# THE STORY OF TOPONYMS. WHERE AND HOW DID OUR ANCESTORS LIVE?

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**Abstract**

The article deals with some aspects connected to the terminology designating various types of dwelling places: from the attestation of toponyms and their geographical spreading to their semantics and its course of evolution. Toponymy motivates the terms semantically; in presenting them, both ethnographic and lexicographic information is taken into consideration, the synonyms of the commented terms being also included.

**Key words**: *toponym, dwelling place, meaning, synonym, oldness*

**Résumé**

L'article traite quelques aspects liés à la terminologie des abris humains: de l'attestation des termes toponymiques, la répartition géographique jusqu'à la sémantique et au mode de son évolution. La toponymie offre une motivation à la sémantique des termes. Dans leur présentation, sont valorisées non seulement les informations ethnographiques, mais aussi lexicographiques, y compris les synonymes des termes commentés.

**Mots-clés**: *toponyme, logement, sens, synonyme, ancienneté*

Numerous place names were formed from terms which designate various types of dwellings, some being permanent and some temporary, differentiated socially and geographically and evolving throughout the centuries: *argea*, *bordei*, *budă*, *conac*, *culă*, *curte*, *foişor*, *zămnic*, etc.

The documentary sources regarding the toponyms of that type were selected from *Dicţionarul toponimic al României. Oltenia/Romania's Toponymic Dictionary. Oltenia* and *Dicţionarul toponimic al României. Muntenia/Romania's Toponymic Dictionary. Muntenia*.

*Argeaua*, *Argele*, *Argelele*

*Argeaua* represents the name of a hill, located in the commune of Uda (Ag) and preserved in an analitical construction: *Coada Argelei*, attested between the XVI-th and the XVII-th century (1654, 1672, 1709, etc.).

*Argele*(*le*) designate various forms of the relief: a mountain in the commune of Bumbeşti – Jiu (Gj), attested in 1872, a hill in the commune of

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Davideşti (Ag) and a ridge in the commune of Cozieni (Bz), attested in 1898 and also present in the syntagm *Vârful cu Argelele*.

To explain the old autochthonous term *argea*, that the toponyms under discussion are based on, it is necessary to operate a selection of the information offered by ethnographers and lexicographers on the semantic evolution of the word. Thus, according to ethnographers, *argeaua* represents one of the components of any traditional peasants' household from Oltenia and Muntenia; it is a partially underground room, dug near the house and adapted such as the weaving loom be placed in it. Lexicographic definitions of the term make it a partial synonym of another term, belonging to the same semantic field: *bordei*, explaining the former as "groapă pătrată, săpată în pământ, în unele părți acoperită ca un bordei, în care vara femeile țeseau pânza, iar în timpul iernii se păstrau stupii"/'a square hole, dug into the ground, in some parts covered like a hut, where women used to weave and beehives were kept in winter'. In the Dâmbovița County, at the end of the XIX-th century, *argeaua* designated a room above the ground "o mică construcție de scânduri, un fel de baracă sau polată, în curtea casei în care țes femeile vara"/'a small construction made of planks, a sort of cabin in the houseyard where women used to weave in summer'. The meaning of the word narrowed and it came to designate the weaving loom "războiul de țesut pânză", signification known by the readers of Ion Heliade Rădulescu's poem, *Zburătoru*: "Dar câmpul şi argeaua câmpeanul osteneşte".

*Bordei, Bordeie, Bordeiu*

*Bordei Verde*, *Bordeiele Cernicăi*, *Bordeiele Țiganilor*, *Bordeiu Podarilor*, etc. (*DTRM*), *Bordeiele Haiducilor*, *Bordeiele Mari*, *Bordeiele Mici*, *Bordeiele Muntenilor*, *Bordeiele Rudarilor*, etc. (*DTRO*).

