

FOLKLORIC MEANING OF PROPER NAMES

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Abstract: Proper names are evidence of historical layers, covered by successive lexical sediments and allow one to recompose forms and types that have disappeared from current language.

The anthroponymic material is a genuine mirror reflecting the ethnolinguistics and socio-demography of human society. The Romanian material comprises elements arranged in successive layers according to historical and cultural factors that have influenced the destiny of the Romanian people.

In this paper, we shall analyse some old proper names that have survived to this day, such as the names of saints and Christian holidays, which also circulated as names of people: Ana, Andrei, Crăciun, Îndrea, Rozalia, Rozavlea, Sânziana, Undrea, with their history and their derivatives in Romanian and other languages. This study relies on dictionaries of names and etymological dictionaries that have appeared so far.

Keywords: customs, folklore, proper names, saint's names, holidays.

Man, a social and rational being par excellence, cannot be conceived outside his relationships with his fellows. The need for a permanent bond among the members of a community, created through language, the most important means of communication and an instrument of thought, has required the establishment and improvement of a particular way of personal designation. We are compelled to speak not only about us, but also about the others. The larger this number, the greater the need to name each and every one in a certain, constant manner, using the same elements and as practical a linguistic means as possible. However, we should not forget that any individual may be designated not only by a name but by common words; moreover, in certain moments of communication, this way of naming becomes absolutely indispensable.

The component part of the language of each people, any personal name is basically a sonorous sequence used constantly in communication to designate a certain person. Therefore, the first and most significant function of the name is to operate and express the necessary distinctions among the members of a community. The emergence of personal names is conditioned on the existence of the human group, of man as a social being.

Most of the current Romanian forenames are loans that reached us through various ways from numerous languages that belong to the Indo-European and Semito-Hamitic families. The reliable results obtained so far by studying person's names allow us to formulate some general assumptions on the form and initial significance of these names, some of which are very old.

Ana

We have chosen the name **Ana** because there are several studies on this name, such as the book of Professor Petre Gheorghe Bârlea¹. He entitles his book *Ana cea bună. Lingvistică și mitologie*, showing details from the history of the word and its connection with mythology and folk traditions.

One of the most widespread and frequent female forenames, **Ana** reproduces an old personal name, the Hebrew **Hannah**, borne by several biblical figures. Experts consider that the Hebrew name is close in meaning to the verb *hanah* “have mercy, be gracious” (also present in other names of the same origin, the best known being **Ion**); there is a difference of opinions only as regards the original form of the name².

The emergence of the name of **Ana** in various Romanian beliefs, customs or folk creations is particularly interesting. In incantations, for example, **Ana** is the first of the nine fairies invoked to help the sick (“Ană buziană” draws attention due to the epithet, a derivative from *boz* ‘danewort’, a plant whose healing properties have been known ever since the antiquity and of which the wreath of the god Pan was made); two riddles in which **Ana** is identified with *lumina* ‘light’ are also surprising (“Ană grasa / Umple casa” ‘Fat Ana / Fills the house’ – *ziua* ‘the day’ and “Ană subțirică / Umple ulcica” ‘Thin Ana / Fills the pipkin’ - *opaițul* ‘rushlight’). Providing other very interesting examples as well, B.P. Hasdeu would point to the connection between “Zâna Ana” ‘Ana the Fairy’ and goddess *Anna Perenna*, an ancient Roman deity later identified with the sister of Dido. Celebrated by Romans with much pomp in March, at the same time as the god Mars, **Anna** seems to be originally a deity of the moon, as Ovid states in *Fasti*: “Some think that this goddess is the moon, because the moon fills up the measure of the year by her months” (it is here that the connection with our riddles would appear). Therefore, **Ana** in Romanian folklore may be a remnant from the Dacian-Roman period, later overlapped by the Hebrew name (as regards the Latin **Anna**, some consider it to be of Etruscan origin, while others deem it a Latin formation from *anus* ‘old woman’, for *Anna of Bovillae* is, in Roman mythology, the name of an old lady who is thought to have saved the people from starvation³).

