

MAYA VLAHOVA-ANGELOVA
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia
mvlahova@ibl.bas.bg

BULGARIAN ONOMASTICS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

The article presents a brief overview of the achievements of Bulgarian onomastics in the contemporary age, from the turn of the century until the present day. It reviews the most significant works in toponymy and anthroponymy, the field's two main branches, as well as disciplines that are less developed in the country, such as astronomy. Particular focus has been placed on the new research uncovering the traces left by the Thracian language in modern Bulgarian onomastics. The work presents some conclusions concerning the contributions of onomastic science in Bulgaria in the past few years.

Introduction

In the beginning of a new century, Bulgarian onomastic science continues to pursue the goals originally set by its founders. After a very productive and successful period in the second half of the 20th century, onomastic research has in our day become a rather exotic discipline. The difficult conditions Bulgarian science faced in the last thirty years have inevitably reflected on the development of onomastics and the most pressing problem is the scarcity of young specialists. In this context, the two main research centres continue their scientific work and their efforts are mainly focused on toponymy and anthroponymy.¹ As a result, a number of onomastic science branches remain underdeveloped, like for example chrematonymy, literary onomastics, zoonymy, etc. The new sociopolitical environment of the 1990s did have a positive impact on at least one aspect of Bulgarian onomastics – the study of the

¹ The review of Bulgarian onomastics offered here refers to activity from the year 2000 until the present day. For earlier periods, see Duridanov (1995), Dimitrova-Todorova (2002, 2011).

onomastic legacy of traditional Bulgarian communities left outside the country's borders. These studies were given a strong impetus, an impossible feat under the previous conditions.

Toponymic research

One of the undisputed priorities of contemporary onomastics is the study of the microtoponymy of the Bulgarian linguistic area in its entirety (including territories outside of the present borders²). This is because Bulgarian microtoponymy has not been gathered and described in its totality. The difficulty of finalizing this venerable goal stems from the fact that Bulgarian toponymy was never written down and it was transmitted orally. It was not until the beginning of the 20th century that administrative records were systematically committed to paper (Choleva-Dimitrova 2014: 9). This situation predetermines the protracted collection of microtoponymic data, which is painstakingly assembled on the field with the assistance of local guides. For all intents and purposes, toponymic field research ceased to exist in Bulgaria in the years after 1989, because of the lack of financing. This is how the inertia gathered in the previous years was interrupted, and the main goal of Bulgarian onomasts – to fully collect all data, was delayed by decades.³ Nevertheless, in the last ten years, there has been certain progress in regard to erasing some of the grey spots on Bulgaria's toponymic map. In spite of the difficulties, new field research was conducted in some regions of the country (like Sandanski and Plovdiv), and more than a few works begun in earlier years for the Botevgrad, Kyustendil, Popovo, Sofia, Tran, etc. regions were completed (Dimitrova-Todorova 2006a; Mihaylova 2008; Umlenski, Kovachev 2008-2018; Choleva-Dimitrova 2014). The publication of 24 previously unpublished toponymic monographies (mostly dissertations) by the University of Veliko Tarnovo (VTU) project "Bulgarian toponymy thesaurus" in the period 2009–2012, is of particular importance (Angelova-Atanasova 2012: 20). Special attention must be given to the efforts made by scientists to research Bulgarian toponymy beyond the country's borders. In the last few years were published detailed studies of the local name systems in the Western Outlands – the Tran and Tsaribrod regions (Choleva-Dimitrova 2014, 2019b), as well as the Bulgarian communities in Budjak in the Ukraine and Moldova (Kurtev 2006; Voynikova 2008; Marinov 2013).

Based on the toponymic data collected in the beginning of the 21st century, the focus of Bulgarian onomastics is continuously shifting toward summarized theoretical explorations. The study of Bulgarian oikonymy, which researches data on

² This refers to the so called Western Outlands, today in the Republic of Serbia, as well as the Bulgarian minorities in Moldova and the Ukraine (known as Bessarabian Bulgarians), and Romania (Banat Bulgarians).

