CONFLUENCES

THE ETYMOLOGIC STRUCTURE OF ROMANIAN MYTHONYMS (II)

P. Gh. 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. The Slavic Superstratum of Romanian mythonyms

One of the main characteristic features of the Slavic stock of the Romanian language, namely the folkloric/colloquial and archaic aspect of the vocabulary (as well as that of morphological elements, such as the feminine vocative ended in *-o*), are neutralized in the case of the system of mythonymy, insofar as here almost all the terms have an obsolete, folkloric and poetic ring to them.

However, there remains the problem of the chronological and dialectal stratification, as the Latin lexical stock is one of those that nourished Romanian vocabulary during several phases, from several directions and in various ways. As regards the diachronic aspect, one thing is certain: the elements of the Slavic superstratum cannot be earlier than the 9th century,

BDD-A3960 © 2014 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)

although the first waves of Slavic peoples passed through the Romanian territory, coming from the Ural Mountains, as early as the 6th and 7th centuries.[1]

In principle, Al. Rosetti, the authors at the Romanian Language Institute and Gh. Mihăilă mention four phases: a) Old Slavic (old Bulgarian) loans – the 9th-12 centuries; b) massive medieval loans, from the languages of neighbouring peoples (Bulgarian, Serbian-Croatian, Ukrainian) – the 13th-15th centuries, though with much later continuances; c) rare Polish influences – the 18th c.; d) modern Russian influences (the 19th – 20th centuries).[2]

As regards the phases of penetration, mythonyms are not very relevant, as they reflect neither the phonetic phenomena specific to an epoch (for example nasalization, the opening of old *o* to *a*, more recently, in pronunciation and writing), nor any certain thematic area, maybe with the exception of saints' names and of several other areas. Nor does the criterion of communication channels function in this case, as all mythological folkloric texts circulated in their oral version, with a colloquial, archaic and regional pronunciation, until they were recorded in writing in the collections of the second half of the 19th century. The only thing we can do, for the purpose of a sub-classification within the group – not very relevant, actually – would be to resort to comparisons with the forms encountered in the onomastic and mythical folklore of the neighbouring peoples – Bulgarian, Ukrainian, Serbian etc. Indeed, these analogies are really helpful in reconstituting, in principle, the origin of the names[3], and, where applicable,

[1] I. Pătruţ, „Despre vechimea relaţiilor lingvistice slavo-române", in : CL, XIV, 1969, p. 25, and CL, XII, 1967, pp. 21-22. The conclusions of this researcher from Cluj also consider earlier studies: I. Bărbulescu, *Individualitatea limbii române şi elementele slave vechi*, Bucureşti, 1929, p. IV (with the option for the 10th century, as the *ab quo* time of the first Slavonic words retained in Romanian); Sextil Puşcariu, *Limba română*, I, 1940, p. 248 and, especially, Th. Capidan, *Elementul slav dialectal românesc*, Bucureşti 1952, p. 45. The latter stated that Slavonic terms came from a much earlier time, "before the 10th century, without the possibility of our going up the stairs of time higher than the 8th century". A synthesis of these opinions is realized in Gh. Mihăilă, *Studii de lexicografie*, Bucureşti: Editura Ştiinţifică, pp. 147-205.

[2] Cf. Al. Rosetti, 1978, pp. 293-356; 435-439; 441-445; ILR, II, pp. 372-374; Gh. Mihăilă, 1973, p. 10.

[3] Useful for mythology in general, and for names of mythical characters, mythical toponymy, etc., are the earlier studies of B. P. Hasdeu, L. Şăineanu, but also the more recent ones, such as A. I. Ionescu, 1978, *Lingvistică şi mitologie* (with reference to Slavic mythology), București: Editura Litera; A. Olteanu, 2004, *Homo balcanicus. Features of the Balkan mentality*, Bucureşti: Paideia; Marianne Mesnil and Assia Popova, 2007, *Beyond*

BDD-A3960 © 2014 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)

the hidden significance beneath a name without semantic resonance in our field of reference.

Consequently, the inventory of this group follows the customary criterion of alphabetical ordering:

Arapul (Moor)*, Arăpuşa, Baba* – Hag *(Răcoaia* – Raucous*, Cloanţa* – Toothless*, Muşa, Relea etc.), Babele* (Hags), *Baba Babelor* (Hag of Hags), *Baba Vâja** (Hag Whirly)*, Bălan* (Fair-haired), *Bogdan*, *Boz* (Dwarf Elder), *Buga*, *Bujor* (Peony), *Burcea**, *Neica*, *Busuioc* (Basil)*, Buşa*, *Caraoschi** (Old Nick), *Cetina* – Needle leaf *(Brazilor** - of the Firs*), Călin* (Nebunul** - the lunatic*), Ciuda* (Spite), *Ciuda Lumii* (World's Spite), *Cosânzenele*, *Costan, Cotoşman, Craiul Iadului* (Hell's King), *Craiul Zmeilor* (Ogres' King)*, Crăiasa* – Queen *(Zânelor* – of the Fairies*), Crivăţul* (North Wind), *(Zăvod* – Dog*) Crai* (King), *Dan*, *Danciu*, *Duna**, *Gârla* (Streamlet), *Gedeon*, Ghesperiţa, Harap – Moor (Alb - White), Iovan* Iorgovan*, *Ioniţă*, Iutele* – Sprite *(Pământului* – of the Earth*), Lelea (Năstăsie), Limir*, *Loza*, *Manea (Câmpului* – of the Field*), Mândra** - Fairest *(Lumei* – of the World*), Mândrul Mândrei* (the Handsome of the Fairest), *Milea (Ion), Nenea (Nea) Norocul* (Uncle Luck)*, Pahon*, Pascu, Pârlea Vodă* (Ash King), *Pogan**, *Prâslea* (Youngest Son)*, Răzor* (Baulk), *Sfânta** - Saint Mother *(Luni, Miercuri* – Monday, Wednesday, etc.*), Sfântul* – Saint *(Petru* etc.*), Sfântul Soare* (Holy Sun)*, Sărăcia* (Poverty)*, Sărăcilă* (Pauper), *Sărăcuţul* (Little pauper), *Scorpia* (Shrew), *Sila Samodiva*, *Siminoc, Smanda*, *Stan*, *Stan Bolovan* (Boulder), *Stanciu*, *Stancu (Alesu* – Fair*), Sticlişoara* (Glassy)*, Stoian, Sucnă (Murgă* – Bay Mare*), Sur* – Grey *(Vultur* – Eagle*), Suta* (Ion), Tăleruş, Trifon*, Tuliman, Vâlva* – Clamour *(Pădurii* – of the Forest*), Vâlvele* (Clamours), *Vâjbaba* (Whirl-Hag)*, Vid Baba, Viliş, Vişin* (Sour cherry tree)*, Vodă* (King), *Voinea*, *Voinicul* (Sturdy Lad), *Voinicul (Florilor* – of the Flowers*), Voinicul Voinicilor* (Sturdiest of the Sturdy), *Zinca**, *Zmeul* – (White) Ogre *(Alb), Zmeoaica* - Ogress *(Pământului* – of the Earth*), Zori* – Dawn *(de Ziuă* – of Day*), Zorile* (Dawns)*, Zorilă* (Dawning).

the Danube. Balkan Ethnological Studies. Translation: Ana Mihăilescu and Mariana Rădulescu. Foreword by Vintilă Mihăilescu. București: Editura Paideia; Sorin Paliga, 2006, *Mitologia slavilor*, București: Editura Meteor.

BDD-A3960 © 2014 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)

As a working framework, we have marked with the abbreviation "Slv." the names encountered in at least three contemporary Slavic languages or those which can be found in the sub-groups of the very ancient epochs of the influences. However, the Romanian word is usually associated, in lexicographic works, with one or two languages, notwithstanding the fact that Serbian and Croatian are considered today as two different languages (as compared to the research of two decades ago, which treated them together, as two dialectal variants of the same language): Bulgarian and Serbian-Croatian, Bulgarian and Ukrainian, rarely Russian.

Beyond these specificities, we come up against the same difficulties of selection and recording as with any etymological stratum: compounds from aloglotic elements (Slavic-Latin, Slavic-Turkish etc.); derivations and conversions, dialectal evolutions, with phonetic, lexical-morphological and semantic modifications effected on Romanian territory; uncertain and debatable etymological reconstitutions; multiple etymology solutions and so on.

The inventory is sizeable enough, confirming the percentage of up to 20% of the general vocabulary of the Romanian language. In fact, the number increases by virtue of the frequency of some key-terms of the Romanian mythological pantheon: *Baba/Babele* (the Old Woman/Women) creates for the Slavic superstratum a group of personages (or the same personage in different hypostases) that is even richer than the one created by the *Moşul/Moşii* (Old Father/Fathers) for the Thracian-Dacian substratum. In addition, there appear a few more personages, which are emblematic for the Romanian mythical folklore, designated by terms of Slavic origin, either as the basic element (Determined element), or as nominalised epithet (the Determiner, often used in isolation as Determined): *Viteazul* (The Brave), *Voinicul* (The Sturdy), *Zmeul* (the Ogre).

If the first of the three may be subject to debate, as a possible result of a multiple etymology (Slavic, Magyar), the other two (actually the most frequent in Romanian mythological onomastics) are indubitably of exclusively Slavic origin.

In addition to these there are the names of rulers, typical of the theme of mythological hierarchies:

Crai (King)*, Crăiasă* (Queen)*, Vodă* (Prince), *Voievod* (Voivod)

To these we may add the names of personified abstractions:

Ciuda (Spite), *Norocul* (Fortune)*, Sărăcia* (Poverty)

And a few names of totemic plants and animals:

BDD-A3960 © 2014 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)

a) *Boz* (Dwarf Elder), *Bujor* (Peony), *Cetina* (Fir), *Vişin* (Sour cherry-tree)
b) *Buga, Ghesperiţa* etc.