The large number of toponyms made up from the word *bordei*, registered by the two dictionaries; reflect a characteristic of most villages in Câmpia Română, which consisted of underground cottages: *bordeie*. The research made by historians reveals that since time immemorial till the beginning of the XIX-th century, the dwellings of the peasants living in the plain area were of this type: underground or semi-underground houses. It is not by chance that the first attestation of the term is in the form of a toponym and it dates back to July 24, 1595. It is found in some Slavonic documents from Țara Românească and in translation it means: *Bordeiul Nebunului/Madman's Cottage*, located in the commune of Bârca (Dj). By transfer, some minor toponyms came to designate human settlements: *Bordeiele*, *sat comuna Ileana* (Il), also called *Mândra*, first attested in 1830, which existed till 1956, when it was switched to *Florenii de Jos*; *Bordei Verde*, the name of a village from the Brăila County has been in continuous

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use since 1861, the year of its first attestation. Very many toponyms have an anthroponymic determinant which designated the owner of the type of house under discussion. A village name such as *Bordeiul Iordăchiței*, from the Ilfov County, could be explained if connected to the name of the first woman who settled there together with her husband Iordache, and dug a cottage, being thus the founder of the village (Giurescu, *Principatele*, 117). The localities from Ialomița, Brăila şi Ilfov prove the assumption of the sociologists who consider that cottages, *bordeiele*, underground houses, were specific to the Danube Plain area while in the mountain regions wooden houses predominated. In his study *Civilizația vechilor sate româneşti*/'The civilisation of old Romanian villages', H. Stahl offers interesting details about this type of primitive dwellings, which were specific to the Middle Ages period. We quote selectively: "Bordeiul, ca locuință permanentă, aproape în întregime săpat în pământ, avea adesea un schelet de lemn de stejar care era instalat într-o groapă făcută în pământ, de dimensiuni variate. Cei mai săraci înlocuiau scheletul de lemn cu un perete de nuiele. La intrare avea o primă încăpere, în pantă, numită *gârlici*, care se scobora treptat, pînă se ajungea la nivelul încăperilor. *Gârliciul* dădea într-o odaie în care se afla vatra, peste care un coş larg ducea fumul până dincolo de acoperişul constituit din paie şi pământ. După vatră urma soba, încăperea în care se dormea. Unele bordeie aveau până la cinci încăperi"/'The cottage, as a permanent, partially underground dwelling, often consisted of a frame made of oakwood and placed into a variable-sized hole dug into the ground. Very poor peasants replaced the wooden frame by a straw wall. The entrance led to the first room, called *gârlici*, which descended on a slope to the level of the rooms. *Gârliciul* led to the room with the hearth, above which there was a chimney evacuating the smoke beyond the level of the roof made of earth and straws. After the *vatră* followed *soba/*the stove, the sleeping room. Some cottages had up to 5 rooms'.

The dictionaries list three meanings of the word *bordei*: "locuință pe jumătate săpată în pământ, acoperită paie şi pământ, mai ales la şes…"/'half underground house, covered with straws and earth, specific mainly to plain regions', synonymous to *argea*, *bojdeucă*, *colibă*, *cocioabă*, *surlă*; "căsuță de lemn, baracă, şopron, construit pe un fânaț, în care se țin uneltele şi dorm cosaşii"/'little wooden house, cottage, barn, built on a hay-field, where tools are kept and reapers sleep'. It is a synonym of the term *hodaie* used in Braşov area. In time, it came to designate a small, primitive dwelling, "o locuință mică, rudimentară". The last two meanings might have contributed to the formation of numerous analitical toponyms with anthroponymic determinants, such as: *Bordeiul Călugărului*, *Bordeiul Militarilor* (Gj, Vl), *Bordeiul din Pădure* (Mh), *Bordeiul Ruşilor* (Dj), etc.

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The analysis of the geographical area of the toponyms formed from the two partially synonymic terms leads to the conclusion that, whereas *bordei*, with the primary meaning "underground house" is specific mostly to plain areas, *argea* is used in hilly regions.

