THE ETYMOLOGIC STRUCTURE OF ROMANIAN MYTHONYMS (I)

Petre Gheorghe BÂRLEA
gbarlea@yahoo.fr
Ana Maria PANȚU
apantu@hotmail.com

Abstract:
A monographic study of Romanian mythonyms cannot ignore the problem of the etymological strata from which the corpus of these terms originates. Such an analysis is necessary primarily in order to establish, from this point of view as well, the place of this special area of Romanian onomastics within the Romanian lexical system. From such a perspective we can estimate the extent to which mythonyms confirm the general etymologic structure of Romanian vocabulary and to what extent the terms designating mythical characters in our fairytales are specifically Romanian.

Keywords:
Mythonyms, etymological analysis, etymological strata, substratum elements, the Latin stock.

1. Between description and etymological analysis

The internal structure of the lexical area of mythonyms can change, to a certain extent, the distribution of the thematic groups and subgroups from the onomasiological make-up of the inventory of mythonymic terms. This is possible because in the semantic core of some apparently "neutral" proper names, seemingly non-analysable at the level of their significance, one can discover common names originally designating, plants, animals, social relations, etc., namely entities which have not been integrated in the respective subgroups, but solely in the subgroup of anthroponyms, pure and simple. The revelation is so much more interesting as the corrupted forms of names circulating in the literary folklore of other nations, before they became fixed in Romanian written versions, hinder the immediate

deciphering of their profound significations. For example, *Alimon Voinicul (Alimon the Sturdy) is a* personage we can ascribe to the category of semi-heroes, meaning the group of "human beings endowed with exceptional qualities", though only on the basis of the appositional epithet and, alternatively, of the information contained in the respective text. By means of etymological analysis, we first notice that a phonetic change occurred at the end of the word *Alimon* (probably by analogy with *Gedeon*, *Ion*, *Machidon* a. s. o.), since the initial form was *Aliman*. This means, in several languages where the word occurs as a surname anthroponym[1], "the German", belonging to the affluent series of surnames of this type (cf. Rom. *Rusu* – the Russsian, *Neamțu* – the German, *Tătaru* – the Tartar, *Turcu* – the Turk, *Sârbu* – the Serb a. s. o.). From the etymological studies of Bogdan Petricescu-Hasdeu we learn that in Turkish the term was also used in a special sense, of "horse thief" or "outlaw".[2] In the same way, *Cotoşman* means "big tomcat", "castrated tomcat", a symbol of evil, of mischief (sometimes also in the role of a helpful companion), as the Slavic *kot* means "cat". In this way, the list of characters from the sphere of wondrous animals must be completed, as in the case of *Gasperiţa*, a species of arachnid (though also with the meaning of "gypsy-woman"), with *Hărău*, which means a species of predatory bird ("sparrow hawk, hen hawk") a. s. o. However, our research does not probe into the deep layers of a proper etymological analysis, as a single sub-series of mythonymic terms would take hundreds of pages, without necessarily leading to the elucidation of the origins and significations of some terms. In fact, some of the words in our inventory have been quite amply written about in the course of time, though the conclusions advanced by reputable linguists have not been unanimously

---

[1] Cf. Gr. *Alamanas*, It. *Alamano*, Bg. *Alamanoi* a. s. o., I. Iordan, 1983, *s.v.*

[2] B. P. Hasdeu, EMR, s.v. *Aliman*. This is also a relatively frequent procedure attested in studies of historical semantics. Even in Romanian mythology or only in the more recent epic folklore, "negative" characters are called *Jidovi*, *Lifte* ("Poles"), *Muscali* ("Moscow people"). The character *Tartacot*, of the series of deformities seems to be realted to *Tartacan* 'Tartar'.

accepted.[3] What we propose to do is a *description* of the etymologic sources of Romanian mythonyms, with a view to achieving a clarification according to the criterion of the diachronic linguistic strata which contributed to the configuration of the lexical system of the Romanian language, with a special focus on this onomastic nominal segment. To this effect, we consider as valid solutions, at least from a strictly methodological point of view, the information provided by etymological or mixed dictionaries.[4] It is only in certain, more debatable situations that we have proceeded to confront the sources and to broaden the area of documentation, resorting, for etymological aspects, to specialist monographic studies.[5]

Therefore our approach is aimed at creating a panoramic view of the diatopic, diastratic and diachronic configuration of the inventory of Romanian mythonyms, according to the following descriptive scheme:

1. The selection of terms from each etymological stratum in the whole list compiled for our working corpus, without going into details regarding the options of the authors of lexicographic instruments concerning the ascertaining of word origins. This only happens for the cases in which the same term is recorded with different etymologies in different lexicographic sources or when the term under discussion does not seem to fit, semantically and formally, the classification proposed by authors.

2. The analysis of the semantic content of the terms fit for completing the onomasiological groups established in the previous chapter and the dissembling of the phono-morphological mechanisms which

---

[3] It is the case of the term *Babe*, cf. EMR, s.v., or the case of the word *copil*, for which see the book by Ion Coteanu and Marius Sala, 1987, *Etimologia şi limba română. Probleme-Principii*, Bucureşti: Editura Academiei.

[4] We have used the etymological indications offered by DLR, MDE, EMR and DEX.