The demonic and misshapen personages are relatively well represented (the dwarfs and the giants):

c) *Baba Vâja,* (Hag Whirly) *Ciuda (Lumii)* – World's Spite), *Ghesperiţa, Harapul* (Arab), *Scaraoschi* (Old Nick), *Stan Bolovan* (Boulder), *Vâjbaba* (Whirly Old Hag), *Zmeul* (Ogre)*/Zmeioaca* (Ogress) and others.
d) *Cotoşman, Pogan, Prâslea* (the youngest son), *etc.*

However, as we have shown, many of these names require special analyses, because their etymologies overlap, intersect or are lost in the process of linguistic and mythological evolution, according to laws exclusively specific to the latter.

Some of them do not have a clear semantic content, as the associations provided by onomastic dictionaries are not at all convincing. Thus, *Burcea* and *Burcilă* are attributed to two homonymous common terms, *burcă*[1], meaning "turtă de făină de păpuşoi" (corn flour flat cake), *burcă*[2] "haină ţărănească din lână" (woollen peasant coat). The latter term is attested with certainty in Ukrainian, while, in the case of the former, dictionaries using more cautious records regarding word origin indicate an "unknown etymology".[4] Anyway, we would have to rather overstress things if we are to include the term, after all, in the thematic series of professions and occupations.

For such terms as *Pogan* "mare, mătăhălos" (big, thickset) and others, such as *Duna* "Dunărea" (The Danube), two etymologies are indicated: Slavic and Magyar.

What constitutes a special situation for the Romanian language, in this sense, is the word *sânt/sântă* vs. *sfânt/sfântă* (San vs. Saint). This refers to the Latin (colloquial) stratum, as compared to the Slavic stratum (late medieval and scholarly, about the 14th-16th centuries. The forms in *sân* < *Lat. sanctus* are older, as also proved by the fact that the two terms became fused and lexicalized:

Sângeorz (Saint George), *Sânpetru* (Saint Peter), *Sumedru* (Saint Demeter), *Sântana* (Saint Ann), *Sântămărie* (Saint Mary)

[4] Cf. DEX, s.v.

BDD-A3960 © 2014 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)

The Slavonic ones, formed many centuries later, appear with their component elements clearly outlined, from the Slavic *sfetŭ/sfetĭ* (the literary Slavonic form being itself, in fact, a loan from the Latin *sanctus*):

Sfântul Gheorghe (Saint George), *Sfântul Petru* (Saint Peter), *Sfântul Dumitru* (Saint Demeter)

Sfânta Maria (Saint Mary), *Sfânta Paraschiva*[5] etc.

We should also remark the modifications of meaning, a usual phenomenon in the process of loans due to linguistic contacts. *Mândrul (Lumei)* etc. means, in everyday Romanian, "Frumosul Lumii (the World's Handsomest)", possibly "Orgoliosul Lumii" (the World's Proudest). However, in Slavic languages, the term *modrij, mudrij* means "înţelept, cuminte, raţional" (wise, mindful, sensible). This meaning is still attested in archaic and folkloric texts, possibly under the usual form of fixed expressions, which conserve such old forms and meanings in "fossilised" structures, with a historical and archaeological value, cf. *Nu e modru* "it is not advisable or wise" (to do something).

The Slavic superstratum significantly enriches by giving an archaic tinge and air to the Romanian mythonymic system, thus individualizing it further. To the linguistic loans explicable by the superposition of populations (the migration of the old Slavs), by the proximity with the Slavonic populations of South-Eastern and central Europe (Bulgarians, Serbs, Croatians, Ukrainians, Poles, Czechs and Slovaks), by cultural contacts, is also added the specific mythological element: the intense circulation of certain myths, mythological nuclei, themes, leitmotifs, personages and symbols, over the entire geographical and spiritual area to which Romanian culture also belongs. Sometimes, we should also take into account the circulation, through the Slavic medium, of some ancient Slavic or Oriental myths.

2. Adstrata and diverse influences

All the other analysable etymological sources form a relatively meagre group, from a quantitative point of view, which means that mythonyms confirm the general configuration of Romanian vocabulary on chronological and structural strata. There is no other special influence from

[5] In these latter cases, anyway, there is also the matter of the usual aloglotic compounds, with terms of Hebrew, Greek or other origins.

BDD-A3960 © 2014 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)

any of the languages with which Romanian came into geographical, historical or cultural contact, apart from the ones already known to us in terms of their nature, extent and proportions. There is the special situation of the words of Biblical, Hebrew-Aramaic origin, circulating through Greek-Byzantine and Slavic-Byzantine linkages. Hence we infer that the circulation of mythological themes and motifs did not follow different trajectories from the ones which facilitated linguistic exchanges. In their more or less visible manifestation, these influences enrich the inventory of Romanian mythonyms, granting it a certain picturesque quality and strengthening its specific character within the general framework of onomastics and the entire vocabulary, for that matter.

2. 1. Terms of Greek origin

In this special segment of the lexis, too, the Greek influence proves to be relatively productive in the Romanian language, as well as in its entire vocabulary, contributing to the inventory of mythonyms with almost half of the total sum of the terms belonging to the analysable strata of this onomastic segment. What has changed, in relation to the general structure of present-day Romanian vocabulary, is the historical and cultural determination, meaning that the mechanism of recent borrowings, a source of neologisms, does no longer apply in the case of mythonyms, but to these old borrowings are added, transmitted via the rich Greek mythology.