Andrei

Indisputable linguistic evidence proves how old and popular the cult of **Andrei** is among the Romanians, Bulgarians, Serbs, Croatians, Albanians. As far as we are concerned, the Christian cult has been engrafted on a number of old pagan elements, beliefs and magic practices known to other European peoples as well. As the 30th of November represents the beginning of winter, **Andrei** is considered to be the master of wolves and other beasts (beliefs and practices connected with wolves, the most feared enemies of herds, occupy a special place within the Romanian or foreign folk celebrations; hence, the name “the month of wolves” for December)⁴. The night of November 30th, a kind of jubilee of wolves and *strigoi* ‘poltergeist’, provides an occasion for witchcraft and spells; one of these is particularly interesting through its connection with the initial significance of the name **Andrei**, namely the custom called “făcutul de ursit” (young women try to find the name of the one who is predestined to them, “ursit”, or the future husband or to make the one they want marry them by means of magic).

¹Petre Gheorghe, BÂRLEA. *Ana cea bună. Lingvistică și mitologie*. București: Ed. Grai și Suflet – Cultura Națională, 2007, 267 p.

²N.A. Constantinescu. *Dicționar onomastic românesc*. București: Editura Academiei RPR, 1963, pp. 8-9.

³Christian, Ionescu. *Mică enciclopedie onomastică*. București: Editura Enciclopedică Română, 1975, pp. 38-39.

⁴N.A. Constantinescu. *Dicționar onomastic românesc*. București: Editura Academiei RPR, 1963, p. 11.

The Romanised population of Dacia took the name from Balkan Latin, circulating as such among the Christians; we have, from that age, the forms **Îndreá** and **Undreá**, folk names of December.

Romanian onomastics is considered to have preserved nothing from Latin, but, in this case, **Îndreá** and **Undreá** invalidate this rule. Perfect Romanian correspondents of the Latin **Andreá**, the aforementioned forms must have circulated as person's names for a while, the convincing argument being the existence of the word *îndreá* – December “the month of Andrei”, which is clear in folk consciousness⁵.

Îndreá could circulate only as a name of folk onomastics. Still, traces have remained in our documentary anthroponymy. In the 17th century, **Îndreiu** and **Îndriiu** were probably hybrid folk forms, in which the first part corresponds to the old form, while the end corresponds to the official Slavonic. As we do not know the position of the stress, we cannot discuss the Transylvanian forms **Indrea** (from 1469), **Indre** etc⁶.

Crăciun

An old person's name, which has been frequently attested for about 500 years in all Romanian provinces and which entered the toponymy long ago, **Crăciún** has given rise to long heated discussions in Romanian and foreign philology. If the value as a personal name can be considered a Romanian creation (the names of holidays that have become anthroponyms are plentiful, and in our case we should not forget a well-known folk figure, “moș Crăciun” ‘Father Christmas’, who draws our attention to a certain type folk personification, with possible implications in onomastics), the etymology of the word *crăciun* is much more difficult to establish⁷.

Crenguța

A laic female first name, created in Romanian, **Crenguța** is a diminutive from the noun *creangă* ‘branch, bough’ or from the personal name **Creangă**, well-known in Romanian onomastics as a family name. It is difficult to say which of the meanings of the common word is the origin of the name **Creangă** (the correspondents of this name also appear in other people's onomastics). Parents who nowadays choose **Crenguța** certainly consider the name as a symbol of freshness, delicacy and continuity⁸.

Rozalia

Modern female forename, spread today throughout the entire Europe and, in some parts, very common, **Rozália** is thought to be a creation of Christian onomastics based on the Latin name of the *Rosalia* holiday (*rusalii* ‘Pentecost’ or *Duminica rusaliilor* ‘Whit Sunday’ in our country), but the analysis of facts makes this etymology improbable and here is why. In Western Europe, **Rosalia** is a calendar name in memory of a Sicilian martyr woman. Let us now return to the name of the aforementioned holiday, supposedly an etymon of **Rosalia**. Ancient Jews would celebrate, seven weeks after Easter, “the day of the first fruit”. The Apostle Peter's speech before a crowd gathered in Jerusalem on the occasion of the harvest celebration is considered to be the

⁵ Al. Graur. *Nume de persoane*. București: Editura Științifică, 1965, pp. 48-49.