³ According to data from 2012, the study of the microtoponymy of nine regions (out of ninety one) has not begun yet, while another thirty are still being researched (Angelova-Atanasova 2012: 27).

the names of settlements in the Sofia, Tran, Varna, and Smolyan regions, continues as well (see Choleva-Dimitrova 2005, 2012; Adzhemlerski 2012; Smolyansko 2015). For the first time, commemorative settlement names have been theoretically analyzed as a separate class of oikonyms in Mihaylov's work (2013). The most significant contribution to oikonym research in the new millennium is the work "Settlement names from southwestern Bulgaria" by Choleva-Dimitrova (2002), which contains a number of valuable theoretical conclusions concerning the settlement name system in our country. Although the dictionary included in the work does not cover the country's entire territory, it is still a solid beginning for the achievement of another fundamental goal of Bulgarian onomastics – compiling a dictionary of settlement names in Bulgaria.

The works of Dimitrova-Todorova also occupy a significant place within Bulgarian onomastic science. The monography "Local names in the process of linguistic communication" (Dimitrova-Todorova 2009) marks a novel approach in the study of toponyms, since it applies a sociolinguistic method to explain changes and current names as a result of bilingualism. The study draws on material from one particular Bulgarian region – Popovo, but its conclusions can be applied to a much wider territory – most of the eastern part of the country, where the influence of another language is a lot more visible in the toponymic system. The work "Proper nouns in Bulgaria" (Dimitrova-Todorova 2011) is wholly theoretical and it synthesizes the author's many years of experience in the sphere of onomastic research. Through a detailed survey of the achievements of Bulgarian science in regard to the different types of names, the author delineates the unsolved challenges and future direction in regard to methods, subjects of study, and onomastic theory.

Another important addition to Bulgarian toponymy has been made by a series of works on the conceptualization of the environment in toponymy, and particularly in reference to geographic perceptions and the world of plants (Dancheva 2010; Mihaylova 2012; Vlahova-Angelova 2018). The dissertation of Choleva-Dimitrova (2019a), titled "Local and kin names from the Tsaribrod region", is another influential theoretical onomastic work, in which the theory of anthroponymic reconstruction is put forth. It contains analysis of troves of microtoponyms and kin names from the Tsaribrod region, and relevant data about Bulgarian anthroponymy is extracted and reconstructed through the method of anthroponymic reconstruction.

In the 21st century, studies in urban toponymy have become especially pertinent on a global scale, mostly because the majority of the world's population is concentrated in cities and this is precisely where intensive name creation and renaming processes are occurring. Bulgarian scientists do not remain unmoved by this new set of challenges, and even though this particular discipline is not very well developed, there has been some progress in the study of urban toponymy, mostly in the two main cities of Sofia and Plovdiv (Borowiak 2011; Vlahova-Angelova 2013). Vlahova-Angelova's (2013) monography on the streets of the capital Sofia is the first empirical socio-onomastic toponymic study based on three experiments, which reveal street names as a wholistic system of symbols and analyze the way in which they function in the collective consciousness of the city's inhabitants.

In the last two decades, a specific current within Bulgarian onomastics has been developing vigorously. Its founder and most dynamic practitioner Balkanski defines it as linguistic archeology. Balkanski and his disciples focus their efforts on the search for linguistic traces that lead to the Bulgarian ethnos in the broadest sense of the definition,⁴ by researching onomastic data (chiefly toponyms and ethnonyms) preserved around the globe. Their aim is to map the Bulgarian migrations over the centuries (Balkanski 2009, 2010; Parzulova 2011; Balkanski, Kondov 2012; Marinov, Balkanski 2014).

In the beginning of the new century we can find pride in the first exhaustive study of eklesionyms in Bulgaria. Belneyska's (2010) work approached eklesionyms as a separate challenge for Bulgarian onomastics. The study's main contribution is a well-developed model for the classification of these toponyms using different criteria: according to the religion they belong to, the type of cult object, grammatical peculiarities, etc.

Lately, studies in hydronymy are likely to have been the most undervalued. Aside from the publication (nearly thirty years later, and not even in its entirety!) of Zaimov's (2014) important work "Bulgarian water names", there has not been much emphasis on the study of waterbody names, with the exception of some studies of the Struma and Iskar riverbeds (Choleva-Dimitrova 2019b, forthcoming; Dancheva forthcoming).