[5] Cf. Iorgu Iordan, *op. cit.*; George Giuglea, 1983, *Cuvinte româneşti şi romanice...*, Edition by Florenţa Sădeanu, Bucureşti: Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică; Ion Pătruţ, 1984, *Nume de persoane şi nume de locuri româneşti*, Bucureşti: Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică ş.a.

directed the evolution of the word towards its secondary, figurative meaning placing it in a clear-cut series of mythonyms.

3. Finally, we shall make the customary statistic calculations, so as to make it possible to obtain, as well, a quantitative confirmation of the qualitative importance which a subgroup of terms has in the general structure of Romanian mythonyms.

Before applying this analytical scheme, two more specifications should be made.

As any etymological analysis, deciphering the meanings and dissembling the phonetic, lexical and morphological structure of mythonyms presupposes not only the chronological incursions into the ancient stages of their evolution, but also their correct placing into the ethno-cultural space. In other words, the principles and methods of linguistic geography and of dialectology prove to be extremely useful, as in any study referring to language history. For example, to decipher such a name as *Istian Viteazul* (Istian the Brave) we need not probe into very deep strata, such as Sanskrit or Greek and Roman sources, although the term is also related to some of these. It suffices for us to know that the respective name circulates in Transylvania as a Hungarian variant of the anthroponym *Ştefan*, turned into *Istian*, in standard literary language, and into *Istian*, *Istina*, in dialectal forms (after the model *Ştefania/Ştefana*). Otherwise, thus we can also explain its original Greek source (*Stephanos* "the crowned one, the king") as well as the one dialectally attested.[6] The same thing happens with dialectal terms from Walachia, Banat, Moldavia, phonetically and morphologically adapted to the specificity of the Romanian language, but also filtered through the influence of the neighbouring languages, by direct contact, from the ancient to the recent strata of Romanian lexis, with Bulgarian, Turkish, Serbian, Croatian, Ukrainian a. s. o. We would not

---

[6] To explain a certain etymon by arguments of a dialectal order, I have used, among others, Matilda Caragiu-Marioţeanu, 1975, *Compendiu de dialectologie română (nord- şi sud-dunăreană)*, Bucureşti: Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică.

know, for example, that the ornithological series needs to be completed with names such as *Boghez/Boghelţ* or with *Socol*, if we did not learn that in Slavic languages there are forms such as *Boheš/Bogusz*, i.e. "owl", and *sokol*, "hen hawk, sparrow hawk", etc.

Finally, we should specify that that the etymological analysis must be confined to the general linguistic frameworks, insofar as the relations with the mythological plane are indirectly derived from these, through the evolvement of the meaning of the common names underlying proper names, and, as in any study of ethno-linguistics, through deciphering their significations and mythological symbolism. If we referred only to the last two examples given above, it is clear that we must establish the following relations:

Boghelţ – owl – the symbol of wisdom, etc.
Sokol – hawk – the symbol of courage, the aspiration for heights, etc.

A tighter or, so to say, a more mechanical relation, is not possible. In the initial stage of our research, we attempted to establish a parallel between the etymologic strata of Romanian vocabulary and the mythological strata proper, despite our awareness that, in the lack of old documentary sources which might attest the first stages in the evolution of the respective areas for both domains, the terms under discussion can only be "fixed" through reconstitution. Or, precisely because the origin of mythological linguistics was comparative-historical grammar, by means of which old, common forms of different languages are reconstituted on the basis of the new material existing in modern languages, and precisely because its principles and methods have been transferred to comparative mythology, we considered that the approach can be applied to the material available in Romanian mythology. This approach has proved inefficient, or, in any case, deficient in terms of the concrete evidence which would have needed to be analysed. On the one hand, the oldest Romanian myths have been conserved only through ritual reminiscences, through superstitions, beliefs and narrative nuclei tardily attested: some of them at the beginning

109

of the 17th century, in the writings of D. Cantemir, very few later than that and most of them in the collections realised in the second half of the 19th century, albeit on the basis of somewhat earlier documentary fragments. On the other hand, the linguistic covering in which the ancient mythological nuclei was passed on to us was adapted to the forms of the epoch in which they were collected and archived in written/recorded versions, in conformity with the laws of diachronic linguistics. Thus, for ancient deities from the solar series, *Gebeleizis*, *Zalmoxis* or the goddess *Bendis*, only the names were conserved in ancient historical documents, while the narrative structure of the Romanian fairytales which took over the characters adapted them to modern times, as *Soare* (Sun), *Lună* (Moon), *Sfântul Soare* (Holy Sun), *Sfânta Lună* (Holy Moon). The totemism in the lycanthropic series is rendered by *Lupul* (The Wolf) – symbol of courage; the symbolism of the circular sanctuary of Sarmizegetusa has been preserved in its old state solely as archaeological evidence, while the mythical characters become *De cu Seară* (Nightfall Man), *Zorilă* (Dawn-Man), etc., and the lesser deities, such as the naiads or the later civilizing heroes are *Zânele* (Fairies), *Feţi-Frumoşii* (Princes Charming), etc.

