

A diachronic analysis of the *Crasna* hydronym field[†]

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Article info

History:

Received July 23, 2018

Accepted August 21, 2018

Published October 7, 2018

Key words:

toponymic field

polarization

differentiation

diachrony

Crasna

Abstract

This study aims at analyzing the formation (through differentiation and polarization processes as described by Dragoș Moldovanu) as well as the evolution of the toponymic field developed from the hydronym *Crasna*, the name of a tributary of the Bîrlad River. The organization of such a toponymic ensemble around a main toponym which denominates a (socio)geographical object regarded by denominators as being of major importance when compared to other toponyms in the area represents a natural process that mirrors the reality in the field. Our approach is based on information extracted from document collections, dictionaries, maps and monographs. The synchronic and diachronic study of *Crasna* toponym field revealed the relationships between toponyms, the denominative concurrence, the existence of certain homonyms, as well as the evolution of the toponymic structure.

1. Introducere

The aim of this study is to trace the formation of a rich toponymic field developed around the name of the Crasna Stream through various structural processes of polarization and differentiation. Crasna is a 63.8 km long tributary of the Bîrlad River with a drainage basin of 564 de km² in the counties of Iași and Vaslui (Ujvári, 1972, p. 504). Moreover, we aim at pointing out to the evolution of topical names, both from the perspective of the designated objects and the expression viewpoint. The toponyms analyzed in this study were extracted from document collections, dictionaries, maps and monographs.

2. Toponymic field, polarization and differentiation

Toponymic fields are aggregates of place names formed by denominators starting from certain nucleus-toponyms meant to designate important (socio)geographical objects in a given area. “The common element of the polarized group is the name of this central element; the distinctions are made by means of entopic terms with a toponymic function” (Moldovanu, 1972, p. 81). Polarization is the process of creation of toponymic derivatives that designate neighboring objects belonging to different geographical categories, while the process of differentiation involves the designation of parts of the same geographical object (Moldovanu, 2010, p. 18–19)¹. The observation of place names within toponymic fields may provide information related to the relationship between the name and the designated object, the connection between certain toponyms, as well as data about certain toponyms that are no longer used. The creation of place names starting from other toponyms was also mentioned by Bolocan (1977), who spoke of *toponymic transfer*, or by Rezeanu (2014, p. 19), who coined the notion of *derivational toponymic extension*.

[†]This paper was presented at the symposium “Toponymy between history, geography and linguistics”, Iași, May 10th, 2018.

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¹Details related to the toponymic fields theory, accompanied by numerous examples, can be found in the introduction of MDTM.

3. The primary toponym

There is a primary toponym (nucleus) in the centre of the field; derivate/secondary toponyms are formed from this nucleus, including it in their structure. A most important stage in establishing the polarizing nucleus is the identification of the toponymic etymology. As far as the *Crasna* toponyms identified frequently on the Romanian territory are concerned, two main directions can be distinguished.

According to certain historians and linguists the meaning of this name is ‘red’. This viewpoint is shared, for instance, by Gh. Ghibănescu in *Schiță istorică despre Vaslui, cu care începe volumul al XV-lea al colecției Surete și izvoade*: „Crasna (Sl. **красень, красни**) red. The resulting meaning is *Roșia Water* [The Red Water]” (Ghibănescu, 1926, p. III). Moreover, Emil Petrovici, an expert on Slavonic languages, states that the Romanian equivalent of *Crasna* is *Roșia* [The Red Stream] (1970, p. 248).

Other linguists proposed the meaning ‘beautiful’ for the adjective this toponym is based on. Iorgu Jordan (1963, p. 113) sends to OS. *krasīnŭ* ‘beautiful’, Bulg. *krasen* ‘beautiful, pretty’ and Sl. *krasa* ‘beauty’. Nicolae Drăganu (1933, p. 476) indicates the origin from Sl. *krasъnъ* ‘speciosus’, ‘amœnus’. In an article about the tendency of the Romanian chancelleries to slaviceze names of places, Alexandru I. Gonța goes even further and asserts that in fact the toponym *Crasna* could actually represent the translation of the Romanian toponym by the Moldavian clerks and it consequently should be read in Mediaeval documents as *Pîrîul Frumos* (Gonța, 1977, p. 264). However, Mircea Ciubotaru points to the fact that using this toponym in order to illustrate the official Medieval slavicing phenomenon is wrong, since this hydronym is of “old Slavonic origin” (1992, p. 459), its “older meaning” being ‘beautiful’ (Ciubotaru, 2001, p. 60)².