Parallel to traditional toponymic research, recent years have witnessed the beginning of the development of digital toponymic resources in Bulgaria, which facilitate and enhance access to the data accumulated over the years (see Angelova-Atanasova 2010, 2012; Choleva-Dimitrova, Dancheva 2011a, 2011b). The two leading onomastic research centres in Bulgaria have already compiled such databases with the ample archival sources in their possession. The Institute for Bulgarian Language and its Onomastics Department at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, created its own "Digital Database of Western Bulgarian Microtoponyms", which contains micro- and macrotoponyms from western and southern Bulgaria (Choleva-Dimitrova, Dancheva 2011a, 2011b). The Bulgarian Onomastics Center at VTU has a similar database titled "Bulgarian toponymy thesaurus", which includes data from Sofia University as well as VTU's own records. In terms of territory, the database mostly covers place and water names from central and eastern Bulgaria, as well as those of the traditional Bulgarian diasporas in the Ukraine and Moldova (Angelova-Atanasova 2012: 17–23). Both databases allow the user to extract and classify names under different criteria (word formation elements, name origin, type of geographic object, toponym type, semantic motivation, etc.), a feature that vastly simplifies toponymic research.

Bulgarian science can feel pride over its achievements in the study of the Thracian language. At the moment, the main recourse is onomastic data. The Centre of Thracology at BAS has developed the database "Glotta", that has gathered and

⁴ This includes the Bulgarian diasporas north of the Danube, the Caucasus, as well as the remnants of proto-Bulgarians that dispersed around Europe in the Middle Ages.

summarized a large volume of linguistic and mostly onomastic data related to the Thracian language: Thracian personal names, gods' names, settlement names and other toponyms, usually new variants of already recorded names, found in Greek or Latin inscriptions (Yanakieva 2014: 15). According to its creator Professor S. Yanakieva, the database and the capabilities of the software greatly facilitate Thracian language research through the application of phonetic, morphemic and lexical analysis, stratigraphic analysis, and linguistic geography (Yanakieva 2014: 17). Presently, another database – “Traces of the Thracian language in Bulgarian onomastics” – is being developed at the Institute for Bulgarian Language. The new resource will include contemporary microtoponyms that contain Thracian or possibly Thracian roots, focusing mainly, but not exclusively, on anthroponyms.

Anthroponymic research

At the start of the 21st century, anthroponymic studies in Bulgaria built on the foundation established in the 1990s (largely in respect to personal names), while simultaneously turning their attention to new, underdeveloped subjects and unexplored branches of anthroponymy.

Personal names are the best-researched class of anthroponyms in Bulgaria. They still, however, provoke the interest of researchers and the last few years have seen a much wider application of socio-onomastic methods. This keen analysis of personal name choice tendencies aims to delineate the evolution of the contemporary Bulgarian personal name system, as well as the social factors that affect it (see Yanev 2009; Yanev, Chobanov 2014; Angelova-Atanasova 2006; Choleva-Dimitrova, Yanev 2011, 2015; Choleva-Dimitrova et al. 2017; Vlahova-Angelova 2017; Choleva-Dimitrova, Vlahova-Angelova 2019). Another direction in which anthroponymic research is actively developing is the study of the traditional anthroponymic systems of the Bulgarian minorities in Albania and Bessarabia (Belo 2010; Mihina 2010; Tsankov 2010; Parzulova 2011).

Another contribution to Bulgarian and Slavic onomastics – anthroponymic theory and anthroponymic formation in particular – is Chobanov's (2020) dissertational work “Hypocoristic derivation as a way of enriching the anthroponymic system of a language (based on data from Bulgarian, Serbian, and Croatian personal names)”. The work summarizes the author's many years of observation of the formation models of abbreviated anthroponyms and their proliferation. This study is the first to examine the in-depth details of the mechanisms and governing principles of the anthroponymic expansion of names derived from abbreviated forms of three southern Slavic languages. Several other comparative anthroponymic studies were published in the same period (Yanev 2009; Netsova 2016; Petkova 2016). Among them, the work “Personal name systems in the German and Bulgarian languages” (Yanev 2009) can be categorized as especially significant, since, alongside the presented analysis of Bulgarian and German names, it also engages with some fundamental theoretical problems such as the social function of names, personal name

choice, the abbreviation of anthroponyms. One of its most interesting aspects is that it practically converts personal names into material evidence, on the basis of which are demarcated the similarities and differences in the cultural characteristics of both ethnicities. Essentially, the semantic analysis of the lexical basis of traditional Bulgarian and German personal names brings to light the fundamental values and particular worldview of the two different societies (Yanev 2009: 126–134).