In the oldest Romanian fairytale preserved, *Povestea lumii de demult* (The Tale of the World of Yore), the foundational characters of Romanian cosmogony are *Muntele* (the Mountain), *Vânturile* (the Winds) *Vârful cel mai de Sus* (the Highest Peak) and others. But these are terms of Latin origin, even more, in their evolved, Romanian-adapted variant, which means that we cannot establish a direct relation between the ancientness of the Geto-Dacian cosmogonic myth, i.e. pre-Latin, and the Romanian mythonyms of Latin origin. The chronological difference between them is of at least a millennium, but the disparate attestations even indicate a chronological distance of one thousand five hundred – two thousand years.

As for the methodological aspects, with special regard to this perspective on the analysis of mythonyms, I have used, for general

problems of etymology, the studies of Th. Hristea, Ion Coteanu, Marius Sala and others.[7]

One of the most difficult problems in the analysis of the appurtenance of mythonyms to a certain mythological stratum has been their multiple structure, which is the fact that, as I was showing in a previous chapter, more than a half of the inventory of mythonyms is made up of compound names, consisting of two, three or even more terms. Of course, it is by no means obligatory for all the component elements to belong to the same etymological stratum. On the contrary, it is almost paradigmatic of the appositive additions or the supplementary characterising epithets to derive from a lexical stratum situated in a later stage of the name's evolution, according to the principle of the permanent sedimentations and transformations specific to the genesis of myths. More often than not, as it has been illustrated, the epithet expresses the same thing as the determiner, but the storytellers of later epochs lost the original meaning of the key-word, which they therefore explain by a new term, in current use at that time, even if, without knowing it, they actually say the same thing. In the subgroups established in this chapter we have graphically marked these situations, by bracketing the element belonging to an etymological stratum other than the one in which I have classified the key element.

2. Etymological strata of Romanian mythonyms

The valid operation remains the etymological reconstitution of the lexical strata valid for shorter time spans – a few hundreds of years – and for more restricted ethno-linguistic and mythic-folkloric areas, i.e. the territory of ancient Dacia, by referring to the customary influences from the neighbouring regions, respectively South-East Europe, the Balkans, reaching as far as Western Europe and the Middle East, and by highlighting

---

[7] Th. Hristea, 1972, *Probleme de etimologie. Studii. Articole. Note*, Bucureşti: Editura Ştiinţifică. For the study by I. Coteanu and M. Sala, cf. *supra*, note 3.

some reminiscences and evolutions from the mythology of classical Antiquity and the Middle Ages. The working procedure, for all these cases, remains the one validated by comparative historical grammar and comparative historical mythology. Etymological reconstitutions – for whole strata and for individual terms, when the situation requires – are made by proceeding from the current attestations to the ancient forms, by recourse to an interdisciplinary analysis, meant to fill in the "blanks" in the structure of some mythonyms.

2.1. Substratum elements

The difficulties attending the reconstitution of the stock of substratum elements, because of their antiquity and of the total lack of documents of the time, should also characterize the sphere of mythonyms in Romanian vocabulary. It is most fortunate for us that the criteria for delimitating the words in this stock[8] are efficient enough for the terms we are directly concerned with. Considering that the mythonyms represent, in principle, personifications of plants, trees, animals, mountains, waters, etc., the old forms were better attested because toponyms, hydronyms and phytonyms are among the most conservative elements in the lexical structure of a language:

Argeşul, Brad (Fir)*, Bucur, Ciută* (Hind, cf. Albanian *shut*), *Curpăn* (Tendril, cf. Albanian *Kurpen), Ciocârlie, Ciocârlan* (Lark), *Dunăre (Voinicul)* [Danube (*the Sturdy*)]*, Fărâmă (Piatră),* [Break (Stone)] *Gheonoaie* (cf. Albanian *Gjon* "owl", "woodpecker"), *Măzărel (Împărat)* [Little Pea (Emperor)]*, Moaşa (Eva), Gammer Moaşa (Iana), Moş (Adam), Moş (Ene), Moş (Gligor), Moş (Lăcustă), Moşii, Moşul, Moşul Codrilor, Mugurul (*cf. Albanian *mugull), Mureşul, Murg* (cf. Albanian *murg*), *Murgilă, Muşa, Oltul, Someşul.*

---

[8] The most convincing criteria were established by Cicerone Poghirc, in the chapter „Influenţa autohtonă" (The autochthonous influence) in *Istoria limbii române* (ILR), vol. II, Bucureşti: Editura Academiei, 1969, pp. 313-365.

As it can be seen, the autochthonous inventory of mythonyms[9] is relatively scarce, but is quite well defined thematically, insofar as it illustrates some stable onomasiological areas: names of plants[10] and animals, names of mountains and rivers, names of human relations, etc. The term *mal*, "the Romanian substratum word with the most certain attestation",[11] only occurs as a toponym proper or as a common name, whereas others, widely studied by specialists, do occur. Noteworthy, in this sense, is the mythonym *Dunăre (Voinicul)* [Danube (*the Sturdy*)], to which Gh. Ivănescu devoted a very pertinent study several years ago.[12] Numerous research studies have been devoted to *moş* (old father), with its cu mythonymic concretisations, *Moş (Adam)*, *Moş (Lăcustă,* i.e. Locust*)*, *Moş (Gligore)*, *Moşii*, *Moşul (Pădurii,* i.e. of the Wood*)*, etc., so much more as it also has gender derivatives (*moaşă, i.e. gammer*), cf. *Moaşa Eva* (also *Baba Eva*) or locative-abstract derivatives, *moşie* "country, land, region, farming land, etc.", cf. also the Albanian *motschë* and *moschë* "age", but also "old

