Ana-Maria BOTNARU
"Spiru Haret" University, Bucharest

Abstract

In this article, we draw up the linguistic monograph of *codru*, a generic term belonging to the Romanian forest terminology. Given the complexity of our task, the analysis combines approaches and methods of several disciplines: the history of the Romanian language, lexicology, semantics, toponymy, dialectology. Starting from the lexicographic definition, we take a historical-linguistic journey to Moldavia, Transylvania, Wallachia and to the South of the Danube. We are also interested in the "echoes" of this term in the Romanian vocabulary, i.e. toponyms and anthroponyms derived from or combined with the above-mentioned generic term.

Key words: *forest*, *etymology*, *toponym*, *anthroponym*, *substratum*

Résumé

Dans cet article, nous exposons la monographie linguistique de *codru*, un terme générique qui vient de la terminologie roumaine de *forêt*. Vue la complexité de notre tâche, l'analyse mélange intentions et méthodes de plusieurs disciplines: l'histoire de la langue roumaine, lexicologie, sémantique, toponymie, dialectologie. Commençant avec la définition lexicographique, nous faisons un tour historique-linguistique en Moldavie, en Transylvanie, en Valachie et au sud du Danube. Nous sommes aussi intéressés des échos de ce terme dans le vocabulaire roumain, i.e. toponymes et anthroponymes dérivés du, ou liés avec, le terme générique cité.

Mots-clés: *forêt*, *etymologie*, *toponym*, *anthroponym*, *substrat*

The Romanian term *codru* can be found in various dictionaries, glossaries and regional lexicons[1], with one (or some) of the following definitions: **1.** "land covered with vegetation and many kinds of trees" – this meaning is recorded in all Romanian counties; **2.** (Ab[2], Ag, Ar, Bc, Br, Bt, Bv, Bz, Cs, Cț, Cv, Db, Dj, Gj, Gl, Hd, If, Il, Mh, Mm, Nț, Ot, Ph, Sv, Tl, Tr, Vl, Vs) "thick, dark forest, with various kinds of trees"; **3.** (Dijir – Bh; Codlea – Bv) "young forest"; **4.** "region covered with large and thick forests; hilly or mountainous region covered with old forests; regions covered with naturally grown forests; large forest, with tall trees, never-axed and with no clearings"; **5.** "extended region, covered with old, large and

[1] See Bibliography.

[2] The two letter abbreviations between round brackets represent the Romanian counties.

BDD-A3856 © 2012 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:43:35 UTC)

thick forests, regardless of the trees' essence"; **6.** "forest grown on mountains, not on plains".

Many centuries ago, the territory inhabited by the Romanian population was almost entirely covered by what they called "codri de pădure": not only the hilly and mountainous areas, but even the low, plain areas – from the Tisza to the Danube.

Numerous historical documents[3] (maps, old papers, chronicles, accounts by foreign travellers) contain various references to *codri*. The names *Vlaşca* and *Vlăsia* date back to the Daco-Roman and Old Slavic cohabitation. As far as the topical name *Vlaşca* is concerned, there is no room for controversy: it means "the land of the Romanians". The topical name *Vlăsia* was being interpreted either as coming from *vlah* ("Romanic", "Romanian"), or through the Slavic word *vles* ("in the forest"). *Vlăsia* is a very old name which can be found in Wallachia and is known everywhere in the lands inhabited by Romanians. Much later, the large forest lying in the North of Bucharest was named *Codrul Vlăsiei*.

In the province of Moldavia, *Codrul Tigheciului* is mentioned for the first time in 1532; Miron Costin in his *Chronicle* and Dimitrie Cantemir in his book, *Descriptio Moldaviae,* also include its descriptions. A document dating back to 1536, during the reign of Petru Rareş, mentions *Codrul cel Mare*. There is also a mention of *Codrii Orheiului* from the year 1587. *Codrii Căpoteştilor*, situated in the West of the city of Iassy, are mentioned by Miron Costin in his *Chronicle*, in connection with a Tatar and Kazakh invasion in 1561. Also in Moldavia, there are *Codrul Ghenghii*, *Codrul Hârlăului* and *Codrul Iaşilor*. In his *Chronicle*, Ion Neculce recounts the boyars' run for their lives, in *Codrul Herţei*, in the year 1681.

In Wallachia, in the second half of the XVIIth century, the documents mention *Codrii Grozăveştilor*, *Cotrocenilor* and *Lupeştilor*.