The Greek language belongs to those languages which, in the course of history, repeatedly acted upon Romanian, more than any other language, due to its antiquity, its worldwide cultural authority, and, last but not least, its geographical location in the Balkan space, dominated by the Greeks for centuries.[6] The first influences came from ancient Greek into Latin, so the Latin words of Greek origin later became Romanian words or penetrated into Romanian through other channels. Illustrative of the case in question, within our mythonymic corpus, are such terms as:

> *Botezat* (Baptised), *Busuioc* (Basil), *Gheorghe* (George), *Ileana* (Helen), *Înger* (Angel), and others.[7]

[6] For the history of Greek influences on Romanian we have used the information from ILR, II, 1969, pp. 366-367; Al. Rosetti, 1978, pp. 231-237; Fl. Dimitrescu (ed.), 1978, pp. 102-108, to which we added the specialist monographic studies.

[7] The language of folk fairytales uses such terms as *botez* (baptizm), *farmec* (spell), *magie* (magic), etc., derived from the same source.

BDD-A3960 © 2014 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)

A few terms were also preserved from the early stage, which directly penetrated into Danube Latin, or Dacian-Romanian, as shown above, meaning the South Danube dialects (Aromanian, Megleno-Romanian) and the North Danube Dacian-Romanian dialect. It is the case of some words such as *Broatec* "broscoiul" ("the frog", in fact the lad turned into a frog by a magic spell), *Ciumă* (Plague) and *(Voinicii fără)Frică* [(Valiant Men without) Fear].[8]

Other terms also came from Byzantine Greek between the 7th and the 15th centuries, permeating the vocabulary as everyday terms which became proper names in the folkloric epos, but also in real life, due to the general process of Greece's cultural appropriation of the whole Balkan Peninsula and even Western Europe, as Greek had become the official language of the Eastern Roman Empire.[9] In this context, Romanian was even more markedly influenced culturally and linguistically, as Dobrudja was part of the Byzantine Empire between 917 and 1185, and the whole territory inhabited by Romanians lay in its area of economic influence and commercial activity, operating along the course of the Danube, from Constanza to Sulina or Porţile-de-Fier. Some words which became mythonyms penetrated Romanian in this period, such as:

Arghir, Arhanghel (Archangel), *Dafin* (Laurel), *Pitic* (Dwarf), *Stihie* (Fury), *Trandafir* (Rose) and others.

Finally, some terms came from Modern Greek, more precisely from pre- phanariot or phanariot Greek (the 15th – 19th centuries), under the given historical conditions[10]:

Calomfir, Năramza, Vasilache and others.

The problem is that many Greek terms had also penetrated into the languages of the neighbouring peoples or of those more remote geographically, with which Romanian came into contact, so that it is often hard to establish if Greek loan words acted directly or through such

[8] Cf. gr. *brótachos*, respectively *kyma* şi *phrix/phrikē*, penetrated into Danube Latin, *apud* P. Gh. Bârlea, 2013, p. 198.

[9] H. Mihăescu, 1966, *Influenţa greacă asupra limbii române până în secolul al XV-lea*, Bucureşti: Editura Academiei. See also L. Gàldi, 1939, *Les mots d'origine néogrequé en roumain à l'époque des Phanariotes*, Budapest.

[10] The epoch begins in 1453 – the fall of Constantinople – and ends in 1821, with the revolution led by Tudor Vladimirescu (which, in principle, also marks the end of the Romanian Middle Ages).

BDD-A3960 © 2014 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)

channels as Slavic, Italian, etc. Somewhat in the same situation are the mythonyms from Christian mythology. Although Romanian Christianity is much older than the Slavic one, due to the Romanizing of the Dacian territories, the organization of the Romanian Orthodox Church was realised during this epoch, according to the Byzantine rite, derived from the Slavic connection. Consequently, many Greek terms from this semantic field, including hierarchical or divine names (transformed into mythical characters) have Slavic phonological and morphological features.[11]

However, these chronological sub-stratifications and geographical distributions are of less importance to us, since no direct link with the circulation of myths in the Balkan region can be established. For their mythological significations and, possibly, for the problems of diastratic selection, generally inventorying them will suffice:

> *Aleodor* (*Iliodor*, DNFR, *s.v.*), *Alesandru, Alexandru, Ambrozie/Amvrozie, Arghir, Arhanghelul, Calimendru, Calomfir (*Bulgarian, Modern Greek *Kolofer), Dafin* (Laurel)*, Fănică, George, Gheorghe*, Grigoraş, Ileana (Sânziana, Cosânzeana* etc.*), Marghioala, Medina, Năramza, Nicolae, Niculcea, Piticul, Sanda Luxandra*, Scorpie* (Shrew)*, Ştefan, Toader, Toderaş, Teodora, Trandafir* (Rose)*, Vasile, Vasilache, Vasilică.*

From the point of view of the thematic criterion, proper names for persons and divinities are visibly predominant. Of course, these retain the significations of the common nouns they derived from: *arghyros* "argint" (silver), *gheorghios* "lucrător al pământului, ţăran" (farmer, peasant) *naramza* "portocală" (orange) and so on. But most of them were already proper names in Antiquity, so they were often adopted without an awareness of the functioning of the linguistic sign.[12]

Another group could be that of Christian ecclesiastic and divine hierarchies, though, in many cases, with Slavonic adaptations.

