

**TOPONYMS, ARGUMENTS OF THE INHABITING AND SOCIAL-  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES WITHIN OLTENIA  
SUB-CARPATHIAN DEPRESSION AREA**

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**Abstract.** In order to achieve the study of the toponyms of this sub-Carpathian region, there were thoroughly analysed the topographic maps at the scale 1:100,000; there were emphasized more than 200 names, half of which making reference to the landforms (oronyms) and the rest to water (hydronyms) and settlements (oiconyms). Many toponyms come from the autochthonous Thracian-Getic-Dacian *lexical fund*, hydronyms predominating. The oiconyms come from different lexical funds and they emphasize the variety of the settlements names. They evoke moments, happenings or historical characters, as well as occupations, traditional professions, thus contributing to a better understanding of the history of a particular region, of its economic and social potential.

**Key words:** toponyms, oronyms, hydronyms, antroponyms, Oltenia subcarpathian Depression Area

Geographical toponimy studies the geographical names within a certain space in order to explain their significance, origin, and evolution closely correlated with the geographical elements. For each region, toponimy represents “a spiritual cover” partly achieved from people-nature relation, which gives us valuable clues regarding the inhabiting process pattern, as well as from the organization and economic development pattern.

The sub-Carpathian relief that is extremely hospitable and displays good bioclimatic conditions, characteristic to depressions, which are sheltered at the foot of the mountains, favoured the development of 67 permanent settlements (64 villages and 3 towns) within the area located between the Jiu and the Bistrița Vâlci, on a surface of 1,000 sq km.

Following the classification achieved by I. Conea (1960), the founder of the Romanian geographical toponimy, we further render the toponymic patrimony of the region by giving conclusive examples of oronyms, hydronyms, and oiconyms, which are grouped in many classes according to the original sense of the geographical name.

**The oronyms** – as Ion Conea called them or “*topographies*” – term introduced by Iorgu Iordan, represent the names of the landforms that describe the position, the aspect or any other feature of the place.

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Within the Oltenia sub-Carpathian depression area, there are noticed oronyms that emphasize the particularities of the landforms, such as: Fruntea Răchiții (a summit with a halt place, covered by osier), Cheile Bistriței (The Gorges of the Bistrița), Între Râuri (Between Rivers), Ponor (Ponor) etc.

Sometimes, the vegetation that entirely (variable dimensions) or partially covers the area is present in names, such as: *Fața cu Paltini* (The Side with Sycamore Maples), *Dealul Viei* (The Vineyard Hill), *Fața Nucului* (The Side of the Nut-Tree), *Aluniș sau Afinet* (Hazel or Blueberry Bushes), *Ferigile* (Ferns), *Zmeuretu* (Raspberry Bushes) etc.

With regard to high areas, the old inhabitants of the region got inspired by certain common animal species, such as: *Muntele Cerbul* (The Deer Mountain) and *Coasta Cerbului* (The Deer Slope), *Piatra Ursoaica* (The She-Bear Stone), *Urma Boului* (The Bull Footprint), *Vârful Cocorului* (The Crane Peak) etc.

Oronyms as *Secături* (Dried areas), *Curături* or *Muntele Runcu* emphasize deforestation made for different agricultural crops, for example, *La Arie* (At the Ground), *La Cânepă* (a glade where hemp was spun) or for the setting up of different human settlements.

The historical events occurred within a certain territory often represent a source of names: *Cimitirul Turcilor* (The Turkish Cemetery), *Crucea lui Matei* (Mathew's Cross) etc.

Less represented in the area is the category of oronyms coming from the names of the people who distinguished themselves through certain features (competence, courage, good managers or influent persons): *Muntele lui Dobre* (Dobre's Mountain), *Coasta Marinii* (Marina's Slope).

A particular and well-represented category in the area is that of the roads (**odonyms**) that crossed the highly inclined territory or even the neighbouring summits: *Plaiul Bumbeștilor*, *Plaiul Novaciului*, *Plaiul Cărpiniș*, *Plaiul Mare*, *Plaiul Sohodol*, *Plaiul Miruș*, *Plaiul Bâlbea* (the flat mountainous regions covered with lawns) or *Calea Domnească* (The Lady's Road – a summit road to Văleanu Mountain), *Calea lui Bărbat* (The Man's Road).