Parallel with the research of personal names continues the study of family names in Bulgaria. Systematic observations of different types of family names are performed routinely (Yanev, Chobanov 2005; Selimski 2007, 2012), while attempts to summarize them have been made as well (Parzulova 2016; Selimski 2018). Unfortunately, the Bulgarian family name dictionary compiled by the Bulgarian Onomastic Centre at VTU has not been published yet. Invariably, part of these efforts go toward the research of Bulgarian names in the diasporas abroad (see Parzulova 2016: 42).

The Bulgarian three-component personal name system (personal, paternal, family name) was established in the 19th century (Ilchev 1969; Rusinov 1974) and today's family names are to a large extent heirs of traditional kin names.⁵ This is why the study of family names consistently runs alongside the study of kin names. The latter, however, haven't been sufficiently researched, even though their importance to the solution of a series of challenges is more than clear. It is only lately that Choleva-Dimitrova has actively researched Bulgarian kin names (Choleva-Dimitrova 2011a, 2011b, 2017a, 2018a, 2019a), with a number of her publications referencing different aspects of research into these types of names. The underlying conclusion she reaches is that kin names are a very important source of linguistic data, due to the specifics of their emergence.⁶ Precisely for that reason, they preserve a previously unsuspected large number of ancient names and appellatives, often with a link to substrata elements like, for example, Thracian personal names.

Studies in chrematonymy

Chrematonymy is one of the least developed onomastic branches in Bulgaria. There is a lack of theoretical works and a nearly complete absence of empirical research in spite of the fact that presently these types of names offer a generous source of data for analysis. The only theoretical observations, as well as some conclusions, on Bulgarian chrematonymy were made by Dimitrova-Todorova (2002, 2006b). Over the last few years were published several studies that examine more specific challenges related to different types of chrematonyms, like for example names of NGOs (Konstantinova 2011), names of Revival houses in old town Plovdiv (Borowiak 2012), names of hotels (Mihaylov 2016), etc.

⁵ Kin names are a specific class of anthroponyms characteristic of traditional Bulgarian society. They have been well preserved in microtoponymy and data is collected during toponymic field research. In our day, a significant portion of them function as family names.

⁶ Kin names originate from other types of anthroponyms – personal names, nicknames, sobriquets.

Astronymic research

The first onomastic work on the names of celestial bodies by Kovachev (2002) treats traditional star and constellation names as a separate class of proper names, or astronoms, which the author has collected and classified. Celestial body names are the subject of Mladenova's (2006) study as well. Her approach, however, is ethnolinguistic in its essence and presents the comparative terminology of folk perception of the cosmos in four languages (Greek, Bulgarian, Albanian, Romanian). The two works complement each other and are an important contribution to Bulgarian ethnoscience, since they regard celestial body names as an integrated system of concepts that represents a distinct branch of traditional knowledge.

Thracian onomastics

Thracian onomastics studies the onomastic legacy of Ancient Thrace. As a substratum layer (Yordanov 2009: 106), it forms an integral part of the Bulgarian cultural onomastic patrimony. Even though the research of Thracian onomastics has a long history in Bulgaria,⁷ it is only recently that scholars have ventured to recognize this discipline as part of Bulgarian onomastics. Ever more frequently, onomasticians address the problem of continuity and are increasingly resolute when putting forward the thesis that Bulgarian toponymy and anthroponymy of today preserve significant traces of Thracian onomastics (Yordanov 2004, 2009; Todorov 2008; Choleva-Dimitrova 2017b, 2018b, 2018c).⁸ And if in the realm of macrotoponymy (mostly hydronymy and oronymy), the substratum Thracian legacy has been long expounded by prominent Bulgarian linguists such as Detschew, Georgiev, and Duridanov, microtoponymy continues to yield more and more examples of Thracian names preserved to this day, aptly named *treasure troves* by Yordanov (see the recently published toponymic studies of the Yambol, Kazanlak, Nova Zagora, etc. regions). It is precisely the data accumulated by microtoponymy that has given researchers reason to conclude, that the presence of the Thracian substratum in the name of multiple micro-entities undoubtedly signifies that the Thracian and later inhabitants of the peninsula had a prolonged period of cohabitation, in the process of which many Thracian names took root (Yordanov 2009: 129; Choleva-Dimitrova 2018c: 68). Recently, the theme

