

THE RIVER DANUBE FOR HOMO BALCANICUS – A BASIC CONCEPT IN THE PICTURE OF THE WORLD

Abstract: În tabloul lumii pentru Homo Balkanicus fluviul Dunărea a ocupat un loc important. Statutul celui mai lung fluviu european – pod, peste care au trecut în Balcani diverse etnii și culturi atât din Est cât și din Vest, se constituie într-un motiv de bază prin care s-au verbalizat categorii și metafore universale. Datele etnolingvistice ale poziției pe care conceptual despre Dunăre îl ocupă în tabloul balcanic al lumii sunt strâns legate de reperele categoriilor semantice ale limbilor balcanice. Accentul în această lucrare este pus pe termeni provenind din limba bulgară precum și pe granițele etnice.

Keywords: ethno-linguistic, concept Danube, Balkan picture of the world, cultural anthropology, metaphor.

For *homo balcanicus*, the Danube occupies an important place in the picture of the world. The status of the longest European river, a bridge through which various nations and cultures come to the Balkans from the East, as well from the West, is a basic concept. By means of it, universal categories and metaphors are verbalized. The explanation highlights the indisputable importance of the river for the life of the people populating the lands near the lower Danube. The regular migration processes on the Balkan Peninsula and language contacts there broaden the area of the distribution of linguistic facts associated with this hydronym as an ethno-linguistic concept. Some facts about different meanings of the word formulas containing the key lexeme *Dunav* (meaning *Danube*) are explored through the lens of cultural anthropology. The analysis of the phenomena from this perspective substantiates what is common in the mentality of the Balkans and the reasons for the layers in the reception of these realia, so significant for everyday life in this topography. They are not only a diachronic layer in the patriarchal language, but represent certain innovations at the synchronic level.

The main focus in this paper is on some data from Bulgarian language in its ethnic borders, integrated around the key lexeme *Dunav* (directly or indirectly), providing information about a line of relations on the topic – such as ethnic and confessional affiliation, Balkan languages and cultural interactions, territory markers. Aspects explored are also connected with the characteristics *nearness* ~ *remoteness* and social parameters of *prestige*, *significance*, *potential*, *status* in the community area, as well as in the individual one.

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The wide temporal frame of the language phenomena concerned can be explained due to the significance of this geographical object for all civilizations, which left some traces in this part of Europe. Basic concepts have had the longest chronology and as a result of this – a large diversity and polysemantics. Undoubtedly, this is rooted in the memory of origin that retains the deep semantics of the name of the river. The *Dunav* hydronym (meaning *Danube*) is widely used and known in different phonetic variants, including non-Indo-European languages, although the base of its etymology was provided by Indo-European languages (BER 1971: 446-447; Brückner 1985: 103; Vasmer 1986: 552-553). This is due to the universality of its semantics. *Dunav* (*Danube*) means ‘river’. Of course, this hydronym has a lot of meanings and usages, a wide derivative network and a high degree of frequency, whereas these characteristics have the highest level of intensity in the region of the lower Danube, i.e. the area in the Balkans where the river is the widest and the biggest one, with the most feeders and associated populated areas (Koleva 2008).

The name of the river is mentioned in some of the most important sources of Bulgarian history of the Middle Ages written in Bulgarian: the Suprasal collection of writings dating back to the middle of the 10th century, the Bulgarian apocryphal chronicle from 11th century and the Chronicles of Manasius (a translation of the World Chronicles by the Byzantine Constantinus Manasius) made in the period between 1335-1345.

The data of the ethnic language for the place of the concept *Dunav* (meaning *Danube*) in the Balkan picture of the world are closely connected to significant semantic categories for the Balkan languages.

One of these categories is the binary category *definiteness ~ indefiniteness*.

Contrary to the paradigmatic rules, this personal name is used not only in its nominative form, but more often with the definite article: *Дунавът* // *Дунава* // *Дунавеме* (*Dunavat* // *Dunava* // *Dunavete* ‘the Danube // Danube // the Danubes’). These usages render its semantics the same as appellatives (an unrestricted class of words). This is not by chance, as analogies exist between the Danube and sites of historical and social importance in the Balkans such as *Балкана* / *Balkana* (the Balkans – the longest mountain chain that provided the name of the Peninsula), *Родопите* / *Rhodopi* (the Rhodopes Mountains – the widest and oldest mountain chain, where the cradle of Orpheus and Thracian Orphism were situated), *Искъра* / *Iskara* (the Iskar River – the longest and the oldest Balkan river, springing from the highest mountain in the Balkans – the Rila Mountain, the only one crossing the Balkans and flowing into the Danube) and, of course, *Черното море* / *Chernoto more* (the Black Sea), the waterway between the Balkans and the Orient (West Asia), into which the Danube empties.

This is the way in which Bulgarian native speakers give an extra connotation to the onym and express a social attitude towards the Great River. For members of the society, it is not only a source of life and work but also a blessed site to settle near to. The Danube is the symbol of water as one of the four elements of Creation, as it provides an abundance of ecosystems existing in the lower course of the river,

especially for its right (Bulgarian) bank. The cult of nature and its relation to the divine, before which the man bows down in veneration, is expressed in the definite linguistic reference (the definite article in Bulgarian).

The Balkan settlers placed the Danube next to the other large natural objects in their own picture of the world using the semantic category *quantity*.

