner from Arbeca lost again. Nevertheless, *El Mundo Deportivo* said that Tilló had clearly won a “moral victory” as “he had no previous knowledge of the terrain, knew nothing about



Bonaventura Tilló i Bellmunt, the runner from Arbecas.

SANTI TORRAS I TILLÓ

training methods and reached the finish without any signs of fatigue only a few seconds after his famous foreign rivals” (Artemán, 1907: 2).

Tilló was the first Spanish runner to finish in a field of 67, an impressive performance, as his rivals had excellent previous form and were considered professionals. The winner, Luis Bouchard, aged 24, was the French Cross Country champion, the second to arrive, L. Orphee, aged 28, had won the marathon at the Olympic Games in Athens, while the third to finish, E. Neveu, aged 26, was champion of France in 1901, 1902 and 1906. Tilló finished two minutes ahead of the Fonoll brothers, the best runners from Barcelona, who finished fifth and sixth. Seventh to finish was José Tovar from Madrid, champion of the races organised by the Spanish Gymnastics Federation (Artemán, 1907). In the light of this performance, Tilló, a farm worker who enjoyed taking part in *cóssos*, can be considered the best Spanish runner of 1907.

In Barcelona a person who “seems to have come from Arbeca” is someone who is out of touch with reality and some people associate the origins of this saying with the exploits of Bonaventura Tilló, an unknown runner from the west of Catalonia who suddenly appeared in Barcelona and took on the best athletes of the time.

Enthusiasm for foot races was the main reason for the creation in 1909 of the “Solé Pedestre Club” (Editorial, 1909: 4). The club had been born in association with the “Solé” gymnasium, whose owner, Manuel Solé, was its president. The head trainer was Manuel Casí, who organised sessions every evening in the Parc de la Ciutadella (Serra, 1909: 8). The Solé Pedestre Club very soon began to organise a large number of races and supported many of the sports events that were being held.

On 30 January 1910 the first Spanish Marathon took place in Barcelona. Juan Santos issued an invitation for runners to take part

in the *Eco d'Sports* newspaper and the event took place at the Parc d'Esports cycle track, where competitors had to complete 163 laps. Only four runners took part: Juan Santos, Conrad Miquel, Robert Boix and Francesc Túnica (Editorial, 1910: 2).

We already find references to cross-country races in *El Mundo Deportivo* in 1910 (10 February and 5 May). One was organised by the Athletics Section of Club Natació Barcelona and another by the French Patrie Club and Hoquei Club. We find the following comment about the increasing popularity of cross-country: “*As can be clearly seen, there is rapidly growing enthusiasm for cross-country, a sport that is arousing great interest in major cities abroad*” (Traceur, 1910).

On 20 December 1914 the first ascent of the Mola de Sant Llorenç del Munt took place, a cross-country race that became one of the most popular events of the time. It was organised by the Centre Excursionista de Catalunya, the Centre Excursionista de Terrassa and the Centre Excursionista de Sabadell (Co de Triola, 1914). The race was held every year until 1922.

In 1915, the formation of the Catalan Athletics Federation, promoted by the union of sports journalists and supported by the Acadèmia d'Higiene de Catalunya changed the scenario of races (Santacana and Pujadas, 2012). The Federation associated physical education with racial regeneration, a very fashionable idea at the time, and supported the development of popular physical culture (Cabot, 1915: 178; Nogareda, 1925).

In this period Pere Prat ran against the clock to set records¹⁴ but he also took advantage of opportunities to take on any rivals who challenged him¹⁵. In September 1915 Prat held the Spanish records for 800 metres (2'14”), 1500 metres (4'31”) and 5000 metres (16'19”)¹⁶.

With the creation of the Commonwealth of Catalonia (1914-1923), presided over

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“Pedestrismo” (1915) in *La Vanguardia*, 26 April: 4. “Pedestrismo” (1915) in *La Vanguardia*, 12 March: 5.

15

“Pedestrismo” (1915) in *La Vanguardia*, 19 February: 6.

16

“Records espanyoles” (1915) in *La Vanguardia*, 19 September: 5.



La Copa « Sant Llorenç del Munt »

1. Salida de uno de los equipos en el pueblo de Matadepera. — 2. Corredores empezando la carrera en el pueblo de La Mola. — 3. El equipo del F. C. Barcelona al salir de San Poble. — 4. El

The first ascent to La Mola at Sant Llorenç del Munt became one of the first athletic events in El Vallès.

STADIUM (20 NOVEMBER 1915)

by Prat de la Riba and later by Puig i Cadafalch, sport received strong support from the pro-Catalan representatives of the Lliga Regionalista. Sport became the expression of the symbolic capital of a progressive, modern, civilised country, with economic, social and cultural growth that looked to Europe (Pujadas and Santacana, 1995). In the construction of this ideological framework, it was difficult to strike the right balance between tradition and renovation. In the case of races two models coexisted: the *cóssos*, the popular model established by national tradition, and cross-country running, the foreign bourgeois version strongly influenced by Anglo-Saxon customs, which looked to Europe and favoured modernisation.