**The hydronyms** (names of the water bodies) are considered by experts as the oldest and most stable geographical names. One of the most important categories of hydronyms is the one that present the same name as the landforms they cross or spring from: *Costești* (at the foot of Costești Hill), *Luncavățul*, *Galbenu*, *Văleni* etc.

The characteristics of the valley or of the water course are mentioned in names as *Valea Largă* (The Large Valley), *Izvoru Rece* (The Cold Spring), *Bistrița* (name given by the Slave population or by the Romanians which means "fast river").

Many of the water names are inspired by the vegetation cover from their proximity: *Alunu* (Hazel), *Alunișul* (Hazel Bushes), *Cărpiniș* (Hornbeam), *Râu Plopilor* (Poplars River), *Izvoru cu Bușteni* (The Spring with Logs) (a mountain spring where the exploited fir-tree was rafted before the First World War) or by certain animal species: *Valea Boului* (The Bull Valley), *Valea Lupului* (The Wolf Valley), *Valea Urșilor* (The Bears Valley).

An important inspiration source is represented by the specific occupations, such as miller's trade – Valea Morii (The Mill Valley) (a valley at Pietreni, with permanent water, where it once functioned a mill), sheep breeding – Valea Strungii (Sheepfold Valley) (a valley where sheep were gathered for milking), cooperage – Izvoru din Fața Dogăriei (The Spring in Front of the Cooper's Shop) (a spring in the proximity of which fir-tree stave were made for pails) or even the places where animals were sheltered during dangerous periods – Valea Oboarelor (The Cattle Pen Valley).

The historical or social and religious events are preserved by certain hydronyms, such as Valea Mănăstirea (The Monastery Valley) (a tributary of the Luncavăț), Fântâna Domnească (The Princely Fountain) or Valea Caselor (The Houses Valley), Fântâna Căprarului (Goatherd's Fountain).

The proper anthroponymy or certain nicknames represent another source of names for hydronyms. We mention: Izvoru lui Vasile (Vasile's Spring), Valea lui Capră (The Goat's Valley), Lacul Grozoaiei (Grozoaia's Lake) etc.

**The oiconyms** make reference to the names of settlements.

It is well-known that the Oltenia depression area, limited by the Jiu and the Bistrița Vâlcii, has always ensured favourable conditions for the appearance and development of numerous settlements, as it is an example of variety of the natural conditions (landforms, river system, soil and subsoil resources etc.). **Sthal H., H.**, in his 1958-1965 studies, referring to the Romanian villages, emphasized that the villages located within the Sub-Carpathians underwent an extremely prosperous social and economic development as most of them were free villages (freeholder).

Most of the settlements developed along valleys or within depressions and less at the foot of the slopes, at the skirt of the forest or within glades. Thus, the geographical location, as well as the physical-geographical components influenced the assigning of the names of the settlements for 50 percent of them.

An important role in establishing the name of certain villages is held by their **position within the valley**: *Romanii de Jos* (Lower Romanii), *Romanii de Sus* (Upper Romanii), *Măldăreștii de Jos* (Lower Măldăreștii), *Măldăreștii de Sus* (Upper Măldăreștii), *Blahnița de Sus* (Upper Blahnița), *Foleștii de Sus* (Upper Foleștii), *Foleștii de Jos* (Lower Foleștii) etc. Sometimes, they included the term "valley" in the name – the village *Aninișu din Vale* (Downstream Aninișu) or "spring" – the village *Izvorul Rece* (The Cold Spring), fact that illustrates the close relation between the human settlement and the water source. In other case, the name of the settlement comes directly from the name of the river that crosses it or of the valley along which it is located: the town *Bumbești-Jiu* (on the Jiu Valley), *Bistrița* (on the Bistrița Vâlcii Valley), *Cerna* (on the Cerna Valley, a tributary of the Olteț) and *Râmești* (on the Râmești Valey, a tributary of the Luncavăț).

