

ROMANIAN TOPONYMY – ORIENTATION LANDMARKS

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Abstract: *Romanian Toponymy – orientation landmarks.* The Romanian Toponymy is part of a wider European corpus with some distinct characteristics that the paper will mention. The real fossils of the Human Geography (cf. Raoul Blanchard) the places names from the Romanian space reflect – on the Romanian majority background – the ethnical diversity (80% from the toponyms are formed in the Romanian language) the resource valorification, the lack of population processes (for instance rural colonization) and the authorities interfering. There are detailed the toponymic stratification, the natural/popular toponymic changes generated by the authorities impact (through the seven networks, very active in the communist period). It is also shown the origins of the main regionimes, of the historical provinces (from Ardeal, Transylvania and Țara Românească).

Rezumat: *Toponimia românească – repere de orientare.* Toponimia românească este o componentă firească a toponimiei europene, cu anumite trăsături specifice, între care unele vor fi evidențiate în cele ce urmează. Adevărate folise ale geografiei umane (cf. Raoul Blanchard) numele de locuri din spațiul românesc seamănă – pe fondul majorității românești – diversitatea etnică (80% dintrte toponime sunt formate în limba română), modalitățile de valorificare a resurselor (subterane și supraterane), procesele de impopulare (colonizarea rurală între altele) și intervenția autorităților. Sunt detaliate stratifierea toponimică, modificările toponimiei naturale/populare generate de impactul autorităților (prin cele șapte grile, foarte active în perioada comunistă). Se arată, de asemenea, originea principalelor regionime, a numelor provinciilor istorice (de la Ardeal/Transilvania la Țara Românească).



Key words: toponymy, Romania, regionimes, official toponymy.
Cuvinte cheie : toponimie, România, regionime, toponimie oficială.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is affirmed, not without reason that the toponymy, with the meaning of a group of names of places, form a real terrestrial coating, coating with particularities given by the specific of the *language* in which they were formed as well as of the *history* and *geography* of space in which they fulfill the complex purpose related to the communication between people/individuals. An important element is the one of illustration and maintenance of the geographers' demarche, without the toponymy the geographic activity and communication not being possible.

This is why it is no wonder that the geographers were among the first specialists preoccupied by explaining names of places and their correct writing. The father of modern geography Fr. Ratzel emphasized in his famous work "*Anthropogeographie*" the necessity of studying by the geographers of the names of places (*ortsnamem*) because "they record the active presence of a population in a certain space, the transformation of the respective space according to its need, are important landmarks of *oikumena* enlargement/extension" (Nicolae, 2008:210).

Researched by the geographers, the toponymy (which became *geographic toponymy*) is also constituted as a sub-branch of human geography, developed on the contact of linguistic and history, situation which makes it extremely useful in the often spiky problem of reconstituting certain anthropoid landscapes of the past, essential problem of another geographic discipline, *historic geography*.

Iorgu Jordan defines toponymy as the "unwritten history of a people, a *real archive* (s.n.i.) where the memory of so many events, facts and scenes is being kept more or less old or important, which happened over time and impressed in a certain way the popular soul" (Jordan, 1963:2).

We add to this appreciation of the founder of modern Romanian toponymic science two others formulated by two of the greatest geographers of Europe: Friedrich Ratzel and Raoul Blanchard. Fr. Ratzel, the father and founder of modern anthropogeography, underlined the unusual resistance of some names of places such as *The Alps* and *The Apennines* – formed in Celtic languages – which survived for millennia, after the disappearance of the Celtic language and the forming of other new (Italian, French, German in this case) such as a basaltic cone which dominate the surrounding spaces modeled in sedimentary newer and more "sensitive" to passing/action of time rocks (Ratzel, 1891:538). On his turn, Raoul Blanchard, named the toponyms "the fossils of human geography" (Dauzat, 1971:13), appreciating the resemblance between them and the traces of the living creatures aforetime in the reconstruction of state of things, realities of the past. In Romania, G. Vâlsan reconstituted the geographic area of some animals that disappeared appealing to the toponyms that made the basis of respective appellatives (zoonims) (Vâlsan, 1938).