Even the geographical name *Transylvania* (< Latin, "the land/country beyond the forests") is suggestive for our discussion. Foreign travellers going through Transylvania noticed the multitude, greatness and amazing quality of the forests. We quote the testimony of the Italian traveller Giovanni Antonio Magini: "[In Transylvania] there are large forests and endless woods" (*Geografia cioé Descrittione Universale della Terra*, Venice, 1598).

The lexicographic definition of the word *codru* is more complex and precise than that of many terms belonging to the forest lexical field. Here is a list of the main elements that make up this definition: a) dimensions: large, extended; b) shape: more or less square-shaped (semantic distinction

[3] Cf. Giurescu, C. C., 1975, p. 64-85.

BDD-A3856 © 2012 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:43:35 UTC)

operating in Old Romanian language only); c) density: thick, no clearings; d) age: century-old, age-old; d) essence: trees of various essences; e) location: growing on hill tops or on mountains.

In the lexicographic sources mentioned in the Bibliography, we identified the following meanings of the word *codru*: 1. piece; 2. piece of land; 3. forest; 4. (old meaning) mountain.

With the very same meanings, we find this term in the Southern Danube dialects (Macedo-Romanian, Megleno-Romanian and Istro-Romanian).

The etymology of *codru* is much debated and disputed; there are two hypotheses: either from the Latin, or from the substratum. Romanian linguists Candrea and Densusianu suggest the source **qu**o**drum*, from Vulgar Latin, a form reconstructed from *qu**a**drum* – meaning "piece, part". Despite the Latin etymology, the vocalic transformation **a** > **o** could not be explained, this transformation being proper to the substratum.

On the other hand, the substratum hypothesis uses a strong argument – the comparison with the Albanese word *kodër, kodrë*, meaning "hill, ridge". The meaning from the substratum would be "wooded hills/ridge", which is plausible if we consider the importance of the wooded mountains in the life, existence and survival of the population dwelling in these areas along centuries.

The linguistic comparison with the Southern Danube dialects is also significant and endorses the substratum hypothesis: in the Megleno-Romanian dialect, *codru* means "place in the centre of the village, where people gather to deliberate", in the Macedo-Romanian dialect *codru* "means "the area of a village, forest, mountain". Moreover, in *The Romanian Language Dictionary* (also known as *The Romanian Academy Dictionary*) we find that in the Istro-Romanian dialect *codru* means "mountain". In old documents written in the Daco-Romanian dialect, one can find the same meaning of *codru*; the same is true today, only with a local dialectal usage.

For the evolution of the meaning, there are two main explanations: a) *codru* "bucată, parte" > "codru de pădure" > "pădure"[4]; b) *codru* "munte" > "munte acoperit cu păduri" > "pădure mare şi deasă"[5].

The importance of forests in the life and history of the Romanians is reflected by the numerous **toponyms**[6] derived from or combined with

[4] Translation: *codru* "piece" > "piece of land covered by a forest" > "forest"; cf. *DELR-EL*.

[5] Translation: *codru* "mountain" > "mountain covered by forests" > "large and thick forest"; cf. Şăineanu.

[6] Apud Bolocan, 2002.

BDD-A3856 © 2012 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:43:35 UTC)

codru, toponyms that can be found virtually anywhere in Romania: *Codru* (Bh, Hd, Sv), *Codrişoru* (Bh), *Codreanu* (Bc), *Codreni* (Bt, If, Vs), *Codreşti* (Vl, Vr), *Codru Butesii* (Mm), *Capu Codrului* (Sv), *Băiţa de sub Codru* (Mm), *Codreţul*, *Codrul Cucului*, *Codrul de Jos*, *Codrul de Sus*, *Codreanca*, *Codreasa*, *Valea Codrului* (Bc), *Valea Mare de Codru* (Bh), *Dumbrăviţa de Codru* (Bh).

There are also variuos **anthroponyms**[7] – from the name of the XIXth century writer and traveller, Ion *Codru*-Drăguşanu, to the first-names *Codruţ*, *Codruţa*, very common today; then, there are also some last names: *Codre*, *Codrea*, *Codreanu*, *Codrescu*, *Codreş*, *Codret*, *Codrici*, *Codricel*, *Codrin*, *Codru*, *Codruş*, *Codruţ*; and even nicknames: *Codrean*, *Codreanu*, *Codreanul*, *Codreascul*, *Codru*.