[11] Gh. Mihăilă, 1961, *Împrumuturi vechi sud-slave în limba română*, Bucureşti: Editura Academiei.

[12] We must call to mind that, in the case of proper names, however, the motivation of the linguistic sign functions, un like the case of almost all the other words in the vocabulary of a language. *Interjections* are the exception, as are the words originating in infantile use (interjections, too, originally). Still, in the case of onomastic names, we speak of a "second degree motivation", as what is explicable is only the choice of the common noun as a proper name, but not the concordance between the object and the common noun.

BDD-A3960 © 2014 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)

The doublets of the type *Alexandru/Alesandru*, *Gheorghe/George* show the different channels through which these terms penetrated into the Romanian mythonymic inventory (directly or through intermediary sources – Slavic, Italian, French, etc.).

Some of them are so deeply rooted in Romanian that they become productive through diminutive progressive derivation, regressive derivation, motional derivation, and even through compounding based on the same element, which is repeated for euphonic purposes:

a) *Argint, Arghir*
Nicolae, Niculcea
Ştefan, Ştefăniţă, Fănică
Toader, Teodora, Toderaş
Vasile, Vasilică, Vasilache
b) *Sanda Luxandra (cf. Alexandru/Alexandra)*

The Greek-Slavonic confluences appear in many cases of mythonymy.

Vera is a Bulgarian name, as I. Iordan affirms, but it also existed as a Greek proper name, *Veras*.[13] In addition, the Magyar name *Veres*, derived from the appellative *veres* "roşu" (red), is also recorded.

Zinca is the equivalent of the Bulgarian first name *Zinka*, but it can be very well explained by the hypocoristic form of *Zinaida/Zenaida*, which comes from *Zenovia*, with the Greek etymon *Zinos*[14] "viu, în viaţă" (alive, living).

Calimendru is a corrupt form of the Greek *Kalamandros* "neregulă, neorânduială, harababură" (disorder, untidiness, pell-mell). Most certainly, it belongs to the category of joking names, given to misshapen characters, anti-heroes or helping companions, with the meaning of "zăpăcit", i.e. "scatterbrained" (I. Iordan, s.v. *Calimendrie*). It can be integrated to the series *Hăbăucul, Tândală*, etc.

Calomfir is integrated in the onomasiological group of aromatic herbs, with a symbolic value in mythology (magical plants, used in casting spells).

[13] I. Iordan, 1983, s.v.

[14] N. A. Constantinescu also considers, in DO, s.v., that this is a Greek name which entered into Romanian through Slavic linkage. What the author of the well-known DO does not say is the fact that the ancient name *Zenobia/Zenovia*, widespread because it was carried by the queen of Palmira (just as *Roxana* spread on account of the wife of Alexander Macedon, and *Elena* due to the mother of Constantin the Great), is formed through a pleonastic association of a common name, as *zen* is the aor. inf. from *zeno, zoēo* "to live", while *bia/bios* means "life"; thus *Zenobia* would mean "the one living her life".

BDD-A3960 © 2014 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)

The plant (*Chrysanthemum balsamite*) has another name in popular Romanian, *calapăr*, so only this one can be said to have been derived from the Bulgarian *Kalofer* (not necessarily so, since the process may have also functioned in reverse), which does not apply to *Calomfir*, closer in form to Greek. *Trandafir* is undoubtedly Greek (cf. *triantophyloi* "treizeci de petale", i.e. "thirty petals), which makes unnecessary any interpretation of the Slavic source.

From Modern Greek came *Marghioala* "deşteaptă, şireată" (smart, cunning) and *Năramza*, cf. *neranzi* "portocal" (orange-tree), though there was also the Bulgarian *naranza*.

Contrarily, *Ileana*, a name so frequently encountered in Romanian fairytales, was phonetically adapted to the linguistic area of South-East Europe, so the Greek *Hellēna*, cf. *helios* "soare" (sun) is rendered, in the languages of the region, by *Ilena, Ilina, Ilóna*, etc.

Finally, *Ambrozie/Amvrozie* belongs, on the one hand, to the category of plant names, as it designates in Romanian a (poisonous) plant, but also to the category of names of magic potions, it being known as denoting the food of the gods in Greek mythology. The term had been used ever since Antiquity as a proper name attributed to people and divinities. I. Iordan mentions a Bulgarian equivalent, as usual, but the word also appears in Latin (*Ambrosius, Ambrosie*), as well as in all European languages – Romance, Germanic, Slavic, Finno-Ugric – therefore we do not see why we should consider the Bulgarian source for the Romanian mythonym.

Mythonyms of Greek origin are likely to confirm the extremely rich resources of the respective culture and civilization – ancient and medieval, in particular, both in the field of language and that of mythology. Even if a direct connection between the two domains is not readily apparent, they can be said to have contributed, simultaneously or separately, to the enrichment, universalising and colourfulness of the Romanian mythonymic stock.