Attentive observers of the places where they lived, the ancestors of these regions called their settlements after the **landforms** and here we mention the name of "deal/hill", *Aninișu din Deal*, *Crasna din Deal* or they used names referring to the general aspect of the terrain: *Grui* (Hill Top), *Coasta Cerbului* (The Deer Slope), *Costești*.

**The vegetal cover**, mainly represented by deciduous forests that were gradually and almost totally replaced by pastures and arable plots or fruit-trees is suggestively rendered within the sub-Carpathian area by oiconyms that remind us different vegetal species, such as: *Cărpiniș* (*Hornbeam*), *Gorunești* (*Sessile Oak*) etc. At the same time, certain oiconyms *Poienari*, *Arșeni*, *Rugetu* suggest *deforestation for gaining new fields used in a different way*.

There are few villages in the area reminding of **fauna** elements. *Urșani* suggests such an oiconym, even if the anthroponimic name is much more plausible, the name coming from Urșanu, an old landlord. The settlement *Horezu* (initially called “Huhurez/Eagle Owl”) certainly comes from Hurezul Monastery, founded by Constantin Brâncoveanu; the monastery in its turn took its name from the Hurezu River that flows in its proximity, while the river was called after “Ciuhurez/Owl”, a nocturne bird living in the thick forests covering the area before the appearance of this settlement.

During time, the *oiconyms preserved other aspects of the social and historical life of the community*, most of them being derived from people’s names, some of them of historical importance: *Buzești*, *Novaci* (the last one coming from Baba-Novac, a general in Mihai Viteazu’s army and founder of the commune in 1595).

Usually, the respective oiconyms comes from **anthroponyms** and they form starting from the name of a common ancestor with the suffix *-ești* and *-eni* (*ani*), the plurals being *-escu* and (*anu*); their function is to indicate the inhabitants’ personal origin, namely of the descendents of the person who set up or ruled over the settlement/village at a particular time. Both suffixes indicate the place the people of a certain village come from (from what place and person).

The name of the village is derived from a person’s name: with *-ești* indicating the people that are descendents of the landlord (or founder) of the village: *Lăzărești*, *Bercești*, *Hirișești*, *Mușetești*, *Stăncești*, *Ifrimești*, *Tănăsești*, *Măldărești*, *Bogdănești* etc. and with *-ani* (*-eni*) denominating the original inhabitants of a village with the same ancestor: *Tomșani*, *Roșoveni*.

In the category of the oiconyms evoking **historical evidences**, there can be included the names referring to churches, monasteries, as well as to former princely properties. For example, the name of the village *Pociovaliștea* seems to come from the pillars of a church in ruins, which were called “Pociumpii-din-vale”, while *Curtișoara* commune seems to have been called after a small old princely court the vestiges of which can still be seen.

On the Russian map from 1835, there are written villages with names derived from occupations; for example, the gypsies that are woodworkers or potters. Presently, there can be noticed villages specialized in certain handicrafts, such as pottery, as it is the case of *Olari* settlement, today a component part / district of Horezu town.

The oiconyms patrimony of the region also comprises *names of settlements referring to the wealth of the subsoil and mining exploitations*. For example, *Baia de Fier* (*Iron Mine*) (where iron used to be exploited and processed in the past) and

*Pietreni* (name indicating the lime exploited here).

*The hydronyms* are names of extremely important places, the oldest and the most resistant/unchanged ones, together with the names of large mountainous massifs.

As a conclusion, we mention the presence of a varied toponymic fund, which indicates the multitude of the inspiration sources for all categories of names, as well as autochthonous people's good knowledge of the places.

According to the topographical map at the scale 1:100,000, which represents the base of the present study, there were found 240 toponyms within the area, half of them being oronyms, 70 hydronyms, and 67 oiconyms.

The oiconyms derived from different lexical funds indicate an intense inhabiting process of the region, a complex process of the Romanian people's formation in the area, the particularities of the Romanian language, an interrupted continuity, and an intense economic activity.

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