Both meanings of the etymon seem verisimilar as far as their geographical motivation is concerned. The studies regarding the composition of the soil in the area crossed by this stream indicate clay soil as the main characteristic of the area (Gugiuman *et al.*, 1988, p. 61). This type of soil could make the water appear red when it is clear. On the other hand, old documents reveal that in the lower and middle basin of the River Crasna there were many villages where one could find lakes, mills, apiaries, orchards, vineyards and gardens (DRH, A, III, p. 254; VIII, p. 104–105; IX, p. 178, 314–315; XIX, p. 561–562; CDM, IV, p. 301 and others), which indicate that the area was favorable for human settlements and agriculture. A “beautiful stream” is a stream of water “surrounded by slow slopes, where people could live and work in good conditions” (Moldovanu, 2010, p. 145).

According to local legends, the name of the Crasna estate could originate from the name of one of the soldiers of Stephen the Great, Crasnaș, whose descendants divided the property into three parts: Crăsnăța, Brădicești and Dolheșt (MDG, III, p. 169)³.

4. Toponymic derivates

Documented for the first time in a copy of a document possibly written on May 1st, 1406 (DRH, A, I, p. 28), this hydronym has become the nucleus of a toponymic field made of several secondary/derivate toponyms that designate (socio)geographical objects situated in the drainage basin of Crasna. First degree derivates, second degree derivates and so forth are formed from the main toponym. While presenting the elements that compose this toponymic ensemble, which is also exemplified in the *Annex*, we shall reveal some of the issues that challenged us in our attempt to rebuild the field and establish the relationships between the names of places that form this field.

The Crasna River analyzed in this study flows into the Bîrlad River in an area whose name resulted through toponymic differentiation, *Gura Crasnei* [The Mouth of Crasna], a name attested in 1586 (DRH,

²See also Vasmer (1967, p. 368; from OS. *krasъnъ* ‘speciosus, perpulcher, iucundus, amœnus’), Grinčenko (1925, p. 836; *Красинŭ* ‘wonderful, beautiful, good’). Cf. noun *krasa* ‘venustas, pulchritudo’ (Miklosich, 1927, p. 269; 1862, p. 309; Šmilauer, 1970, p. 100).

³The anthroponym Crasnaș, attested in documents from the 15th to the 17th centuries (Gonța, 1995, p. 136–137), gave the name of Crăsnășenii village, also situated on the Crasna Stream.

A, VIII, p. 104). In the very same place there existed, in the first half of the 19th century, a post office named *Gura Crasnei* near which a village bearing the same name, first attested in 1871 (TTRM, I₁, p. 308) was founded. By the end of the 19th century, a railway station was built here, belonging to the Crasna–Huși railway built in 1888 (Lupu & Kalinca, 1990, p. 1). Thus, in some documents of the time the place was mentioned as *Gara Crasnei* [The Railway Station of Crasna] (*ibidem*) or, with the determinant in nominative, *Gara Crasna* [Crasna Railway Station] (Chiriță, 1893, p. 83). The two collocations occur alternatively in official documents until 1924, when the village is called *Crasna* and the name it still holds today (TTRM, I₁, p. 308).

The area from the springs of this valley is mentioned in old documents under the name of *Obîrșia Crasnei* [The Headwaters of Crasna] (DIR, A, XVI-I, p. 221, in the year 1523) or, using other entopic terms, *Fundul Crasnei* [Crasna Bottom] (Ghibănescu, 1913, p. 321, in the year 1668) and *Fundătura Crasnei* (CDM, III, p. 284, in the year 1666). There was also an estate in the area called *Fundul Crasnei*, where a village with the same name was subsequently settled (today it is called Rotăria, see *infra*).