---

[9] Among the numerous difficulties in reconstituting the substratum of the Romanian language there are the very terminological inconsistencies of the specialists. Al. Rosetti, in the 1969 edition, but also in the definitive one of 1978, of *Istoria limbii române*, uses the term "*autochthonous*" as a subdivision of the substratum, but then refers to the whole substratum, cf. „Acţiunea *subtratului*", at page 204; „Elementul *autohton*", at page 607, but „Traca şi ilira", at pages 219-230. In the lexicographic works in current use, such as MDE, the qualifier "autochthonous" is attributed both to the words inherited from the Thracian-Dacian substratum and to those formed subsequently from older roots, of diverse origins, that is to the ones commonly designated as "words formed on Romanian territory". Also, C. Poghirc observes that the correct term for this phase in the history of our language is that of "Geto-Dacian", more restricted to the fairly certain proto-Romanian corpus.

[10] The advantage consists especially in the fact that the famous glossaries recording Dacian words (from the 3rd – 4th centuries A.D., unfortunately) are, in fact, some fragments of writings about medicinal plants, etc. Hydronyms, oronyms and toponyms are recorded in treatises of history and geography.

[11] Cf. Cicerone Poghirc, 1969, p. 331.

[12] Cf. Gh. Ivănescu, 1958, „*Origine pré-indo-européenne des noms du Danube*", in: *Constributions onomastiques*, Bucureşti: Editura Academiei, I, pp. 125-139. Other studies have also treated the respective toponym from a mythological point of view; cf. Alina Jercan-Preda, 2010, p. 68.

woman". This last attestation explains why in Meglenoromanian there is only the feminine form, *moaşă*.[13]

In the category of words that can be interpreted as contributions revealed exclusively by etymological reconstruction there is *ghiuj* (decrepit old man) which, in the above-mentioned specialist treatises, is considered to belong most certainly to the Geto-Dacian stock. It is not to be found as such in our inventory of mythonyms, but it was proposed as a solution for the semantic interpretation of some anthroponyms of the type *Vâj* and *Vâje*.[14] But these are found in our mythonym *Vâjbaba* (the Old Hag). It is the correspondent from the Transylvanian variant (col. I. Pop-Reteganul, III, p. 59) of the fairytale *Ileana Cosânzeana* and it corresponds to *Mama Ciuma* (Mother Plague) of the stock fairytale (col. M. Pompiliu) or to *Baba Relea* (Evil Hag) of the Bukovina variant (col. G. Sbierea, p. 56). It is *Baba din fundul Iadului*, the "Hag of Hell's Bottom" (or *Marginea Lumei*, "the World's Edge", in other variants), the mistress of the nine-hearted horse. Lazăr Şăineanu, who records these hypostases, considers that in the Transylvanian dialect *Vâja* means "witch, ghost-woman",[15] whereas Iorgu Iordan puts forward other solutions. It may simply be a name of onomatopoeic origin, from the interjection *vâj!*, from which *vijelie* might have been derived, but it may also be a corrupted form of the adjectival noun *ghiuj*, of Thracian-Dacian origin, meaning "decrepit old man", with an *î*, pseudo-etymologically equated with *i*. There are attested forms such as *Vâjoi[1]* for "ghiuj" (decrepit old man), but also *Vâjoi[2]* as "swirling brook". On the other hand, there is also the Bulgarian *Važo*.[16] The fact that *Vâj-Baba* (Old Hag) would express in a pleonastic manner the same concept by two different words does not represent a counterargument for this

---

[13] Cf. Al. Rosetti, 1969, p. 272. For the history of the word, cf. also S. Puşcariu, *Limba română*, I, p. 172; Gr. Brâncuş, SCL, XVII, 1966, p. 213; M. Sala, SCL, VI, 1955, p. 140; C. Poghirc, 1969, p. 345.
[14] Cf. I. Iordan, 1983, s.v.
[15] L. Şăineanu, *op. cit.*, p. 640.
[16] *Apud* I. Irodan, *loc. cit.*

etymological interpretation, since in mythonymy, just as in toponymy, etc., aloglotic pleonasms represent a common phenomenon, as it was shown above.

In whole, the mythonyms in the substratum of the Romanian language constitute a quite well-established segment, by reference to the integral inventory of Romanian mythonyms and, on the other hand a segment which is convincing in terms of mythological symbolism, through the personification of plants, trees, animals, birds, of some oronyms and hydronyms and of some concepts regarding people's age[17], etc.