On 19 December 1915 the sports section of the CADCI organised the Copa Autonomia de Pedestrisme (Editorial, 1915). Soon after this, on 9 January 1916, the first championship of Catalonia was held (now called “cross-country”), a 10-kilometre race in Vallvidrera, which was won by Pere Prat in a field of 58 runners¹⁷. A month later, on 6 February 1916 the first Spanish cross-country championship was held in Madrid, Pere Prat, who was running for the Catalan Athletics Federation, again being the winner

(A. A., 1916). The following year, also in Madrid, he won the title again.

In December of the same year, the Centre Excursionista de Catalunya organised a race from Argentona to Granollers (Co de Triola, 1916). With this race and the ascent to La Mola the CEC gave new impetus to its mountain sports section. From then on sports associations organised races of many kinds. With clear political connotations, the racing section of the Centre Autonomista organised the Copa Autonomia de Pedes-



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“Pedestrismo. Cross- Country Vallmitjana” (1916) in *Stadium*, 15 January: 38.

Pere Prat was trained by Francesc Antoni Trabal i Sans and was signed up by FC Barcelona. Stadium (31 March 1917).

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trisme (Editorial, 1918). At that time the Commonwealth of Catalonia was engaged in a dispute with the government of Spain over increasing its powers of self-government.

In the 1920s awareness grew of the threat of professionalism. Josep Antoni Trabal, director of the *Jornada Deportiva* and Pere Prat's trainer, saw sport as a means to achieve the physical and moral regeneration of young people but also warned that financial interests could lead sport towards professionalism. Trabal (1921: 7) said that "any sport that becomes a profession stops being a sport, because professionalism and offices mean subordination and sport is, above all, a school of discipline based on freedom, a means of enjoyment, an instrument for racial regeneration".

In the 1920s Catalan athletics was indeed shaken by professional sport. Medals were no longer important and people spoke of a crisis in athletics. The rivalry between clubs was so intense that some paid money to sign up supposedly amateur runners (Berenguer, 1926; Clark, 1926; Meléndez; Sabater, 1926). The accusations of payments to leading Catalan runners and money paid for signings by clubs like FC Barcelona, led to a crisis within the Federation (J. T., 1926; Trabal, 1926a, 1926b).

The Catalan Athletics Federation (1926) suspended the membership of these runners. The crisis involving the clubs and paid signings came to be considered as the "corruption" of sport. The fact that certain clubs tried to attract the best Catalan athletes was considered disloyal to the smaller clubs that had trained them. The monopolistic position of a single club was seen as a deadly attack on the sport, as it undermined the illusions of clubs with limited resources that sacrificed themselves morally and economically (Sabater, 1926).

In the 1920s cross-country races were a great success and spread throughout Catalonia. The most popular event, and one

which is still held, was the Jean Bouin race, organised on 1 February 1920 by *El Sport* newspaper. The following year the race was organised with the support of the Catalan Athletics Federation and subsequent editions by other sports publications such as *La Jornada Deportiva*, *Día Gráfico* and *Gráfico-Sport*, until it was finally taken over by *El Mundo Deportivo*, which still organises it today (Pujadas, 2012).

In the 1930s sport with popular roots grew and diversified. The participants reflected the ideological and social conflicts of the era and one could see runners representing the Bloc Obrer i Camperol wearing the hammer and sickle and athletes with the *estelada* flag representing Catalan independence. A particularly notable feature of the period was the incorporation of women in sport. In the case of athletics it was largely promoted by the publicity issued all over Catalonia by the Club Femení i d'Esports de Barcelona (Justribó, 2015; Real, 1998). On 12 November 1933 the first women's cross-country race in Spain took place in Torre Baró, Moncada with seven participants¹⁸.

We can thus see how the traditional *cursa pedestre* was transformed or disappeared because of the nature of the new athletic events introduced by sports associations,



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"Atletismo. Rosario Reventos vencedora del primer Cross-Country femenino" (1933) In *La Vanguardia*, 14 November: 17.

Arrival of Miquel Palau in the Jean Bouin race 1926. Source: *Mundo Gráfico* (6 January 1926).

(BIBLIOTECA NACIONAL DE ESPAÑA)

which developed international modern sport in Catalonia.

From dictatorship to popular races as a revival of democratic sport

Popular sport is only possible in a context of democratic freedom. This was not the case in the Franco era, when censorship and repression were always present. The Franco government never encouraged popular sport and limited participation by the public. Even so, cross-country races continued to take place under the supervision of the sports federations and other institutions belonging to the regime such as the *Frente de Juventudes* and *Educación y Descanso*.