In the region of Nikopol, the name of the river and its banks is in the plural: *Дунавеме* / *Dunavete* 'the Danubes' (BER 1971: 446). The plural definite form is created on the model of the names of the mountain chains (the Rhodope Mountains, the Carpathian Mountains, the Apennines). The idea of a large space is obligatory, expressed in oronyms by the plural form. Here it is verbalized in analogue with those already known. Meanwhile, in this form the opposition *high ~ deep* plays an important role in human spatial ideas about the natural world.

In the folklore text from the region of Sofia (an area relatively distant from the river), the name of the river is in the plural form as well: „въз тия бели Дунаве”/ *Over these white Danubes*. The collocation with the demonstrative underlines the name and the epithet *бели*/ *white* is a “trade mark” of the Danube. This is not only a colour term, but a polysemantic symbol of Heaven, beauty, light and life as an antipode of black, including all its negative connotations (compared to the opposition *White sea / Aegean sea ~ Black sea* already known for homo balcanicus).

The idea is of a large quantity of water expressed by phrases with the hydronym *Dunav* (meaning *Danube*) on the Balkan Peninsula.

In the dialect of Embore (the Lerin region in Aegean part of Macedonia), the expression 'дунав вода' (*Danube water*) is found, which means 'a lot of water usually after heavy rainfalls' (BER 1971: 446).

The reference to the largest river for the Balkan population is indisputable. There are some verbal characteristics about its large dimensions (Koleva 2009).

The word formula of two hydronyms – the rivers *Dunav* and *Sava* (Danube and Sava) – significant for the Balkans has a similar semantic.

The Bulgarian dialect collocation 'туна и сава' (*tuna i sava*), meaning 'a great amount of, quite a lot', is used in Prilep (the region of the river Vardar, Macedonia). The component 'туна' (*tuna*) is the Turkish variant of the Danube (*Tuna*). Due to the bilingual language situation with the presence of the Turkish language code as a historical context of five centuries of political rule by the Ottoman Empire on the Balkan Peninsula, whose northern boundary was the River Danube, is real this quantity metaphor to get through the hydronym *Tuna* into the Bulgarian dialects, which have more intensive contacts with the language of the ruler. *Tuna* is used with the meaning 'in great abundance' in northeastern Turkish dialects. The semantic of this metaphor becomes clear from the data about the heavy and frequently occurring floods of the river Danube in the past.

The component 'сава' is the name of the second right-hand feeder of the Danube – the river *Sava*, a large river used for navigation. In the discourse of the patriarchal language of the Serbs, *Sava* means 'rain', because after rains its waters were frequently high. As is well-known, the river flows into the Danube near one

of the most emblematic places for the entire history of the Balkans: Belgrade. For centuries, the waters of both rivers were often high, as is a fact today as well.

The combination of the two hydronyms ‘*туна и сава*’, which developed as a result of certain language contacts, is registered only in the Bulgarian language area and it is not known in the Serbian area. Its phonetic shape points to the chronology of the phenomena, not earlier than the 14th century, which is supported by the well-known historical data of the Turkish invasion into the Balkans.

Apart from being full over centuries, both rivers have served as language and political boundaries (since the Slavonic colonization of the Balkans). In the history of the Balkan peoples, the rivers Danube and Sava (Дунав и Сава) have been quite important.

It is curious that the phrases ‘*tuna i sava*’ and ‘*dunav voda*’ have been recorded in other areas not in the region of the river Danube. In the southwestern part of the Bulgarian language area – in the geographical region of Macedonia (of the river Vardar and the Aegean Sea) – there are large rivers, there flowing into the White Sea due to the continental plate’s inclination toward the south. Out of the specialized language information, the two regionally marked word formulas with the hydronym components prove the significance which the two large rivers (with the river Danube as a leader) have for the life on the Balkans and the role they play in the picture of the world of homo balcanicus.

Within Bulgarian folklore culture, Дунав (the Danube) is a key word in proverbs and sayings whose meaning involves the idea of great space that is also an obstacle. The following expression has a high degree of frequency: *Власите на края на Дунава се давят // Накрай Дунава власите се давят. / The Vlachs drowned when they almost reached the opposite bank of the Danube*. It is said for a person who loses, fails in the final stage of some work (RBE 1979: 263). The following phrase is used in dialects: *Не може ме опра ни Дунав. / The Danube cannot wash me*, meaning ‘to be in a difficult situation’, ‘no one can help me’ (PRBE 1974: 709). The fact that the above expressions are not restricted to the regional usage is evidence of the wide scope of these linguistic phenomena. Moreover, the above-mentioned expressions belong to an archaic layer of phraseology and are fixed expressions.

It is an interesting fact that the concept *Dunav* (meaning *Danube*) is associated with the idea of success, prosperity, the wealth of those who live on the river banks. The Gorans from Albania and Kosovo have such a view. Gora is a high mountain region, located on the west of Balkans, between Shar Mountain and Vratsa Mountain from the East and Korab Mountain from the West, where the Bulgarian and Albanian settlements are mixed. Life there is very difficult, and the lack of work is a reason for emigration. The Gorans say: *Za qerdosane, qe se qerdosaje ka svi na Dunava. // За кердосане, ке се кердосаје ка сви на Дунава*. ‘will earn’ < Greeks κέρδος ‘earning’ (RGNA 2007: 941).

A book title by a poet from Varna “*Дунавът на паметта*” // “*The Danube of the Memory*” (Stoyanov 2011) is an innovation in the using of the hydronym

Dunav (meaning *Danube*) as a metaphor. This title takes us to *De Profundis*, to the very first and eternal word of the Bible.

The list of the word formulas and metaphors with the key word *Dunav* (meaning *Danube*) is open and this is relevant to evaluating the river as a basic concept in the Balkan picture of the world.

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