2.2. The Latin stock of Romanian mythonyms

From a quantitative point of view, the mythonymic segment of Latin origin is the most consistent, directly proportional with the general structure of Romanian lexis, from an ethnologic perspective. Qualitatively as well, this is the most fertile, because it facilitates the most phrases, periphrases, metaphorical formulations, based on a very wide range of onomasiological references. From this last point of view, we cannot even try to delimitate any thematic subareas, as we proceeded in the case of mythonyms derived from substratum elements, because the names of Latin origin cover practically all the big groups and all the subgroups and subseries from the onomasiological classification of the respective terms, without any existing tendency for the selection of a certain semantic type of words. We could conceivably observe that chromatic terms and several determinant semantic fields (celestial bodies, moments of the day, etc.) derive almost exclusively from Latin. This lexical affluence has its inconveniences, of a diachronic order. Not all the mythonymic terms of Latin origin come from Vulgar Latin and, on the other hand, the latter is, in

---

[17] In fact, not even in the case of mythonyms from the Geto-Dacian substratum, it is not these that selected a certain domain, but, quite the opposite, the fact that from the substratum words we only know those designating names of plants (thanks to the *glosses* of late Greek Antiquity) animals, hydronyms, oronyms etc., makes us identify a few mythonyms among them. Incidentally, the respective thematic areas are prone to mythological personification, but this mechanism affects the lexis of any other language.

its turn, divided according to certain periods.[18] Some terms belong to classical literary Latin, such as *malus and pirus*, which became *Măr* (Apple-tree) and *Păr* (Pear-tree) or *homo* and *bruma*, which became *Omul (Pământului)*, "Man (of the Earth)" and *Brumă* (hoar-frost). Others belong to late Vulgar Latin, such as *alapa* (for Latin *ala, -ae*), *formosus, -a, -um* (for literary Latin *bellus, -a, -um*), which became *Aripă Frumoasă* (Beautiful Wing). Some terms belong to even later periods, to the so-called "Danube Latin",[19] such as *frondia* (< *frons*, *-tis*), for *Frunză (de Măgheran)*, "Leaf (of Marjoram)". Finally, there are also two other important Latin sources – that of elevated Latin, that is of the terms borrowed much later, in scholarly ways, as well as the one of Romance languages, which serve as "connection", as an intermediary of the transition from Latin to Romanian. Both are part of the phenomenon of "re-Latinising" of the Romanian language.

Most terms were preserved as such throughout all of these stages. This refers to common names (nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs) turned into metaphoric proper names, symbolic of mythical characters. For example, *Apă Bună* (Good Water), *Aude Bine* (Hear Well), *Vede Bine*, (See Well), *Luna* (Moon), *Soarele* (Sun) *Steaua* (Star), etc. have been preserved as such since the Dacian-Roman period (cca. 105-271 A.D.), throughout the phase of Danube area Latin (the 4th – 5th centuries A.D.), the phase of common Romanian vernacular (the 5th – 8th centuries, that is prior to the separation of Aromanian from Daco-Romanian), the phase of medieval Romanian (the 9th – 17th centuries), up to that of modern and contemporary Romanian. Some terms still keep the characteristics of a certain phase,

---

[18] In the staging of the history of the Romanian language, I used as a point of reference the proposals of the collective of ILR, 1969, vol. I-II, cf. I, pp. 9-10, and II, pp. 15-18. Cf. also Al. Rosetti, 1979, I, and Fl. Dimitrescu (coord.), 1978, *Istoria limbii române*, Bucureşti: Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică.

[19] Cf. I. Fischer, 1975, *Latina dunăreană. Introducere în istoria limbii române*, Bucureşti: Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică. It treats of the Latin element of the 4th – 5th centuries North and South of the Danube.

which are not always easy to identify. In our classification, we have ignored these diachronic subdivisions, because we have not intended a study on the history of language.

We have adopted, as stated above, the etymological solutions offered by the lexicographic instruments in current use and have extended our area of research only in the case of some words, considered semantically unusual and hard to decipher:

*Agerul Pământului** (The Agile/Sprite of the Earth), *Aflatul, Alb Împărat* (Emperor White), *Alba Împărăteasa* (Empress White) *Apa Rea,* (Bad Water), *Argintar Galbeni Buni* (Silversmith Good Ducats), *Aripă Frumoasă* (Fair Wing), *Aude Bine,* (Hear Well), *Aude Rău* (Hear Badly), *Auraş Împărat* (Emperor), *Austru* (Southern Wind), *Barbu, Barbă Cot* (Ell-long Beard), *Bou (Bălanel)* (Ox, White Ox), *Bourean* (Young Ox), *Brumă* (Hoar-frost), *Bucăţica* (Tiny Tot), *Căldură* (Heat), *Chipăruş, Ciperi, Constantin, De către Ziuă* (Break of Day), *De către Seară, De cu Seară* (Falling Night), *Doamna (Chiralina*)* (Lady), *Doamna Florilor* (Lady of the Flowers), *Dumnezeu* (God), *Fata (din Dafin*)* (The Maid [of the Laurel]), *Fata Nevăzută, Neauzită, din Cer Căzută* (The Unseen/Unheard/Sky-fallen Maid), *Fata Rumpe Haine** (Tatter-Clothes Maid), *Fata Nenăscută de Om Nevăzută* (Unborn Maid Unseen by Man), *Faurul Pământului* (The Blacksmith of the Earth), *Făt Frumos cu Părul de Aur* (Golden-Haired Fair Youth/Prince Charming), *Făt Frumos din Lacrimă* (Tear-Born Fair Youth/Prince Charming), *Fătul (Babei)* ([The Hag's] Lad), *Fiul Iepei* (The Mare's Son), *Fiul Oii* (The Sheep's Son), *Fiul Vacii* (The Cow's Son), *Floarea (Codrilor)* (Flower [of the Woods]), *Floarea Florilor* (Flower of the Flowers/Flower Queen), *Floarea* (Flower), *Florea Înfloritul* (Blossomy Florea), *Florian, Florica, Floriţa, Foametea* (Famine), *Frântul* (The Crooked), *Freacă Pietre* (Rub Stones), *Frigul* (Cold), *Frigurosul* (Chilly), *Frumoasa Lumii* (Fairest of the World), *Frumoasele* (Fair Maids), *Frunză de Măghiran* (Leaf of Marjoram), *Galben de Soare* (Sunny Golden), *Gerul* (Frost), *Grâuşor de Aur* (Golden Little Wheat), *Greuceanu,*