The toponymy of an area must not be interpreted only as a descriptive image of the place, but also as its history revealing the dynamics of the anthropoid landscape, its recent paleogeography, the occupation of a territory, for a long time, by several people, simultaneous or each on its turn. The presence of each of them is betrayed through the names different places from the analyzed region received.

In this situation one can perform a *toponymic stratification*, specifying the origin of the topic names from the given area. **The oldest and the most important layer belongs to the aboriginal population, over which other layers superposed, which the historian, linguist, but also the geographer, must delimit and explain.**

In this paper I will approach at large two aspects/problems, that are **the toponymic stratification** (which I reminded above) and **the official toponymy**. They are the most important for the approach of current toponymic reality.

2. THE TOPONYMIC STRATIFICATION

As other European spaces, the Romanian one is one of old popular, popular which concretized in a complex, varied toponymic coating adequate to the geographic space and historic time. We must take into consideration one of the toponyms' features and that is "the different resistance to passing time", different from and depending on the space major category designated. It is admitted that the most resistant are the major hydronyms (see further the case of the names of running waters) and the most affected by the passing of time are the oiconyms (names of populated points /settlements).

We must keep in mind that most of the names of places (approximately 80% of some appreciations) are of Romanian origin, more accurately the *names of places given by Romanians*. One problem that has been long debated was the one of Slavic names of places (substantially pseudo-Slavic) great Romanian linguists/Slavists among which Emil Petrovici showed that most of these names of places have been given by Romanian who assimilated common Slavic words (but also Slavic names of persons) which they use in different contexts (including spatial) in their speech.

- Old Indo-European toponyms.
- a) traco-geto-dacic. Major hydronyms which reached us: Tisa – *Tisia*, Somes – *Samus*, Ampoi – *Ampee/Ampelum*, Motru – *Amutria*, Olt – *Alutus*, Prut – *Piretos*. The oiconyms reached us due to the antic Greeks and Romans' inscriptions and writings. Two exceptions: Albac – *Albakidioi*, Abrud – *Abrutus* present in slightly changed forms. Third exception – *Dacia* regionim (without knowing the specific significance).
- b) Latin. Remained in documents; exceptions: *Ad Mediam* (Mehadia), *Turris* (Turnu-Magurele), *Berzobis* (Berzovia), *Ad Aquae Hercules* (Băile Herculane), *Altinum* (Oltina), *Constanța* (Constantiniana).
- c) Greek and Byzantine toponyms, remained in documents and inscriptions (in Dobrogea). *Histria*, *Tomis*, *Callatis*, *Salsovia*, *Halmyris*, *Axiopolis*. *Histria*/today's Istria is officially reintroduced (1925). In Dobrogea also existed Celtic names – *Noviodunum* (Isaccea), *Arrubium* (Măcin), *Carsium* (Hârșova) taken over and kept by Romans.

- d) Slavic toponyms. The Slaves came around 600 and settled in the S and N of Danube. They introduced a series of words in the lexical fund and implicitly in toponymy, given their position in the leading layer (see the words *stăpân*, *voievod*, *jupan*, *boier*, and others). Almost 8% of the Romanian words are of old Slavic origin (cf.E.Petrovici). The “Slavization” of toponymy (see above).

Main suffixes of old Slavic origin:

- ava: *Bârzava, Târnava, Dumbrava, Oreava*;
- ea: *Buŧtea, Corpadea, Cungrea, Dracea, Drincea, Dobrogostea*;
- ova: *Bucova, Cacova, Craiova, Tutova, Dubova*;
- enca: *Camenca*;
- ov: *Bascov, Braşov, Bucov, Cleanov, Cricov, Ilfov; Milcov, Snagov*;
- eţ: *Voroneţ*;
- iţa: *Bistriţa, Cameniţa, Ciulniţa, Pleniţa, Dâmboviţa, Ialomiţa*;
- iva: *Clopotiva, Craiva, Criva*;
- işte: *Branişte, Grădişte, Sălişte, Targovişte*;
- na: *Bazna, Blandiana, Cerna, Derna, Dorna, Coşna, Covasna, Putna*;
- ina: *Brodina, Campina, Crivina, Studina, Sulina*, and others.

Main Slavic origin prefixes are:

- pre: *Predeal, Preluca, Prelipca*;
- pri : *Prislop, Prihodişte, Priboi*;
- za : *Zăpodie, Zănoaga*;
- po : *Posada*.