⁶ Christian, Ionescu. *Mică enciclopedie onomastică*. București: Editura Enciclopedică Română, 1975, p. 38.

⁷ Idem, p. 94.

⁸ Al. Graur. *Nume de persoane*. București: Editura Științifică, 1965, p. 53.

beginning of the Christian propaganda and the church decided that one of its greatest holidays should fall on this day⁹.

The Greek name of the celebration, *Pentekosté* “the fiftieth day” (an approximate loan translation from Hebrew), is taken from Latin (Pentecoste) and is preserved in Italian, French, Spanish, etc. At about the same time, in spring, the Roman Empire celebrated a pagan holiday of Oriental origin dedicated to the Manes (deities thought to represent the souls of the dead) and called *Rosalia*, after the ceremony of decorating the tombs with roses. The Christian holiday overlapped the pagan one, preserving its name, but only in Eastern regions of Europe. In toponymy, there is the commune of Rozavlea in Maramureş¹⁰.

Sânziana

A female forename, back in fashion due to the influence of folklore, **Sânziána** is an older creation of the Romanian onomastics from the noun *sânziana* or *sânziene*. In our folk calendar, the Midsummer holiday (*Sânzienele*) is related to numerous ancient beliefs and rituals which have interesting parallelisms in the mythology of other peoples, closer to or more remote from us in space and time. A number of customs performed on the night of the *Sânziene* are well-known, of which we shall mention only the picking of medicinal herbs (especially swallowwort) or the adornment of gates and windows with flowers¹¹. The wreath of braided grain-ears for *drăgaică* (another name of the holiday), in some areas “the *sânziene* wreath”, is used as a magic object for predicting the length of one's life. In certain parts, the *sânzienile* or the *drăgaicele* are identified with the *Iele*, fairies, fantastic beings that have the passion of dancing and also the power of dazing and disfiguring those they dance with¹². Cosmogonic legends according to which *Iana Sânziana* is identified with the Moon are particularly interesting (married to her brother the *Sun*, she commits suicide, throwing herself into the water; this way, they no longer appear together at the same time); the link between the lunar cult and *sânziana* was probably made through *zână* ‘fairy’, a certain linguistic proof of the cult of *Diana* in Carpathian-Danubian regions. As can be seen, *sânziana*, which basically means “Saint John’s Day”, has nothing to do with Christianity, except the name, but is related to older, pagan elements. According to a custom encountered with many peoples, the name of the holiday has been used with a personal value at least since the 16th century, when the forms *Sânzioana*, *Sâmzeana*, *Sâmziana*, etc. started to appear in documents (one must also consider another possibility as well, namely the formation of the personal name from the name of the plant that blooms on the day of the *sânziene*). The use of the forename *Sânziana* is explained today maybe less by the onomastic tradition and more by the poetic value due to the folk lyrics (from scholarly literature we should mention the fairy-tale *Sânzianași Pepelea* by V. Alecsandri)¹³.

Along with the spread of Christianity and the fall of the Roman Empire, elements of diversification and of unification began to occur in personal names. Diversification comes from the language being required to utter certain names which come from a common source.

However, there are a relatively large number of baptismal names formed in Romanian and they are the only ones which have not been borrowed. They may have been formed from common words of Latin origin, especially the botanical names (of flowers or fruit) and the zoological ones (of animals).

⁹ N.A.Constantinescu. *Dicționar onomastic românesc*. București: Editura Academiei RPR, 1963, p. 40.

¹⁰ Christian, Ionescu. *Mică enciclopedie onomastică*. București: Editura Enciclopedică Română, 1975, p. 248.

¹¹ Al. Graur. *Nume de persoane*. București: Editura Științifică, 1965, p. 53.

¹² Idem, p. 53.

¹³ Christian, Ionescu. *Mică enciclopedie onomastică*. București: Editura Enciclopedică Română, 1975, p. 257.

Crenguța has been definitely formed in Romanian, from names of plants. *Sânziana* also falls under the same category. Although it is a holiday name, it has also come to name a plant that blooms around Saint John's Day and is also called the *drăgaica* (another name of the holiday as well); therefore, the plural *sânziene* gave birth to a rebuilt singular form *sânziană*, which has become a female name, also used in fairy-tales (*Sânzianași Pepelea*).

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