In the lexical family of *codru*[8] (*codrean*, *codresc*, *codreşte*, *codreţ*, *a codri*, *codriş*, etc.), the diminutives are significant both in number and as far as the suffixes involved (*codr**uţ***, *codr**uleţ***, *codr**icel***, *codr**işor***). The speakers have considered forests as vital spaces, where they could escape and take shelter, but also as a complex economic reality, a mythological and cultural topos.

In the *Regional Linguistic Atlas of Romania – Wallachia and Dobrudja*[9], one can find the subjects' answers to the following question [no. 1290] "*Do you know the word codru*? *What is codru*?".

In Wallachia, *codru* means "forest"; this meaning can be found virtually everywhere. The meaning "piece" is rarely recorded on that map [°821 – "piece of soap", °830 – "a round of bread, of polenta", °844 – "a round of bread"].

When they mention *codru*, the subjects of the linguistic survey often refer to one of the following aspects:

- **dimensions**: "large forest" [°676, °680, °685, °718, °857], "long forest" [°831], "larger forest" [°709], "huge forest" [°697]
- **density**: "large thick forest" [°684], "newer, thick forest" [°704], "thick forest" [°807]
- **age**: "old forest" [°675, °677, °679, °695, °699], "over 100 year old forest" [°708]; answers mentioning "young forest" are rare and isolated "*codru* is a forest, but a thicker and younger one" [°727], "thick and younger forest" [°704], these answers can be considered an exception, rather than the rule

[7] Apud Iordan, 1983.
[8] See DEX.
[9] Linguistic map no. 403.

BDD-A3856 © 2012 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:43:35 UTC)

• **location**: “only in mountainous regions do they use the word *codru* [°835], “forests in the mountains” [°853], “mountain forests” [°867].

This clear preference of language users for *codru* “large and/or old forest, situated on the mountains” reflects a centuries-old historical reality, whose echo can still be found in both the communities’ and individuals’ “linguistic memory”. The most complex definitions are recorded at the point [°826] – “a bigger, thicker, older forest”, and [°710] – “massive, thick, extensive forest”.

In the *Regional Linguistic Atlas of Romania – Wallachia and Dobrudja*, on the linguistic map no. 403, there are no references to either shape or essence, despite their presence in the definitions (of the word *codru*) recorded in many dictionaries. On the other hand, in the Atlas, there are determiners linked to the *visual* perception of the forest: “green forest” [°683, °700, °756], or even “beautiful forest” [°719].

In the province of Dobrudja, the widespread meaning of the word *codru* is that of “piece, round of”. There are two syntagms widely used by the subjects: “round of bread”, “piece of polenta” [°871, °873, °884, °885, °886, °895], and sometimes “piece of soap” [°896]. On the other hand, the meaning *codru = pădure* “can be rarely found – “he/she escaped into the forest” [°877].

BIBLIOGRAPHY

*** *Dicționarul limbii române* (DLR), tom I, partea a II-a, *C*, Bucureşti, Editura Universul, 1941.

*** *Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române* (DEX), Bucureşti, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, 1996.

*** *Atlasul lingvistic român pe regiuni*: *Muntenia şi Dobrogea* (ALRR-MD) vol. III, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei Române, 2001.

*** *Județele României Socialiste*, ediția II-a, Bucureşti, Editura Politică, 1972.

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

Candrea, I.-A., Adamescu, Gheorghe, *Dicționarul enciclopedic ilustrat Cartea Românească*, Bucureşti, Editura Cartea Românească, 1931.

Candrea, I.-A., Densusianu, Ov., *Dicționarul etimologic al limbii române*. *Elementele latine* (DELR-EL), Bucureşti & Piteşti, Editura Paralela 45, 2003.

Giurescu, Constantin C., *Istoria pădurii româneşti*, Bucureşti, Editura Ceres, 1975.

Iordan, Iorgu, *Dicționar al numelor de familie româneşti*, Bucureşti, Editura Ştiințifică şi Enciclopedică, 1983.

BDD-A3856 © 2012 Editura Sitech

Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:43:35 UTC)

Şăineanu, Lazăr, *Încercare asupra semasiologiei limbei române*, Bucureşti, Tipografia Academiei Române, 1887.

BDD-A3856 © 2012 Editura Sitech
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:43:35 UTC)