- The presence for more of three centuries (from X-th century) of the peceneg and cuman is signaled by names of places (especially hydronyms) from the lower regions of S and E of the country. Characteristics are the hydronyms formed with the suffix – (*Iui, Desnăţui, Bădălui, Geamartalui, Călui, Bârlui, Teslui, Vaslui, Covurlui, Călmăţui, Gălăţui, Bercelui, Urlui, Matalui* (Conea, 1960:89). This origin is also of the anthroponyms *Basarab, Toxabă, Tâncabă, Turtabă* from which the *Romanian* names of cities formed (ex. *Toxobeni/Taxobeni* in Rep.of Moldavia, *Tâncăbeşti*).
- At the beginning of the 2nd millennia the process of Romanian ethno genesis concluded, the Romanian language, whose structure is exclusively Latin finalized (Romanian is a neo-Latin language); it also incorporated words from the *adstrat* (pre-Roman) as well as from the *supra-layer* (many of Slavic origin, then of other origin – Hungarian, Turkish, German and others). A part – as appellatives – form the basis of the names of places, together with the anthroponomy of various extractions (Slavic, Hungarian, German, Greek, Turkish, and others).
- A part of the Romanian toponyms were formed as a result of taking over, *in the spirit of our language* of names of places formed in other languages (Hungarian, German, Turkish, and others). Examples: *Timişoara / Temesvar*; *Bungard / Baumgarten* (meadow), *Medgidia / Medjidie*;
- It has been intervened also on *official* way (after 1878, 1918) in the provinces that entered in the structure of the Romanian modern state.

- Not all the foreign names have been modified (partially or totally). For example we have in the current nomenclature German toponyms – *Altringen, Bethausen, Eibenthal, Liebling, Lindenfeld, Neudorf* and others (in Banat). Totally there are 220 names of German origin or regarding Germans; 25 have been changed (by the Romanian authorities, after 1918), other 50 being changed by the Hungarian authorities (1867 – 1918) (Buza, 2002:147-148). In exchange there is one Hungarian toponym (officially accepted) *Balványos* (in Covasna county) which appeared after 1970.

Regional exemplification (IASI county). We find five toponymic layers (Ungureanu, Boamfă, 2006:28):

- - very old (pre-history antiquity) hydronims *Prut* and *Siret*;
- Old (the period of Romanian people forming and assimilation of migrating people) – *Iași, Miroslava, Socola*;
- Medieval (toponyms predominantly Romanian) *Tg. Frumos, Cotnari, Pașcani*;
- Modern (names of property entitlement villages – *Focuri, Coarnele Caprei, Fântânele* and others);

Contemporary, toponyms officially imposed, replacing the authentic toponyms (natural/popular) for example *Victoria* – former *Cârpiți*.

Large circulation, including international, also have the names of historic provinces;

- **Transylvania – Ardeal.** In the middle of the 12th century appear forms (adjectival) of *ultrasiluanus, transiluanus*, which then enter in names *Transilvane, Terra ultrasiluas* (designating for the Hungarians the land beyond the forests – *Silvania*, today's Sălaj). There have been in the older Byzantium documents (10th-11th centuries) aboriginal names such as *Ardil, Ardelia, Ardalia* (from an old radical *ardh/high land* see Ardeni; according to C. M. Ștefănescu, 1968) from which we reached the Hungarian form *Erdely* (forest land).
- **Tara Romaneasca – Muntenia – Walachia.** The historians affirm that *Tara Romaneasca* is older name than *Muntenia*; the geographers (I. Conea) brings arguments in favor of *Muntenia* (“the hearth of the South-Carpathian state was in the part of the mountain and hills from where it extended to the plains”). **Muntenia** comes from the collective name of *munteni* (given to both slopes of Meridian Carpathians from E of Olt). After 1359, it is imposed on the initial religious filial the name of **Walachia** (*Ungro-Walachia*, “the Walachia near Hungary). The Turks called it *Kara Iflak (Black Walachia)* in opposition to *Ac Iflak (White Walachia)*, name given to *Moldavia*.
- **Moldavia.** According to the tradition – from the name of the river, *Moldova*, and after E. Vartosu, 1956, from the German word *molde* (channel, bed, hole, cavity); see also *Vltava (Moldau* in German). *Baia*, the first capital of the principedom – called around 1300 *Civitas moldavensis*. In 1428 Johann Schiltberger called it *Claine Walachia*, putting it near *Walachia (Țara Românească)*. The principedom of *Moldavia* extended from the Carpathians to *Nistru*, then lost some of its parts in the favor of the empires that came closer (Ottoman during *Stefan cel Mare – Bugeac*, Austrian in 1774 – *Bucovina*, Russian in 1812 – *Basarabia*).

