ON THE ROMANIAN TERM *STEJAR*

Ana-Maria BOTNARU
"Spiru Haret" University, Bucharest

Abstract

In this article we sketch the linguistic and extra-linguistic micro-monograph of an important word in the Romanian forest terminology: *stejar/oak-tree*. First, we discuss the possible reasons why *stejar* might be inherited from the substratum, and not borrowed from Bulgarian (as most dictionaries agree). Then we discuss map no. 417 from the Regional Linguistic Atlas of Romania. We also mention the lexical family of the word, as well as its toponymical and anthroponymical "echoes". Then we briefly explain the mythological and historical significance of the oak-tree in our culture, as well as illustrate the poetic value of the word.

Key words: *oak-tree, etymology, toponym, anthroponym, mythology*

Résumé

Dans cet article, on fait une ébauche de la monographie linguistique et extralinguistique d'un mot très important de la terminologie roumaine de la forêt : *stejar/(la) chêne*. Premièrement, on discute des motifs possibles pour lesquels *stejar/chêne* pourrait être hérité du substrat et non pas emprunté du bulgare (comme le précise la grande majorité de dictionnaires). Ensuite on discute la charte n^{o} 417 de l'Atlas Linguistique Roumain sur régions. On mentionne aussi la famille lexicale du terme, comme ses échos toponymiques et anthroponymiques. Puis, on explique en bref la signification mythologique et historique du chêne dans notre culture, en illustrant aussi la valeur poétique de ce mot.

Mots-clés: *chêne, étymologie, toponyme, anthroponyme, mythologie*

In *The Dictionary of the Romanian Language* (by the Romanian Academy), the word *stejar/oak-tree* appears followed by an extended definition (description and subspecies):

stejar m. n., pl. *stejari* and (pop.) *stejeri* – "name given to several tree species in the fagacaeae family, up to 50 m tall, with straight body, wide head, small and clustered flowers, whose fruit is acorn and whose strong and hard wood is widely used in industry and constructions, etc.":

BDD-A3810 © 2010 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:01:11 UTC)

1. (and in the collocations: “stejar pedunculat” [Engl. *Pedunculate oak*], “stejar de luncă” [Engl. *Meadow oak*]) – “large and strong tree, with wide head and deep roots, very common in the hill and plain areas; (reg.) *gărin, goronaş, gorun, sledun, terş, tufan*” (*Quercus robur*) [Engl. *Pedunculate oak*]

2. (pop.) Romanian: *cer* (*Quercus cerris*) [Eng. *Turkey oak*]

3. (pop.) Romanian: *gârniță* (*Quercus frainetto*) [Eng. *Hungarian oak* or *Italian oak*]

4. (pop.) Romanian: *gorun* (*Quercus petraea*) [Eng. *Sessile oak*]

5. Romanian: *stejar roşu* (or *roşu american*) (*Quercus borealis*) [Eng. *Red oak*]

6. Romanian: *stejar brumăriu* (*Quercus pedunculiflora*) [Engl. *Whitish oak*]

7. Romanian: *stejar pufos* (*Quercus pubescens*) [Eng. *Downy oak*]

The linguistic atlases and the regional glosaries provide extended lists of phonetic variants, which indirectly demonstrate that the oak is widely spread and known: *stajar, stăjar, stăjer, stâjar, stâjer, stânjar, stânjer, steajar, sterjer, strajer, străjar, străjer, şteajer, ştejar, ştejer, ştijar, ştojar, trăjer*.

The lexicographic sources do not agree on the etymology of “stejar”: *The Dictionary of the Romanian Language* (by the Romanian Academy) indicates “etymology unknown”, while other important dictionaries (CADE, DER, DEX – see bibliography) consider the word to have come from the Bulgarian language: *stežer*.

One cannot rule out the substratum[1] hypothesis, the logic of the historical argument is compelling – in Romanian, *all mountain tree names* are: either **(a)** age-old, before Latin (e.g. *jep* [juniper]), or **(b)** inherited from the substratum (e.g. *brad* [fir-tree]), or **(c)** inherited from Latin (e.g. *pin* [pine], *fag* [beech], *frasin* [ash]). The hypothesis of the Bulgarian origin is not endorsed by the geographical argument either: the oak-tree is spread and known *on the whole Romanian territory*, not in the Southern part of the

[1] Brâncuş, 2004, p. 153.