The process of toponymic differentiation led to the formation of the hydronym *Crăsnița* by derivation with the diminutive suffix *-ița*. Also present in the name *Valea Crăsnița* [Crăsnița Valley], it names one of the first right-side tributaries of the Crasna stream, upstream the village of Dolhești in the county of Iași (CDM, V, p. 202, year 1708). The name of the area situated in the vicinity of the stream sources was formed through toponymic differentiation, *Obîrșia Crăsniței* [The Headwaters of Crăsnița] (Merlan & Hapaleț, 2006, p. 52), while the names *Dealul Crăsnița* [The Crăsnița Hill] or the version with the denominator in genitive *Dealul Crăsniței* [The Hill of Crăsnița], *Pădurea Crăsnița* [The Crăsnița Forest] (ATLAS MOLD.), *Iazul Crăsnița* [The Crăsnița Pond] (Merlan & Hapaleț, 2006, p. 18) and *Podișul Crăsniței* [The Plateau of Crăsnița] (*ibidem*, p. 16) were formed through polarization. Since in this area we found that an estate with the name *Crasna Seacă* [Dry Crasna] was attested in the first half of the 19th century near the village of Dolhești (see TTRM, I₁, p. 308), we do not exclude the possibility that this stream of water was also called *Crasna Seacă*.

In some sources (HARTA MIL., for instance) *Crăsnița* designates the upper stream of Crasna. Hence there appeared through differentiation the name for the springs area: *Fundul Crăsniței* [The Bottom of Crăsnița]. The two names—*Crasna* and *Crăsnița*—were even used simultaneously for identifying the upper stream of Crasna, as indicated by various documents or maps. For instance, in the period 1825–1858, the estate situated in that area was called either *Crasna*, *Fundul Crasnei*, *Fundul Crăsniței* or *Crăsnița* (TTRM, I₂, p. 1005); a hermitage situated here is mentioned with the names *Fundul Crasnei* (TTRM, I₂, p. 1005), *Schitul de la Crăsnița* [The Hermitage from Crăsnița], *Schitul Crăsnița* [Crăsnița Hermitage] or *Schitul din Crasna* [Crasna Hermitage] (see Costăchescu, 1924, p. 317, 319, 320)⁴. On the estate mentioned above the village known today as Rotăria was settled, which was called, over the years *Rotarul* [The Wheelwright] or *Rotarul din Fundul Crasnei* [The Wheelwright in Crasna Bottom], *Rotarii* [The Wheelwrights], *Crăsnița*, *Crasna* and *Fundul Crasnei* (TTRM, I₂, p. 1005).

A document from 1535 mentions the Zavalnești village, on Crăsnișoara, a village close to Gugești in the county of Vaslui (DIR, A, XVI-I, p. 378), while a document from 1594 mentions the village of Liești, situated “between Crasna and Crăsnișoara” (DRH, A, IX, p. 178); this village no longer exists today, but its name was preserved in the toponym *Valea Liești* [Liești Valley] (ROM., 40). The information provided by these two documents entitle us to conclude that the hydronym *Crăsnișoara* (formed through derivation with the diminutive suffix *-ișoara*) indicates another right-side tributary of Crasna stream, most probably the one known today as *Pîriul Bălțați* [Bălțați Stream], after the name of the village in its vicinity⁵. The area near the springs was named through a process of toponymic differentiation: *Obîrșia Crăsnișoarei* [The Headwaters of Crăsnișoara] (DIR, A, XVI-I, p. 221). The same tributary is mentioned, three years later, as

⁴A hydronym was formed through polarization from the name of this religious settlement: *Pîriul Schitului* [The Hermitage Stream], the name of a right-side tributary of Crasna upstream of the village of Pietriș, in the county of Vaslui (Costăchescu, 1924, p. 318).

⁵We do not exclude the hypothesis that this tributary is the Burghina Stream, located South of Bălțați Stream.

Crăsnița (DRH, A, IX, p. 315).