- **Oltenia.** It is a relatively recent name (since the 19th century); sooner, in 1750 (according to I. Donat) appears in a document of Gr. Ghica the name of *Oltul (Tara Oltului)* to designate this part of Tara Romaneasca. *The line of Olt has also been a limit between counties, indicating early a separate identity of this space*, the identity being strengthened by the Austrian occupation (1718 – 1739). Its name on the map of Fr. Schwants (1722) is *Valachiae Cis-Alutanae*.
- **Maramures.** The term is old enough, 1199, related to a hunt (here) of the (Hungarian) king Emeric, then designating a royal forest (here); in the first half of the 14th century appears the name of the river Mara as *Maramors, fluvium Maramorosii*, where it is deduced from that the region had this name. At origin it would be (according to N. Drăganu, 1933) two anthroponyms (Mara + Mores/olders).
- In medieval documents, more frequently in the 16th century also appears the Latin name *Marmatia* (kept in the name of the most important populated center of *Sighetu Marmatiei*)
- **Crisana.** The bookish term, starting from the three Cris, designating the historian province from V of the Apuseni mountains (including the mountain part crossed by the three rivers).
- **Banat.** Old name (since 1230), for the space between the Carpathians, Danube, Mures and Tisa; previously to 1177 a *Comitatus Timesiensis* is reminded. In 1718 *Temescher Banat* (then simply *Banat*), province of the Hapsburg Empire. Since the second half of the 19th century, “Banat keeps only its geographical meaning, which at the *Banat* Romanians becomes equal to country” (V. Tulescu, 1941 apud D.Oancea, 1984:34).
- **Bucovina.** Bookish term, given by the Austrians in 1774, to the “occupied” northwestern part of Moldavia, with origin in a local appellative (*bucovina=beech forest*).
- **Dobrogea.** Attested at the beginning of the 15th century *Shra-I Dobrugea* (Câmpia Dobrogei). Origin in the anthroponym Dobrotici: *Dobrotici-ili, Dobrugei-ili, Dobrogea* (according to the habit of creating regionisms after the name of the ruler).
- **Basarabia.** Designates at the beginning of (around 1400, according to I. Conea) only the southern part of the province of Moldavia to the Tsarist Empire. But even earlier (according to T. Porucic) *Basarabia* was called the steppe on the left of Danube and north of the Black Sea from Nipru and until the Iron Gates; the Tartars conquering this steppe called it *Bugeac* (that is corner, because they silted in them like in a corner). After the achievement of principality of Țara Românească (and the appearance of the name Walachia/Ungro-Walachia), *Basarabia* restrained to the S of the province which bears the name today, being replaced later with the Turkish-Tartar name of *Bugeac*. And the Russians, in 1812, re-updated the old name giving it to the entire region between Prut and Nistru in order to mask “the kidnap” of a great part of the historian *Moldavia*.

3. THE OFFICIAL TOPONYMY

The second great problem is related to the intervention of officials over the toponymic coating, especially over the names of settlements - cities and villages - (oiconyms) and means of communication within them – streets, boulevards, markets, neighborhoods (urbanonyms, odonyms). Given the limited time, we will stop over the modification of oiconyms. These interventions are obvious, in the Romanian space after 1878, the year of the state independence and obviously the strengthening of control over the territory. The development of postal services, press, cartography, imposed a “verification” of the existing nomenclature and its enrichment with names meant to strengthen the national conscience, with terms such as *Independența* (1887), *Unirea* (1909). The occasion has been granted by the successive property conferring (the first in 1864), including related to the colonization of Dobrogea, actions that had as effect the *apparition of new settlements*.