2.2. Terms of Hebrew-Aramaic origin

Hamito-Semitic languages are not among the etymological strata of Romanian, but the onomastic system is indebted to them, in relation to the biblical texts and the Christian calendar, as any other modern language, for that matter.

Considering the extraordinary capacity of Christianity to absorb in its own mythology themes, motifs, symbols and characters from the pagan

BDD-A3960 © 2014 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)

mythologies preceding it, it is no wonder that Vetero-Testamentary and Neo-Testamentary names are so frequent in Romanian fairytales. In addition, these names are integrated in the Christian calendar, so their proliferation in common onomastics is fully explicable, as is their transfer into folk literary creations.

There is, evidently, the predominance of real first names in the calendar derived from the former phrase-names in the Hebrew-Aramaic stock based on the derivational particle *–el/el-* or *yah-*, "God", the short for *Elohim* "God", or for *ie-*, cf. *Iehova* "Jahveh, God", in combination with other various particles:

> *Adam, Eva, Gavril, Gedeon, Ioaneş, Ionică, Ioniţă, Ion (Buzdugan), Ion (Făt-Frumos* – Fair Youth, Prince Charming*), Ion (Săracul* – Pauper*), Ion (Tâlharul* – Highwayman*), Ioniţă, Irimia, Maria, Mihail, Mihăeş, Măriuca, Măriuţa, Mărioara, Oanea, Săftica* ş.a.

In the case of these mythonyms, the phenomenon of linguistic linkages and of phonological and morphological adaptations operates more than in any other sector of onomastics. In the case of the Romanian language, these names passed, in principle, thorough one of the following links:

> Hebrew-Aramaic > Byzantine Greek > Slavonic > Romanian
> Hebrew-Aramaic > Christian Latin > Romanian
> Hebrew-Aramaic > Slavonic > Romanian

It is possible for a name from ancient mythology to have passed through other channels, with detours through Oriental or Occidental mythologies and languages.

The original significations are always preserved, but this makes no difference after all, since the generations of post-biblical times do no longer perceive them in their initial contexts, but merely as names of religious origin, saints' names under whose protection parents try to put their children.

Thus, *Ion*, the most frequent name not only in Romanian, but also in universal onomastics, is found somewhat proportionally in Romanian mythonymy. It is true that, in fairytales, it rarely appears alone; it is accompanied by an epithet, as the majority of such names. In principle, it should be perceived with its ancient signification:[15]

[15] Al. Graur, 1965, p. 29.

BDD-A3960 © 2014 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)

Hebr. *Iehohanan* "God is merciful" > Rom. *Ioan* > *Ion*, cf. Slavic *Ivan*, German *Johann*, Engl. *John*, Irish *Jan* etc., from din *Iehova* "Jahveh, God" + *han* "merciful".

Hebr. *mâr* "master, lord" > Greek *Maria*, Lat. *Maria*, Rom. *Maria*[16], etc.

These two names, the most frequent in common traditional Romanian onomastics, also have the most derivative variants, etc., as shown in the enumeration above, thus considerably enriching the series. It should also be noted that *Oanea* belongs to the *Ion*, sub-group as well, representing a reduced form of *Ioanea*.

Săftica is also a hypocoristic from *Elisafta*, representing the shortened and adapted form of the name *Elisabeta* < *Elisbeth* "God is joy".

From the same root, *el-* or *-el*, which in time began to function more as a prefix or suffix than as an analysable compounding element, were formed many of the other Romanian mythonyms:

Mihail, Mihaieş < Hebr. *Michael* "Who is like God?", cf. the series *Daniel, Rafael, Nathanael* and others.

Gavril < *Gabriel* < Hebr. *Gabriel*, from the series above.

Ioviţă < Hebr. *Iov*

Irimia < Hebr. *Ieremiah*.

Adam and *Eva*, names belonging to syncretic divinities in the Romanian mythological pantheon (cf. *Moş Adam* – Father Adam*, Moaşa Eva* – Mother Eve*, Moaşa Iana* – Mother Iana), have different etymological bases:

Hebr. *adam* "red" (literally "clay");

Hebr. *eva* "life", cf. the Greek correspondent *Zoe*.

As stated before, almost all these entered into Romanian indirectly, via other languages. In fact, they are so widespread in European languages (and from hence to the languages of other continents), that it is hard to establish the course followed by each name in part.

In principle, the direction of evolution was the one outlined above. The phonetic and morphologic aspect of the words, on the one hand, and the religious and cultural history, on the other, entitle us to think that this is the way it happened. In fact, some of these names are recorded in onomastic dictionaries directly with the last etymology, as derived from a Slavic

[16] Al. Graur, *loc. cit.*, pp. 28-29, proposes a different etymology: Hebrew *Mar* – "bitter", hence Maria "Daughter of bitterness", "Daughter of pain". For other interpretations see P. Gh. Bârlea, 2007, p. 94.