The diminutive derivatives attested over the years designate both the upper part of the stream and several of its tributaries, reflecting a popular denominative modality, common also for other watercourses (Bistrița, Bîrlad, etc.). The intervention of administrative representatives and geographers in the denomination process resulted in the enforcement of other names for some tributaries, usually derived from the names of the villages crossed by the respective watercourses.

We have also identified several hills in the vicinity of this watercourse whose names belong to the toponymic field under analysis: a hill in the upper basin of Crasna stream, near the village of Rotăria (ROM., 40), one West of the village of (MDG, I, p. 119), one West of the town of Huși (CDM, V, p. 203⁶) and another one between Crasna and Lohan (ATLAS MOLD.). The binomial appellation *Crasna/Crăsnița* is likely to have led to certain errors regarding some geographical objects represented on the maps. Most sources indicate the presence of *Dealului Crăsnița* [The Crăsnița Hill] on the right side of the Crasna River, near the Crăsnița Creek, from which the name was most probably taken, while the Crasna Hill is located on the left side of the watercourse. However, on the HARTA MIL. of 1962, the two hills are represented in reversed positions; as well as this, in MDG (III, p. 169) the hill near the Crăsnița mound is named The Crasna Hill. From the landform name *Dealul Crasna* [The Crasna Hill] designating a hill situated in the vicinity of Crasna springs, the following names were formed through differentiation *Culmea Dealului Crasna* [The Crasna Hill Peak], *Muchia Crasna* [The Crasna Hill Peak] (ATLAS MOLD.) and *Pădurea Dealului Crasna* [The Crasna Hill Forest] (Merlan & Hapaleț, 2006, p. 113).

As shown above, the names of some villages and estates resulted from the name of the Crasna stream; besides the village situated at the confluence with the Bîrlad River and the village in the vicinity of the springs, called today Rotăria, we have identified two estates whose names are included in the denominative complex formed around the hydronym Crasna. In DRH, A, XX there are a few documents from the first half of the 17th century that mention a certain Crasna which the editors identify as Crasna village from the area where the Crasna Stream flows into the Bîrlad River (DRH, A, XX, p. 769). However, after a careful analysis of these documents (DRH, A, XX, p. 193, 212–213 and 358) and after tracing the boundaries of the village of Broșteni, to which the decisions contained in those documents make reference, we feel entitled to conclude that this is actually another estate called Crasna, situated West of the town of Huși⁷. This hypothesis is supported and confirmed by a piece of information provided by Caproșu (2000, p. 359): two Greek gardeners, a Russian furrier and two former serfs “live in Crasna, in the village of Tătărani”; TTRM, I₁, p. 312 attests the existence in this area of an estate called *Crasna* (which in 1907 was included in the estate of the village of Crețești in Vaslui county). As well as this, another estate should have existed in the middle basin of Crasna, in *Rîpele Crasnei* [The Crasna Steeps], where some fugitives from the village of Băhnarii settled in 1742 (Mihordea, 1961, p. 265).

As proven by the documents, there were many ponds on Crasna, one of them attested in 1493 by the periphrasis *Iezerul de la Crasna* [The Crasna Lake] (in original *взера на красной*, DRH, A, III, p. 254, year 1493), in the vicinity of the present-day village of Tălpigeni in Vaslui. Another toponym of the field that makes the object of this study is *Pădurea Crasnei* [The Crasna Forest] (MDG, II, p. 41) or *Codrul Crasnei* [The Crasna Woods] (Giurescu, 1967, p. 40)⁸. Of the secondary toponyms formed from the hydronym *Crasna* we should also mention: *Șesul Crasnei* [The Crasna Plain] (TEZ. VAS., p. 132; MDG, II, p. 750 and V, p. 553), *Podul peste Crasna* [The Bridge over Crasna] (Chirica & Tanasachi, 1984, p. 129), *Piscul*

⁶A proof that these oronyms were formed through polarization from the hydronym is the attestation of the toponymic collocation *Dealul Văii Crasnei* [The Hill of Crasna Valley] (to designate the hill at the boundary with the town of Huși) in a document dating from 1705 (CDM, V, p. 107). Subsequently, through simplification, the name became *Dealul Crasnei*.