BDD-A3810 © 2010 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:01:11 UTC)

country alone. Consequently, the Bulgarian origin of the Romanian word *stejar* is highly improbable, despite it being taken over and passed on by most Romanian dictionaries.

As far as its synonyms are concerned, we have the following picture: *gârniță* comes either from Bulgarian or from Serbian; the same is true for *gorun* (or it maybe inherited from the substratum[2]); *tufan* and *ghindar* are formed in Romanian (*tufă* + ***an***, *ghindă* + ***ar***, respectively), and *tufă* is a word of Latin origin.

The lexical family of *stejar* is very rich in derivative nouns (mainly collective nouns and diminutives): *stejărel*, *stejăraş*, *stejărărie*, *stejăret*, *stejărie*, *stejărime*, *stejăriş*, *stejărică*, *stejărişte*.

Now we shall comment on map no. 417 of the *Regional Linguistic Atlas of Romania* (*ALRR*) – *Walachia and Dobruja***,** question [1317]: "What's the name of the hard-wooded tree, from which staves are made... its seeds are eaten by swine in the forest?".

The most frequent answer is, of course, *stejar*, *stejari* (with multiple regional and local phonetic variants), this answer resulting in many lexical areas, of various dimensions.

Nearly half of the subjects mention the oak and a synonym: *ştejar*, *ştejari* or *gorun* [°769], *tufă* or *stejar, stejari* [°717], *tufan, tufani* or *stejar* [°789], *stejar, stejari* or *tufan, tufani*" [°809], *stejar, stejaruri* or *ghindar, ghindari* [°736].

It seldom happens that the subjects mention a synonym only, without mentioning the oak at all: *tufă*, *tufe* [°844, °845, °869], *tufan*, *tufani* [°818, °862, °864, °865].

Very rarely, in the Western side of Walachia, the subjects provide true synonymic series: *tufan*, *tufă*, *gârniță*, *ştegărică* [°766], *gârniță*, *tufan*, *ştejar(i)* [°760], *ştejar(i)*, *tufă*, *tufan* [°762].

[2] Idem, *ibidem*.

BDD-A3810 © 2010 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:01:11 UTC)

The toponyms[3] derived from or compound with *stejar*, although not numerous, are spread on the entire Romanian territory: *Stejar* (Ar[4]), *Stejaru* (Bc, Cț, Gj, Il, Mh, Nț, Ot, Ph, Tr, Tm, Tl, Vs, If), *Stejarul* (Bc, Ph, Gj), *Stejari* (Ag, Gj), *Stejarii* (Iș), *Valea Stejarului* (Vl, Mm, Tm), *Stejera* (Mm), *Stejărenii* (Mș), *Popeşti-Stejari* (Gj), *Stejăreşti* (Sb), *Stejărel* (Hd), *Stejerelul* (Gj), *Stejeretu* (Ag), *Stejerei* (Gj).

The word *stejar* has "echoes" in the Romanian hydronymy[5], too – *Stejar*, *Stejaru*, *Stejerel*, *Stejeriu*, as well as in the anthroponymy[6] – *Stejaru*, *Stejărel*, *Stejeran*, *Stejerean*, *Stejereanu*.

Interestingly, the Romanian word *stejar/oak-tree* is inherited from the substratum, while the word naming its fruit, *ghindă/acorn* is inherited from Latin: *glans*, *-ndis*.

One cannot skip mentioning the rich mythological significance of the oak-tree[7], which holds an important place in the life and spirituality of Romanians, who consider the oak a "totemistic tree" – second only to the fir-tree (cf. R. Vulcănescu[8]).

"A long cultural tradition certified this tree as a symbol of the physical and psychic force, a symbol of the evelasting and the majestic. […] Axis mundi, ensuring the communication between the three worlds: subterranean, terrestrial, celestial. […] Metaphor of the man – undefeated by fate, allegory of his moral strength"[9].

The historical argument is equally important, underlying the significance of the oak-tree for the Romanians during history: "The oak-tree

---

[3] The toponyms mentioned in this paper are taken from Gheorghe Bolocan, *Dicționar invers al numelor de localități din România*, Craiova, Editura Universitaria, 2002.

[4] The abbreviations given in round brackets represent the names of the Romanian counties.

[5] The hydronyms mentioned in this paper are taken from Gheorghe Bolocan, Iustina Burci, Elena Șodolescu-Silvestru, Ion Toma, *Dicționar invers al numelor de ape din România*, Craiova, Editura Universitaria, 2006.