*Conac, Conace*

The numerous toponyms made from the noun *conac*, whether used as simple forms to designate village names in the County of Gorj or in analitical structures with anthroponymic determinants, some attested in the XVIII-th and XIX-th century, are a consequence of the polysemantism of the term. From the primary obsolete meaning "place where travellers could rest for the night", "(loc de) popas, de găzduit şi de adăpostit noaptea", therefore a certain type of dwelling (*Conacul Haiducilor*) the word came to designate a make-shift dwelling to accommodate the country's ruling prince and the prestigious visitors during their journeys", "sălaş improvizat, în ţările române, pentru găzduirea domnitorului şi a oaspeţilor de seamă, care călătoreau prin ţară" (*Conacul Brâncovenesc*, *Conacul Domnişoarelor*). By semantic transfer, the word gradually acquired the meanings "reşedinţa unui ispravnic sau subprefect; han"/'a county's subprefect residence; inn' and eventually "casă boierească la ţară, pe o moşie; curte"/'mansion; court, hall'. With its last meaning, "casă boierească", the term is very frequently encountered in minor toponyms, especially in analitical constructions: *Conacul Academiei*, *Conacul Boieresc*, *Conacul Eforiei*, *Conacul Huniei*, *Conacul lui Alecu*, *Conacul Pănonilor*, *Conacul Vechi*, etc.

*Cula*

*Cula Andreieştilor*, *Cula Boierească*, *Cula Jidovilor*, *Cula lui Glogoveanu*, *Cula lui Mărin Logofătul Cula Naltă*, *Cula Nemţilor*, etc. represent only a few of the toponyms formed from the word *culă*.

Borrowed from Turkish, the noun *culă*, originally meant "turn circular, cupolă, boltă"/'circular tower, dome, vault', but in Oltenia it has a special meaning: "clădire fortificată, având numai în partea de deasupra ferestre mici; servea ca locuinţă strategică pichetelor de străjuire şi de pază şi ca refugiu de apărare pentru populaţia moşiilor boiereşti de la munte"/ 'fortified building having small windows only in its upper part; it served as a strategic dwelling for the guards who stayed on watch and it was used as a refuge place for the population on the boyards' estates in the mountainous region'. A quotation from Al. Vlahuţă, cited in DA, compares *cula* to a castle of the local aristocrats: "Culele – micile castele ale vâlcenilor – s-au părăginit". Ethnographers define the term as "locuinţă cu etaj, construită din

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piatră, ce servea ca loc de apărare contra turcilor”/‘one-storey house built of stone and serving as a defensive building against Turks’ attacks’.

*Curtea, Curtea Vâlcanului, Curtişoara*

The above-mentioned names have been borne by a village from the Gorj County throughout the centuries. The village was attested in the XV-th century. Chronologically the attested names were: *Dvor Vlăcanov*, in a Slavonic document dating from 1480, *Curte*, in another Slavonic document from 1485 and *Curtişoara*, the present-day name of the village, dating from 1787, the origin being the appelative *curte*, meaning “casă mare (...), casă boierească (...), locuința proprietarului, boierului dintr-un sat”/‘big house (...), a boyard’s house (…), the dwelling of the owning boyard in a village’. The meaning “palatul de reşedință al Domnitorului”/‘the Ruling Prince residential palace’, begins to characterise the term when designating the name of *Curtea de Argeş*, the capital of Țara Românească.

*Damurile*

They represent an old name of the village of Potlogeni, the Olt County, dating back in 1853, the origin of the term being *dam*, whose meaning, less used nowadays, appears in the expression *damuri de case* “clădiri mărețe, palate”/‘majestic buildings, palaces’, as it is clear from the following context: “Românu’ (…) fie’n bordei, fie în damuri de case, nu se sfieşte d’a trăi dumnezeieşte”/‘Romanians, either living in cottages or in palaces, don’t restrain themselves from leading a happy life’ (apud DA).

The primary meaning of the Turkish term *dam* is “acoperiş (…) casă”/ ‘roof, house’; then the meaning degraded, it designated “grajd, ocol, țarc de vite”/‘stable, cattle enclosure’, as it appears in folkloric literature: “Dute-n grajdul cailor,/ Sus, în damul boilor”; the term is also spread in Tulcea meaning “adăpost pentru vite, pentru fân”/‘cattle or hay shelter’ and in Teleorman “găurile în care se adăpostesc animalele”/‘holes where animals take shelter’.

Toponyms with Middle Ages resonance, names of long gone realities are appropriate labels for the language facts discussed in the present paper.

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