Returning to Lleida, we find a number of runners who were internationally successful, including Jaume Florensa de Corbins, Ventura Baldomà de Roselló and Luis García (Capdevila, 2012; Torredadella, 2003), who also took part in the races for a lamb, which still persisted (Suau, 2013). In Lleida Luis García (nicknamed “Paganini”) became a leading trainer and, together with other top Catalan former athletes and coaches, contributed to the growth of cross-country in the 1970s and 1980s. During these decades, the official cross-country races organised by the Catalan Athletics Federation drew the best Catalan and Spanish long-distance

runners. Examples include the race at Calldetenes, which is the oldest in Catalonia, dating back to 1951, followed by the Sant Sebastià race in Sabadell (1962) and events in Granollers (1964), Manresa (1965), Santa Coloma de Gramenet (1970) and Mataró (1970).

During these years the modern cross-country event coexisted with the *cóssos*, which survived in Lleida, with the participation of leading athletes from Aragon, Lleida and other parts of Catalonia, who could win attractive prizes, now in the form of cash. The coexistence of cross-country and *cóssos* continued almost to the end of the 1990s.

The democratic nature of popular urban races was not restored until the transition to democracy, with the support of local councils, neighbourhood associations and groups of athletes (Abadia, 2014). Towards the end of the 1970s jogging made its appearance, an activity associated with the growing popularity of urban races (Abadia, 2011) and also linked to the individual enjoyment of leisure through healthy physical exercise, separate from activities organised by sports associations (Puig, 1981). The development of such races was boosted by the work of the Comissió de Marathon de Catalunya and Ramon Oliu’s book *L’essència del Cór-*



The first cross-country championship of Catalonia in 1934, won by Joaquina Andreu of the Sarrià Esportiu club. *Crónica* (March 1934).

TORRENS (BIBLIOTECA NACIONAL DE ESPAÑA)

rer (1979). From the 1980s popular races returned to the streets and were used by the public as a symbol of freedom and to express a wide range of ideologies (Abadia, 2014). These years also coincided with a high point in the history of cross-country in Catalonia, with the appearance of promising young athletes like Jordi García and Pere Casacuberta, junior champions in the World Cross-country Championship, in 1980 and 1984, respectively¹⁹.

Even so, the popular races that are held in Barcelona now, such as the traditional *Cursa de la Mercè*, the *Cursa del Corte Inglés* and the *Cursa de Bombers*, which began as an expression of freedom and personal autonomy, as Lagardera (1996) says, have been completely taken over by the dominant logic of “sportization”.

At the end of the twentieth century there have thus been races organised by the federations, the cross-country events, and also popular races for everyone. However, some *cóssos* have survived, like the race for the lamb in Albesa, held every year on 16 August.

In conclusion, some critical comments

We have seen how in many Catalan towns in Lleida and Tarragona races for a lamb, or *cóssos*, had been very popular events since ancient times during festivities for the local patron saint, activities by groups and other celebrations. Subsequently these races were marginalised in the process of sportization that took place, especially in Barcelona, where it was encouraged by the middle classes, and they were progressively discontinued. Modern sports, especially football, eventually reduced traditional sports to a residual role (Brasó and Torredadella, 2015, Capdevila, 2009, 2012).

During the 1970s the Californian fashion of slow running reached Catalonia and the loan words “jogging” and “footing” were used to describe it. Today running is fashionable

once again and we use the English word “running” to refer to it. It is a fashion created by the systemic nature of neo-capitalist globalisation. In recent years participation in races has grown rapidly throughout the Principality. They are more popular than ever and there are races of many kinds: extreme events, solidarity races, races for everyone, events with a gastronomical theme, etc., every municipality having its own race. Lastly, there are some races that reconstruct old traditions for commercial purposes or to attract tourists.

The ecology of language is also that of the region, its customs and national roots. Why should we lose words, replacing them by others of foreign origin, when the *Diccionari de la Llengua Catalana* still contains traditional expressions like *cós*, *pedestre* and *cros*, which were previously part of our language and are still valid?

Does this mean that we adopt an activity mainly or even exclusively because it comes from abroad? If the activity is part of our own traditions, how is it that we not only fail to promote it but abandon it altogether? Why is it that if the same activity comes from another country we adopt it and its practice becomes generalised? Could it be because, when it is presented to us, it has been manipulated by publicity and this is a concealed strategy for certain economic elites to impose their will?

If this were the case, would it not be a morally more worthy objective to support and promote what is already part of our traditions? Would this not also help us to establish objective, critical criteria (for example, in terms of their benefits for society) for prioritising one sporting activity or another?

These criteria could be economic or ecological but they could also value activities that are part of the country's tradition, such as the *cóssos*. First cross-country, then jogging and now running have replaced the traditional *cós*.

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Carne Valero from Sabadell won the same championship in 1976 and 1977.

Remembering the popular significance of the *cóssos*, we would be in favour of reviving traditional sporting activities, because they constitute a common good and because they are not presented to us by economic elites whose purposes are not immediately obvious to us. Today running has become a business with a wide range of intermediaries.

However, we can still take pleasure in running freely, away from the stress of modern life, running without any obligations, run-

ning without worrying about records, speed, distance or terrain. ■

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