Inimă Putredă (Rotten Heart)*, Împăratul Alb* (White Emperor)*, Împăratul Galben* (Yellow Emperor)*, Împăratul Negru* (Black Emperor)*, Împăratul Roşu* (Red Emperor)*, Împăratul Verde* (Green Emperor)*, Lăcustă Ler* Împărat* (Locust Ler Emperor)*, Lungilă* (Long Legs)*, Lupul* (Woolf)*, (Mama*) Pădurii, (Mama) Soarelui, Mama Vânturilor* (Mother of the Forest/Sun/Winds)*, Măiastra*(*Wondrous)*, Mângiferu, Măr (Împărat)* (Apple [Emperor])*, Mezilă, Miez de Noapte* (Midnight)*, Miazănoapte* (North)*, Mintă (Creaţă)* (Peppermint/Curled Mint)*, Mintea* (Mind)*, Mucea fãr' de Păr* (Baldy Snotty)*, Mustaţă de Aur* (Golden Moustache)*, Barbă de Mătase* (Beard of Silk)*, Mutu* (Dumb)*, Nămiaza Nopţii* (Dead of Night)*, Necuratul* (Evil One)*, Negru Împărat* (Emperor Black)*, Nour Împărat* (Emperor Cloud)*, Ochi Râde-Ochi Plânge* (Laughing Eye-Weeping Eye)*, Omul Pământului* (Man of the Earth)*, Omul cât Şchiopul* (Tiny Man)*, Barba cât Cotul* (Elbow/Ell-long Beard)*, Omul din Lună* (Man in the Moon)*, Papură Împărat* (Reed Emperor)*, Pasăre Măiastră* (Wondrous Bird)*, Păr (Împărat)* – Pear (Emperor)*, Pătru Făt Frumos* (Peter Prince Charming)*, Peneş Împărat* (Emperor)*, Pescăruş* (Seagull)*, Petre Cel Frumos* (Fair Peter)*, Petrea Căţelei* (Peter of the Bitch-dog)*, Petrea Făt Frumos, Petrea Piperiul* (Peter Pepper)*, Petrea Şchiopul* (Lame Peter)*, Petrea (Tâlhariul)* (Highwayman)*, Petrea (Voinicul)* (the Sturdy)*, Petru Firicel* (Leaflet)*, Picioare de Cal* (Horse Legs)*, Pier de Căldură* (Die of Heat)*, Pier de Frig* (Die of Cold)*, Pipăruş* (Little Pepper)*, Pipăruş Petru, Pipăruş (Viteazul)* (the Brave)*, Por Împărat* (Emperor Por)*, Regina Florilor* (Flower Queen)*, Roşu Împărat* (Emperor Red)*, Sân Georz* (Saint George)*, Sân Petru* (Saint Peter)*, Sântana* (Saint Ann)*, Sântilie* (Saint Elijah)*, Sumedru* (Saint Demeter)*, Sânta Duminică* (Saint Sunday)*, Serilă* (Nightfall)*, Scutură Munţii* (Shake Mountains)*, Setosul* (Thirsty)*, Soarele* (Sun)*, Sorin, Sora Crivăţului* (The North Wind's Sister)*, Sora Soarelui* (The Sun's Sister)*, Spată Lată* (Broad Back)*, Spic de Grâu* (Wheat Spike)*, Spic de Aur* (Golden Wheat Spike)*, Statu Palmă Barbă Cot* (Palm Tall Ell Beard)*, Strâmbă Lemne* (Bend Wood)*, Şchiopul cu Barba cât Cotul* (Ell-

118

Beard Lame Dwarf)*, Urmă Galbină* (Yellow Trace)*, Uşor ca Vântul-Greu ca Pământul* (Light as the Wind, Heavy as the Earth)*, Vânt Împărat* (Wind Emperor)*, Vântul cel mai de Sus* (Highest Wind)*, Vântoasele* (the Whirlwinds)*, Vârful cel mai de Sus* (The Highest Peak)*, Vede Bine* (See Well)*, Verde Împărat* (Green Emperor)*, Vulturul* (Eagle)*, Zâna Florilor* (Flower Fairy)*, Zâna Munţilor* (Mountain Fairy)*, Zâna Soarelui* (the Sun Fairy)*, Zâna Stelină* (Starry Fairy)*, Zâna Verbină* (Verbena Fairy)*, Zâna Zânelor* (Fairy/Queen of the Fairies/Fairy-Godmother).