⁷ Detailed analysis of Thracian onomastic research can be found in Yordanov's (2009) work. It contains an extensive bibliography on a variety of subjects: state of the source base, name orthography challenges, challenges of separating proper Thracian-Pelasgian names from other paleo-Balkan names, the significance of onomastic science for illuminating the ethnic, social, cultural, etc. life of the Thracians. Yanakieva also compiled a meticulous survey of the new methods used to research the Thracian language, which includes Thracian onomastics (Yanakieva 2009).

⁸ At this point, we'll focus solely on the latest research on the continuity between Thracian onomastics and contemporary Bulgarian onomastics, since they reveal a novel and distinct perspective on the problem of Thracian heritage, which for different reasons was long underestimated by Bulgarian onomasticians.

of continuity between the two onomastic systems has been studied by a team from Institute for Bulgarian Language headed by Prof. A. Choleva-Dimitrova, as a part of BAS's interdisciplinary project "The Thracians – origins and development, cultural identity, civilizational interactions and Ancient legacy". The Institute for Bulgarian Language participated with a work entitled "Thracian language remnants in Bulgarian onomastics", the aim of which was to research Bulgarian microtoponymy and uncover traces of Thracian. The research is still ongoing, but up to this point results show that the influence of the Thracian language is most palpable in microtoponyms rooted in anthroponyms, which are based on a Thracian personal name borrowed from the Thracian anthroponymic system, as it happens with kin names. The conclusions regarding the continuity between the two systems can be summarized as follows: a) there is a large number of personal names common to both systems; b) there're commonalities in name formation, like, for example, the frequent usage of hypocorism (see Choleva-Dimitrova 2017b, 2018b, 2018c). This new perspective finds support in a number of new epigraphic and archeological discoveries, as well as the newest paleo-Balkan research, which is a precondition for the reassessment of more than just one or two names, until now classified as unclear or problematic.

Onomastic reference materials

Several reference publications from the last few years have also greatly contributed to the enrichment of Bulgarian onomastic science, by presenting its achievements in synthesized form (Balkanski, Tsankov 2010; Dimitrova-Todorova 2011; Parzulova, Balkanski 2013). The Bulgarian onomastic encyclopedia by Balkanski and Tsankov (2010) and the encyclopedic handbook of Bulgarian anthroponymy by Parzulova and Balkanski (2013) also add input to the onomastic terminology field, by exhaustively presenting and further expanding the terminological base according to the latest developments in onomastic science.

Conclusion

In the past decades, Bulgarian onomastic science has continued, despite the challenging conditions, to advance and contribute to the nonmaterial cultural patrimony of the Balkans. The scope of onomastic research keeps broadening, though not as dynamically as it could be desired, and disciplines like urbanonymy, ekklesionyms, commemorative names, astronoms, etc. are now studied systematically. Bulgarian onomastic science has strived to keep up with modern methods and it could be claimed that significant progress has been made in the application and development of socio-onomastic methodology, both in anthroponymy and toponymy. There are successful comparative anthroponymic studies with closely related Slavic languages, as well as languages that are further removed linguistically, like German and English. As a result of these works, a series of common traits and dissimilarities

between anthroponymic systems have been clarified. This, in turn, forms the foundation on which important ethnolinguistic conclusions are made. The newest onomastic research sheds light on various historical periods, culture, and relations of the Bulgarians with other peoples, thus contributing to the study of complex interrelations between the different ethnicities that inhabited the Balkans.

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