⁷One of the witnesses to the sale of a part of the Crasna estate, in the county of Fălciu, near the boundary of Stroiești, hence West of Huși, was, in 1691, Postolache Coșescul from Crasna (TEZ. VAS., p. 55).

⁸The forest is mentioned in the *Annals* written by the Polish chronicler Jan Długosz, „in silva post villam Krasne”, besides the stream and the plain it crossed: „in campo, qui Krasnepolye appellatur, ad torrentem Krasni potok” (*apud Antoche*, 2013, p. 16 and 19).

Crasnei [The Crasna Peak] and *Drumul Crasnei* [The Crasna Road] (CDM, V, p. 239), *Lunca Pîriului Crasna* [The Crasna Stream Meadow] (Merlan & Hapaleț, 2006, p. 11), *Microdepresiunea Crasna* [The Crasna Microdepression] and *Podișul Crasnei* [The Crasna Plateau] (the last two are geographical terms).

This toponymic field also includes *Ocolul Crasna*, a name designating two administrative units belonging to Vaslui and Fălciu, respectively, each including several settlements situated in the Crasna drainage basin (TTRM, I₂, p. 1432–1434).

5. Morphological and syntactic aspects

The nucleus-toponym occurs in most cases in its simple form, accompanied by a term that indicates a geographical class (*apă* ‘water’, *pîrîu* ‘stream’, *vale* ‘valley’), which is embodied in its content. However, along time, it also occurs in collocations containing a determinant either in the genitive (*Apa Crasnei* [The Water of Crasna] DIR, A, XVI-II, p. 114; *Pîriul Crasnei* [The Stream of Crasna] DRH, A, VI, p. 170; *Valea Crasnei* [The Valley of Crasna] MDG, II, p. 747) or in the nominative (*Apa Crasna* [The Crasna Water] CDM, IV, p. 439; *Pîriul Crasna* [The Crasna Stream] DRH, A, XXII, p. 72; *Valea Crasna* [The Crasna Valley] MDG, IV, p. 37, there are also cases where the quality of the watercourse is overrated, as in *Rîul Crasna* [The Crasna River], Merlan & Hapaleț, 2006, p. 10). In the foreign maps, the name of this watercourse occurs frequently as semi-calque: *Krasna Fl[euve]* (year 1781), *Krasna Riv[ière]* (year 1696), *Knisna Fl[uss]* (year 1788), *Krasna Fl[uss]* (year 1787), *Krasna F[iume]* (year 1788), *Krasna Fl[uvius]* (year 1774), *Crasna R[eka]* (in 1772), *R[eka] Cracni* (year 1774) (see TTRM, I₄, p. 63).

The field of the toponym *Crasna* comprises simple topic names, either derived of complex⁹. The simple ones are names of human settlements *Crasna*, resulting from a simplification process from a periphrastic construction (**Satul de pe Crasna* [‘The Village on Crasna’]) or collocation (**Satul Crasna* [‘The Village of Crasna’]). The toponyms obtained through derivation are *Crăsnița* and *Crăsnișoara* [The Little Crasna]; the derivation with diminutive prefixes is specific to the process of toponymic differentiation and expresses the opposition “main watercourse” – “tributary” or “main watercourse” – “upper watercourse”.

Most names resulted from polarization are usually collocations “with a unique determiner, namely the primary toponym or multiple determinata representing terms that designate the class of geographical objects” (Moldovanu, 2010, p. 18). The toponyms derived from the hydronym *Crasna* make no exception: *Dealul Crăsnița* [The Crăsnița Hill], *Pădurea Crasnei* [The Crasna Forest], *Rîpele Crasnei* [The Crasna Steeps], *Șesul Crasnei* [The Crasna Plain], etc. Periphrastic constructions are also present in the field: *Iezerul de la Crasna* [The Mountain Lake from Crasna], *Podul peste Crasna* [The Bridge over Crasna], *Schitul de la Crăsnița* [The Hermitage from Crasna]. Moreover, toponymic differentiation may create collocations. Thus, parts of the denominated geographical object are designated with the help of certain lexical marks (Moldovanu, 2010, p. 19): *Dealul Crasna* [The Crasna Hill] – *Culmea Dealului Crasna* [The Crasna Hill Peak], *Crasna* – *Gura Crasnei* [The Mouth of Crasna], *Crăsnița* – *Fundul Crăsniței* [The Bottom of Crăsnița].