BDD-A3960 © 2014 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)

language or, more rarely, from Modern Greek. For example, *Ilie* (*Sfântul* – The Saint) was also recorded in the series of Slavic origin mythonyms, although its origin is certainly Hebraico-Aramaic:

Eliahu, a combination between the two names used for the concept of "God", respectively *El(ohim)* and *Yah(ve)*, gave in modern languages *Eliah*, *Elie*, hence the Slavic *Ilia* and the Romanian *Ilie*. The fact that in old Romanian texts the mythonym is also attested under the form compounded with the Latin *sanctus*, in a agglutinated and lexicalized lexeme, *Sântilie*, can represent a proof of its circulation on Romanian territory in an epoch preceding Slavonic and Romanian contacts.

In total, the names of Hebraico-Aramaic origin constitute testimonies of the operation of the mechanism of onomastic transfer in the context of linguistic contacts, as well as points of reference in the constitution of Christian mythology, respectively of the phenomenon of religious and mythological syncretism.

2.3. Terms of other origins

a) The fairytales collected by Ion Pop-Reteganul and other collectors from Transylvania contain *names of Hungarian origin*, due either to the circulation of the respective texts over a larger aria to the right and left of the Tisa or to the variants translated from one or the other of the two languages. This is obvious especially when a common first name appears in its foreign version: *Ştefan*/*Istvan*/*Istian*.

As in the case of common terms of Hungarian origin, their significance is harder to decipher for the Romanians in the other historical provinces, because the corresponding appellatives preserved their regional, popular and archaic character. However, in much the same manner as with other everyday terms, some of them acquired national circulation, even entering into the vocabulary of standard literary Romanian, such as *Uriaş,* (Giant) *Viteaz* (Brave) (for the latter, see also the possibility of accepting the Slavic origin). The other terms need further lexicographic clarifications, which care reveal new components of the onomasiological groups initially established:

Cocişiul (coachman),[17] *Istian (=Ştefan), Mătăhuz*[18] *(Împărat – Emperor), Paripu (Roş –Red),*[19] *Pârcălabul* (county prefect),[20]

[17] Cf. Hungarian *kočis* "coachman", from *kočia* "cart", cf. also Serbo-Croatian *kočija*.
[18] Cf. Hungarian *mátaha* "big, heavy man", cf. also Romanian *matahală* (beefy man).
[19] Cf. Hungarian *paripo* "the fair youth".
[20] Cf. Hungarian *porkalab* "county prefect".

BDD-A3960 © 2014 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)

Şugă,[21] *Uriaşii* (the Giants),[22] *Vicleanul* (the Cunning), *Viteazul* (the Brave).

b) From *German* we have few mythonyms, although the two Germanic populations which colonized Transylvania, Banat and Bucovina between the 12th and the 17th centuries may have brought along enough fairytales and stories from German folklore, so richly illustrated in the collections of the Grimm brothers. Practically, the only one attested in our corpus of texts is the name of the anti-hero *Tândală*, considered an adaptation of a word coming from the German *tädeln* "to joke", from which the Romanian *a tândăli* was formed "to laze about, kill the time".[23] The other name of German origin is *Măghiran*, cf. German *Mageran* (Marjoram), a species of oregano (*Origamm Majorana*). Although it appears rather as more of an epithet (*Frunză de Măghiran* – Marjoram Leaf), it completes the onomasiological subseries of miraculous plants in the mythologies of many peoples.

c) Somewhat more numerous are the *mythonyms of Turkish origin*, although the system ethno-cultural references is quite different in terms of mythological background. Of particular import was the fact that the Turkish language served as an intermediary both for the transfer to Europe of Arabic or Persian vocabulary, in many semantic fields, and for facilitating, in the Balkan and European space, the circulation of literary folklore, so rich in imagery and symbolism:

Buzdugan (Martel), *Cataran* (Tar), *Cioban* (Shepherd), *Coman* (Cuman), *Piciul* (Tiny Tot).

It is interesting that some names of mythological characters belong to an earlier epoch, before the Romanian Principalities established political, economic and cultural relations with the Ottoman Empire (the 15th – 19th centuries).

Coman is precisely an anthroponym of the lexical family attesting to the Cumanian occupation of the whole Balkan Peninsula between the 11th

[21] Cf. Hungarian *sugár* "slender, slim"; cf. also Romanian *sugăr*, "labial plant", "sugărel".
[22] Cf. Hungarian *órios* "very big, huge".
[23] In fact, German has a famous type of anti-hero, *Eulenspiegel*, whose name is, however, translated or rather adapted to Romanian as the calc form *Buhoglindă* (Owl-Glass), meaning that there is no re-created variant, but only a translation.

BDD-A3960 © 2014 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)

and the 14th centuries[24], Comana, Comaniţa, Comănici, etc. From the Cumans, this Turkic population of the pre-Ottoman period, we have terms which became mythonyms in Romanian fairytales, such as:

Buzdugan (Martel), *Cioban* (Shepherd), *Duşman* (Enemy).

Cataran remains a term of uncertain origin. It can be attributed to the Turkish language only if, as Iorgu Iordan tentatively assumes, it could be a corrupted form of *catran* (tar), cf. Turkish *katran*.

Contrarily, *Piciul* (Tiny Tot) is certain to have come from Ottoman Turkish, as a direct loan of the Turkish *pič* "very short boy".