- by using atypical terms (with abstract character): *independența* / independence, *victoria* / victory, *progresul* / progress, *libertatea* / liberty and so on;
- the “transplant” of some oiconyms from the S of the Danube, reminding of the fights in the independence war: *Smârdan*, *Plevna*, *Grivița*, *Nicopole* – names given to some villages at great distance from the Danube (for example in Botoșani county, Vaslui county). Unwanted effects (see the Bulgarian linguistic opinions, i.e. I.Duridanov).
- Diachronic “transplants” (few of them). *Roma* (Botoșani county), *Dacia* (Botoșani, Satu Mare, Brașov counties);
- using the name of the Romanian army special units: *Cavaliers*, *Dorobanti*, *Rosior*, *Hunters*.
- using names of personalities a). Until 1947 – cultural, personalities, waivodes, even legendary characters (Aprodu Purice, Dochia) political persons, representatives, members of royal family.
- b). In the communist period: names of the communist “hagiography” (heroes of the working class.); leaders of social movements in the middle ages – Gh. Doja, Horia, Cloșca, Crișan – and in the 19th century (revolutions from 1821 and 1848; with accent on the left elements – see N. Bălcescu).
- *NORM: There were used the names of personalities no longer living.*
- The official toponymy reduced the variety of natural/popular toponymy appealing to several (7) so called functional *grilles* more obviously (completely) in the communist period and partially, before and after it.

1. **The political grille** censored/censors names that “come from” institutions or names of personalities that are “non-corresponding” in the authorities’ vision. “Unmotivated” eliminations also appeared (ex. name Pădureni instead of Brăteni, the last place name remindful of important Romanian politician family Brătianu).

2. **The religious grille** – active in the communist period. It has been partially used (not all of the names of places have been eliminated. Ex. Sfântu Gheorghe / *Saint George* (oikonoms in Călărași, Covasna and Tulcea counties)

3. **The social grille**; “winnowed” the social aspects revealed by the toponymy (*Salahori* / *Hacks*, *Haimanale* / *Picaroons*, *Tâlhărești* / *Theft*, *Flămânzeni* / *Hunger*, *Clăcași* / *Serfs...*).

4. **The ethnic grille** – the elimination of ethnonyms which “could create or maintain discriminations regarding minorities”. Most of them were names of gypsy villages – *Lingurari*, *Ursari/Bear Leaders*, *Gypsy* – and others (Nicolae, 2006:163).

5. **The economic grille** – eliminated those names that consigned the non-productive character of some lands (from the area of the cities). *Glodurile/Sludges*, *Găunoasa/Hollow*, *Valea Seacă/Dry Valley*, *Secătura / Varlet*, *Putreda / Putrid* and others.

- The determinative – *Târg / Fair*, attached to some names in Moldavia (those little fairs/târgușoare analyzed by Prof. Victor Tufescu, 1942) has also been eliminated.

6. **The ethic grille** – eliminated the names with indecent, injurious, denigrating character for the respective village community. It worked “since ancient time” (more precisely, after 1800).

7. **The esthetic grille** – removed the names considered “ugly” for two reasons: a). either fear (Dragon, Bones, Bloody. and so on); b). or “came from” “unfitted” animal names (Pig’s Fen – *Bălteni*, Bull’s Valley – *Păltiniș*, Bull’s Mouth – *Vedea*, Great Ox – *Viișoara*, Gopher - *Poponeți* – today *Fulga* – and others.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The modification of the official nomenclature is a process with a certain age, accelerated in the period of 1948 – 1989 given the awareness of the communist power about the formative function of toponymy (imposing of values according to the communist ideals/ideology). Among the most important consequences there are the following two:

a) A breakage from the history (maintaining the name – clear proof of continuity; the erasure of past’s traces, the reconstruction of the society’s base were also pursued.

b) The concentration of the configurative variety of the country’s toponymy; belong to neutral names with reduced distinct value or null value (for example more villages named *Siret*) There are also exceptions, going back to individualized forms (for example *Băița de sub Codru*, *Groșii Țibleșului*, *Călinești – Oaș* and others). The elimination of “picturesque” names (like *Cacaleții*) is justified in a period in which mass media is “self-ruling”.

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