Except for some names that are specific to the geographical scientific register, the elements that form the toponymic structure developed around the hydronym *Crasna* result from formation procedures that are typical to the Romanian folk toponymy.

⁹By complex toponyms we mean names of places made of several terms: periphrasis and toponymic collocations or compound toponyms. By using this term we take distance from most studies on toponymy that regard all toponyms made of several words as compound toponyms. In our opinion, compound toponyms are only those toponyms which, as in the case of common nouns, display “certain inflexion particularities deriving from the total or partial loss of the autonomy of all or some of their constitutive terms” (GLR, I, I, p. 92). For a detailed account on this topic, see Moldovanu (1991, p. LIX).

6. Conclusions

The toponymic field formed around the nucleus-toponym *Crasna* is a very rich and diverse one, as far as the types of names resulted from structural processes of polarization and differentiations are concerned (these processes were transposed in theory by Dragoș Moldovanu). By studying names of places and gathering information from document collections, dictionaries, maps and monographs we have managed to point at the complexity of this denominative ensemble, the evolution of toponyms and the relationships between them, the presence of homonyms and the denominative concurrence. The morphological and syntactical analysis indicated that, except for some geographical names, all toponyms belonging to the field result from formation procedures that are typical to the Romanian folk toponymy. The *Annex* provides a schematic account of this denominative ensemble made of toponymic derivatives of various degrees developed from the polarizing toponym *Crasna*.

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B. Acronyms

ATLAS MOLD. = Institutul Geografic al Armatei, *Atlasul Moldovei* (1:50 000), București, 1892–1898.

CDM = *Catalogul documentelor moldovenești din Arhiva Istorică Centrală a Statului*, I (1387–1620), II (1621–1652), III (1653–1675), IV (1676–1700), V (1701–1720), București, 1957, 1959, 1968, 1970, 1975.

DIR, A = *Documente privind istoria României. A. Moldova*, Editura Academiei, București, 1951–1957.

DRH, A = *Documenta Romaniae Historica. A. Moldova*, I–XXVII, București, 1975–2006.

GLR, I = *Gramatica limbii române. I. Cuvîntul*, Valeria Guțu Romalo (coord.), București, Editura Academiei Române, 2005.

HARTA MIL. = *Harta R. S. România*, executată de Direcția Topografică Militară, (1:25 000), București, 1962.

MDG = George Ioan Lahovari (coord.), *Marele dicționar geografic al României*, I–V, Soccec, București, 1898–1902.

MDTM = *Mic dicționar toponimic al Moldovei, structural și toponimic. Partea I. Toponime personale*, Dragoș Moldovanu (coord.), Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, Iași, 2014.

ROM. = *România. Atlas rutier*, de general maior ing. Vasile Dragomir, col. ing. Victor Balea, col. ing. Gheorghe Mureșanu, Gheorghe Epuran (sc. 1:350 000), Editura Flomarco, București, 1981.

TEZ. VAS. = *Din tezaurul arhivistic vasluian. Catalog de documente, 1399–1877*, întocmit de Grigore Găneț și Costică-Ioan Gârneață, București, 1986.

TTRM, I₁₋₂ = *Tezaurul toponimic al României. Moldova. I₁₋₂, Repertoriul istoric al unităților administrativ-teritoriale (1772–1988)*, Dragoș Moldovanu (coord.), București, 1991–1992.

TTRM, I₄ = *Tezaurul toponimic al României. Moldova. I₄, Toponimia Moldovei în cartografia europeană veche (cca 1395–1789)*, Dragoș Moldovanu (autor), Iași, 2005.

Appendix A. *Crasna* toponymic field