[6] The anthroponyms mentioned in this paper are taken from Iorgu Iordan, *Dicționar al numelor de familie românești*, București, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1983.

[7] Evseev, 1997, p. 439-441.

[8] Idem, *ibidem*, p. 439.

[9] Idem, *ibidem*, p. 440.

BDD-A3810 © 2010 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:01:11 UTC)

represents the persistence and continuity of a people's life and deeds: the oak-tree in Borzeşti, Horea's durmast in Ţebea"[10].

One of the most astounding poems in the Romanian philosophical poetry is "Gorunul"[11] [The Durmast] by Lucian Blaga, an author who makes this tree a symbol of the common destiny of both tree and man.

Mihai Eminescu's poems[12] established the place of the oak-tree and its symbolism in Romanian poetry: "Sună codrul de *stejari*"[13]; "*Stejarii* par o strajă de giganţi ce-o înconjoară."[14]; "Luna trece prin *stejari*/ Urmând mereu în cale-şi."[15]

BIBLIOGRAPHY

*** *Atlasul lingvistic român pe regiuni*: *Muntenia şi Dobrogea*, vol. III, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei Române, 2001.

Bolocan, Gheorghe (coord), *Dicţionar invers al numelor de localităţi din România*, Craiova, Editura Universitaria, 2002.

Bolocan, Gheorghe, Burci, Iustina, Şodolescu-Silvestru, Elena, Toma, Ion, *Dicţionar invers al numelor de ape din România*, Craiova, Editura Universitaria, 2006.

Brâncuş, Grigore, *Istoria cuvintelor*, Bucureşti, Editura Fundaţiei România de Mâine, 2004.

Evseev, Ivan, *Dicţionar de magie, demonologie şi mitologie românească*, Timişoara, Editura Amarcord, 1997.

Iordan, Iorgu, *Dicţionar al numelor de familie româneşti*, Bucureşti, Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1983.

Vianu, Tudor (coord.), *Dicţionarul limbii poetice a lui Eminescu*, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei, 1968.

[10] Evseev, 1997, p. 441.

[11] Published in volume in 1919.

[12] The quoted verses, from Mihai Eminescu's poems, are taken from Tudor Vianu, *Dicţionarul limbii poetice a lui Eminescu*, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei Române, 1968.

[13] *Opere* I, 146/4.

[14] *Opere* I, 152/9.

[15] *Opere* I, 186/21.

BDD-A3810 © 2010 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:01:11 UTC)

Vulcănescu, Romulus, *Mitologie română*, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei, 1985.

ACRONYMS

CADE = Candrea, I.A., Adamescu, Gheorghe, *Dicţionarul enciclopedic ilustrat*, Bucureşti, Editura „Cartea Românească”, 1926-1931.

DA = *Dicţionarul limbii române*, tomul I, partea I, *A-B*, Bucureşti, Socec, 1913; tomul I, partea a II-a, *C*, Bucureşti, Universul, 1940; tomul I, partea a III-a, *D-de*, Bucureşti, Universul, 1949; tomul II, partea I, *F-I*, Bucureşti, Imprimeria Națională, 1934; tomul II, partea a II-a, *J-lacustru*, Bucureşti, Universul, 1937; tomul II, partea a III-a, *Ladă-lojniță*, f.a.

DLR = *Dicţionarul limbii române*, serie nouă, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei, tomul VI, *M*, 1965-1968; tomul VII, partea I, *N*, 1971; tomul VII, partea a II-a, *O*, 1969; tomul VIII, *P*, 1972-1984; tomul IX, *R*, 1975; tomul X, *S*, tomul XI, partea I, *Ş*, 1978; tomul XI, partea a II-a, *T*, 1982-1983; tomul XII, partea I, *Ţ*, 1994; tomul XII, partea a II-a, *U*, 2002, tomul XIII, partea I şi a II-a, *V* şi W, *X*, *Y*, 1997-2005; tomul XIV, *Z*, 2000; tomul I, partea a III-a, *D*, 2006.

DER = Ciorănescu, Alexandru, *Dicţionarul etimologic al limbii române*, Bucureşti, Editura Saeculum, 2002.

DEX = *Dicţionarul explicativ al limbii române*, Bucureşti, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, 1996.

BDD-A3810 © 2010 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:01:11 UTC)