Even from a general survey of the above sub-inventory we can notice that the problems of interpretation are much more numerous than the ones mentioned in the preamble to this subchapter. There we discussed the problems in selecting and including the terms in the "Latin" class of mythonyms, problems which we have simplified as much as possible, by renouncing the sub-classifications according to the chronologic and dialectal criterion. Unfortunately, these recur, under different forms, in the analysis of the significations of some mythical character names, without whose clarification we could not even convincingly complete the etymological under discussion.

A first problem is that of the usual "corrupted" forms, more precisely those which evolved according to later dialectical and historical laws, at phonetic, morphologic, lexical and semantic levels, until the complete loss of the connection with their initial Latin etymon.

A second problem is linked to the lexical-morphologic evolutions even in the standard literary language, by suffix derivation, so active in Latin and Romanian.[20] Though not very productive here, it becomes complicated by association with other phenomena.

From the Latin Accusative *florem*, we have inherited the Romanian *floare* (flower), respectively the mythonyms *Florea* and *Floarea* (with the

---

[20] Fortunately for us, in the case of mythonyms, suffix derivation proved less productive, so the disassembling of the basis of a form complicated by derivational mechanisms (often also combined with compounding and conversion) was less fastidious here.

respective vocalic alternation), but also the derivatives /diminutives *Florica, Floriţa, Florian,* as well as the compound forms (pleonastic) *Florea Înfloritul* (Blossomy Florea), with a para-synthetic derivation in the second term. However, these are infinitely more easily analysable than the ones which evince the very first problem enounced here, that concerning the dialectal phonetic and morphologic evolutions. When we say *Petrea Piperiul* (Peter Pepper), we understand that, originally, they were the Romanian terms *Petre* and *piper*, respectively the Latin ones *petra/Petrus*[21] and *piper*. The problem is that, in some Transylvanian and Moldavian dialects, the labial consonants become palatalised, so that *Piper* becomes *Chiper*, then, by diminutive derivation, *Chipăruş*, which would be more suggestive of "chiparosul" (cypress) (more mythologizing) rather than of "pepper". But from the context we understand that it refers to the condiment granule. What is not understood is the form *Ciperi*, an enigma solved later (though not definitively, we should believe,), by the philological analysis carried out by Iorgu Iordan.[22]

But then compounding complicates almost permanently these etymological interpretations. If we say *Negru Împărat*, (Emperor Black) things are all right, as both terms belong to the same language, and, even more, to the same period in the evolution of Latin, which is a rare case in mythonymy. But for *Pipăruş Viteazul* (Little Pepper the Brave) or *Petrea Voinicul*, (Peter the Sturdy), the first term is Latin, while the other is of Slavic-Magyar and Slavic origin, respectively. It is the same with *Frunză de Măghiran* (Leaf of Marjoram), where the second term is the German *Mageran* (a certain *oregano* species), with *Sora Crivăţului* (The North Wind's Sister) (Latin + Slavic), etc. In *Agerul Pământului*, (The Agile/Sprite of the Earth), the first term comes from the valid universal

---

[21] Cf. also Greek πέτρος/Πέτρος, Macedonean *bedros/Bedros*, French *pierre/Pierre* etc. On this antanaclasis is based the assertion attributed to Jesus Christ: „*Tu es Petrus et super hanc petram aedificabo meam ecclessiam*" "You are Peter and on this stone I will build my church".

[22] I. Iordan, 1983, s.v. *Ciperi*.

classical Latin stock, since *agilis* (Acc. *agilem*) normally evolved towards *ager* (with the predictable modifications – the loss of the Latin termination, the rhotacization of intervocalic -*l*-, etc.), while the second belongs to the late vulgar stock, as *pavimentum* has a special significance in Latin ("earth layer", alternatively "beaten earth"), while in Romanian it acquired the meaning of *terra*, a word it replaced for the most part.[23]

Some terms, even from the very common mythonymic stock, such as *Făt Frumos* (Fair Youth/Prince Charming), or *Zâna/Zânele* (the Fairy-Godmother/the Fairies) are always controversially discussed, as it is not very certain, for example, that *Zâna* derives from *Diana*, although all the phonetic, morphological-lexical and semantic-symbolic evidence would confirm this evolution.

There are terms formed on Romanian soil, such as *Mama*, a word of infantile origin, created autonomously in different languages, even genealogically unrelated,[24] so that the popular and archaic Latin *mamma*, used in familiar register, bears no relations, despite all appearances, with the corresponding Romanian term, and the standard literary doublet *mater* was not at all adopted from Latin. In the combination *Mama Pădurii/Muma Pădurii* (Mother of the Forest), etc., which was classified with the terms of Latin origin, we can have the form with *u* (M*u*ma), but also with *Maica*, a Slavic form. What is more, the problem regarding the evolution of the Latin *paludem* "marsh" to the Romanian *pădure*, through metathesis, rhotacization, and especially through the spectacular change of meaning, makes the classification in a certain group even more difficult.