The small number of these latter words confirms the scarcity of Turkish terms proper which survived in modern Romanian.[25]

2.4. Mythonyms of unknown etymology

There are a few character names in the fairytales belonging to Romanian mythical folklore, whose significance, as common names, is known and recorded in the dictionaries of the Romanian language, but whose etymology has not been clarified by the linguists. They constitute, however, linguistic signs of come qualities characterizing fairytale heroes. In other words, their symbolism is worth taking into consideration, as they account for the mentality of the community which created them as character names and in which these texts circulate:

> *Afin, Băiet* – Lad *(Sărac* – Poor*), Boghelţ*, Cheleş, Crâncu, Creaţă, Erete/Herete > Hărău* "hawk, eagle", *Flămândul, Flămânzilă* (Hungered), *Jumătate* (Half), *Mogârzea* "big, foolhardy; who speaks with difficulty"; *Neghiniţă, Păcală* (Trickster), *Pepelea*, Pipelca, Prichiduţă, Stăncuţă* (Little Crow), *Şperlă* "hot ashes", "a bad man", *Tâlharul* (Highwayman), *Titirez* "spindle top", *Ţugulea/Ţugunea, Zăvod* ("big dog"), *Zgâmboi* "tot, toddler", *Zgâmboiu.*

[24] Some contemporary historians consider that these had a more important role in the history of the Romanian people that is commonly believed, cf. Neagu Djuvara, 2010[10], *O scurtă istorie a românilor...*, Bucureşti: Humanitas, pp. 45 *sqq*.

[25] Of the 14 Turkish origin words attested in contemporary Romanian use, ten are actually words of Arabic-Persian origin, which leaves only four Turkish words proper – almost exclusively used in familiar use vocabulary: *chior* (one-eyed), *ciomag* (club), *hal* (bad state), *soi* (breed), cf. Al. Graur, 1968.

BDD-A3960 © 2014 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)

As we have already had occasion to see from the description of the etymological groups discussed above, for some of them there are attempts at explanation by recourse to resembling forms. For others, we have to take into consideration only the figurative meanings. For exemple, *Boghelţ* also means, taken metaphorically, "handsome, big", *Crâncu* can be related to *crâncen* (fiery), *a încrâncena (to shudder)*, (also with unknown etymology), *Şperlă* is also explained as "a bad man", *Titirez*, as "clever man", while *Pipelca* must be the regional term (Southern Romania), as well as the popular *papelca*, unrecorded in the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language, DEX or any others, which circulates, relatively widely, however, with the meaning of "loitering woman, talkative lazy woman".

2.5. Mythonyms with no equivalences in the common vocabulary

A few other mythonims are not recorded anywhere, not even by the dictionaries concerned with dialectal elements, which would mean that they are the pure inventions of storytellers, or rather forms so completely modified or phonetically and morphologically corrupted thorough the process of circulation of folkloric myths and texts that they became unrecognizable:

Buicheză, Bulimandră, Ganul, Iele, Letin, Suleica and others.

The first one seems to be one of those ironical names, suited to the character's role in the text. In this case, we might take into consideration the roots of the Slavic *buia* "to dash", "to run", but also the Hungarian *buja* "sensuous, lecherous"; there is also the proper name *Buia* "spoiled, frolicsome, unserious". *Bulimandră* seems to belong to the same ironical area as *buleandră* "old coat, useless rag", figuratively "immoral woman", while *Ganul* could be a variant of quite frequent family names such as *Gană, Ganea*, from the Bulgarian *Gana* (DNFR, s.v.). In the Transylvanian fairytale of I. Pop-Reteganul, this name gives the title of the narrative *Ganul ţiganul* (Ganul the Gipsy), from the B type of lucky charms (cf. also *Doftorul Toderaş, Trifon Hăbăucul*), etc., and the unusual form could be explained by the euphonic effect obtained thorough the association of the two terms (*Gană Ţiganul > Ganul Ţiganul*).

Maybe the most debated Romanian mythonym, after *Făt Frumos* and *Ileana Cosânzeana*, was the word designating the group of the *Iele (Enchantresses)*. In these pages, we have accepted the simplest explanation, according to which *iele* comes from the personal pronoun *ele*, (they, feminine plural), as a consequence of the semantic action of the linguistic

BDD-A3960 © 2014 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)

tabú. In the course of time, however, diverse other possible sources have been suggested: the Cuman *yel* "wind" (L. Şăineanu), the Sanskrit *val* "death", (B.P. Hasdeu)[26] and others.

Letin can be a Slavonic term as well, related to *leto* "forest" (just as *Zefirin* is a derivative of *zefir*, "zephyr"); there are attestations of names such as *Letinski* "foresty, wild", just as Bulgarian fairytales mention a giant named *Latin* (LŞ, p. 527). Finally, for *Suleica* there would be the numerous masculine correspondents of family names, including allusions to the name of a species of fish.[27]

[26] Cf. L. Şăineanu, 2012, p. 19.
[27] Iorgu Iordan, 1983, s.v.

BDD-A3960 © 2014 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.143 (2026-11-19 07:51:12 UTC)