Finally, if there can be an end to etymological problems, some mythonyms are totally encoded. The first term from *Ler Împărat* (Ler Emperor) was intensely studied, due to its frequency in the incantatory formulae of carols and spells, texts which accompanying ritual acts. We

---

[23] There remain, however, in Romanian, *terra>țeară>țară* "country", respectively, *terranus* "peasant".
[24] Cf. P. Gh. Bârlea, 2013, p.192.

have accepted the most widespread explanation among specialists: it might well be a form which was reduced, syncopated (because of its usage in incantatory, rhythmical and rhymed contexts) to this enigmatic syllable, deriving from the Hebrew *Alleluiiah > Latin ler > Romanian ler/Ler.*[25]

BIBLIOGRPHY

1. Surces

***, 2003, *Antologia basmului cult românesc*. Vol. 1-2. Ediție îngrijită de Ioan Șerb, București: Editura „Grai și Suflet- Cultura Națională”.

***, 2010, *Basmele românilor*, vol. I-X, București: Editura Curtea Veche.

OPRIȘAN, I. (ed.), 2005, *Basme fantastice românești,* vol. I-IX, București: Editura

ȘĂINEANU, Lazăr, 1978, *Basmele române în comparațiune cu legendele antice, clasice și în legătură cu basmele popoarelor învecinate și ale tuturor popoarelor romanice*. Ediție îngrijită de Ruxandra Niculescu. Prefață de Ovidiu Bîrlea, București: Editura Minerva.

2. References

BÂRLEA, P. Gh., 2013[2], *Limba română contemporană...*, București: Editura „Muzeul Literaturii Române”.

BÂRLEA, Petre Gheorghe, 2007, *Ana cea Bună - Lingvistică și mitologie*, București: Editura „Grai și Suflet - Cultura Națională”.

CARAGIU-MARIOȚEANU, Matilda, 1975, *Compendiu de dialectologie română (Nord- și Sud-dunăreană)*, București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică.

COTEANU, Ion; SALA, Marius, 1987, *Etimologia și limba română. Probleme - Principii*, București: Editura Academiei.

---

[25] The phenomenon is also attested in other lexemes and syntagms, such as the popular interjection *zău*, reduction from Romanian *(pe) Dumnezeu* (by God) < lat. *Dominus Deus*.

DIMITRESCU, Florica (coord.), 1978, *Istoria limbii române*, Bucureşti: Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică.

EVSEEV, Ivan, 1999, *Componenta mitologică a vocabularului românesc*, Bucureşti: Editura Academiei Române.

FISCHER, I., 1975, *Latina dunăreană. Introducere în istoria limbii române*, Bucureşti: Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică.

GIUGLEA, George, 1983, *Cuvinte româneşti şi romanice...*, Ediţie de Florenţa Sădeanu, Bucureşti: Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică.

HASDEU, Bogdan Petriceicu, 1974-1976, *Etymologicum Magnum Romaniae*. Vol. I–III. Ediţie îngrijită de Grigore Brâncuş, Bucureşti: Editura Minerva.

HRISTEA, Theodor, 1972, *Probleme de etimologie. Studii. Articole. Note*, Bucureşti: Editura Ştiinţifică.

IORDAN, I., 1983, *Dicţionar al numelor de familie româneşti,* Bucureşti: Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică.

IVĂNESCU, Gh., 1958, „*Origine pré-indo-européenne des nous du Danube*", în: *Constributions onomastiqués*, Bucureşti: Editura Academiei, I, pp. 125-139.

JERCAN-PREDA, Alina, 2010, *Locul limbii franceze în structura lexicului geografic românesc*, Bucureşti: Editura Universitară.

PĂTRUŢ, Ion 1984, *Nume de persoane şi nume de locuri româneşti*, Bucureşti: Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică.

POGHIRC, Cicerone, 1996, „Influenţa autohtonă", în: *Istoria limbii române*, vol. II, Bucureşti: Editura Academiei, pp. 313-365.

PUŞCARIU, Sextil, 1976, *Limba română*, *I. Privire generală*, Bucureşti: Editura Minerva.

ROSETTI, Al., 1971, *Istoria limbii române literare*, Bucureşti: Editura Minerva.

ŞĂINEANU, Lazăr, 1978, *Basmele române în comparaţiune cu legendele antice, clasice şi în legătură cu basmele popoarelor învecinate şi ale tuturor popoarelor romanice*. Ediţie îngrijită de Ruxandra Niculescu. Prefaţă de Ovidiu Bîrlea, Bucureşti: Editura Minerva. (Ed. I: 1895).

ŞĂINEANU, Lazăr, 1999, *Încercare asupra semasiologiei limbei române: Studii istorice despre tranziţiunea sensurilor*. Ediţie de Livia Vasiluţă. Timişoara: Editura de Vest. (Ed. I: 1887).

ŞĂINEANU, Lazăr, 2012, *Ielele sau Zânele rele – studii folclorice*. Ediţie de I. Oprişan, Bucureşti: Saeculum I.O. (Ed. I: 1896).

VULCĂNESCU, Mircea, 1991, *Dimensiunea românească a existenţei*, Bucureşti: Editura Fundaţiei Culturale Române.

VULCĂNESCU, R., 1987, *Mitologia română,* Bucureşti: Editura Academiei.