

**A Crosslinguistic Perspective on Romanian Anthroponymic  
Phrasemes as Carriers of Cultural Connotations**

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**Abstract**

Starting from the premise that anthroponyms constitute a subgroup of idiomatic components which are “deeply rooted in the cultural tradition of a community” (Fiedler, 2007: 55), it seems natural to investigate their culture-specific elements and connotations.

This attempt at exploring an array of Romanian phraseological expressions based on personal names is supported by well-documented lexicographic sources, including Zanne (1895-1903), Scriban (1939), Dumistrăcel (1997) and Tomici (2009), to name the most important ones. Hence, we have identified about 35 universal anthroponymic idioms with their equivalents in English and French and 70 national and local onomastic phrasemes, whose cultural and axiological markedness is assessed on account of their challenging crosslinguistic correspondences.

As proven by our research, Romanian anthroponymic phrasemes with universal, national or local culture components (Szerszunowicz 2011: 82) are both semantically charged and axiologically loaded (Szerszunowicz 2009: 172). Hence, due to their anthropocentric character, they carry connotations that can be retrieved and activated when the idiomatic meaning relies on them.

**Keywords:** *anthroponymic phraseme, onomastic component (OC), crosslinguistic equivalence, cultural carrier, Romanian phraseological units*

### 1. Introduction

The role and usage of proper names, in general, and of personal names, in particular, as components of other linguistic units have been explored by both phraseologists and onomasticians, due to the confluence of their fields of study in onomastic phraseology. As proven by Szerszunowicz (2006: 295), “the status of proper names as constituents of phraseological units differs greatly, depending on the degree of lexicalization and users’ knowledge, since language users can decode constituents at issue as proper names or they may not even know of the proprial origins of the elements.” The term that we use throughout our study for such units is *anthroponymic phraseme*, which we consider to be more comprehensive than *anthroponymic idiom* if we want to refer to human-related phraseological units.

Our preference for the usage of the term *anthroponymic phraseme* is motivated by the fact that the phraseological units with onymic components comprise a large array of “word-like units” (Gläser 1998: 126–127), which consist of both idioms and non-idioms (e.g. noun phrases: Rom. *sărutul lui Iuda* = betrayal; verb phrases: Rom. *a aștepta ca pe Hristos* = wait hopefully; adjective phrases: Rom. *cuminte ca cățaua lui Melinte* = apparently obedient, but sly; prepositional phrases: Rom. *de când cu Adam/de când cu moș Adam* = from old times). They generally designate phenomena, objects, actions, processes or states in the real world, while they originate in the Bible (Rom. *ca în sânul lui Avram* = very comfortable), classical heritage (Rom. *călcâiul lui Achile* = weak point), literary texts, popular culture or celebrity culture.

Another well-represented class of *anthroponymic phrasemes* is that of “sentence-like units” (Gläser 1998: 126–127), which consist of proverbs, maxims and formulae: Rom. *Dacă dai nas lui Ioan, el se suie pe divan* or *Ce mi-e baba Rada, ce mi-e Rada baba!*). They “designate a whole state of affairs in the real world” (Pierini 2008) and rely more on the practical knowledge that common people impart with wit and humour. It is especially formulae that are perceived as “situation-based expressions serving a specific discursive function, typically

occurring in spoken discourse" (Gläser 1998: 127; Moon 1998: 21): Rom. *Tronc, Marghioală!, Tunde-o Pîrleo!, înghite, Agache/Agachi!*

In addition to the classes of idioms and formulae, Pierini (2008) also describes:

- a. "irreversible binomials", defined as "pairs of two words belonging to a same part of speech joined by *and* and occurring in a fixed order" (Gläser 1998: 126; Moon 1998: 152–156): Rom. *Păcală și Tândală;*
- b. stereotyped similes, intensifying the meaning of an adjective or a verb (Moon 1998: 150–152): Rom. *a nimerit ca Irimia cu oiștea'n gard* (for people who took a very wrong turn).

### **2. Onomastic components (OCs) as carriers of cultural information**

From the point of view of their meanings, anthroponymic phrasemes refer to linguistic units with anthroponymic OCs which function as carriers of culture and can be divided into three groups (Szerszunowicz, 2011, 82):

- a. International culture component (ICC): biblical, mythological and historical characters with universally known connotations;
- b. National culture component (NCC) familiar to the native users of a language;
- c. Local culture constituent (LCC).

In the process of cross-linguistic equivalence, one of our concerns should be preserving the descriptive and evaluative character of anthroponymic idioms. Based on findings related to other phraseological corpora, our assumption is that the number of full equivalents of Romanian ICCs is much higher than the one of partial and zero equivalents.

There is definitely a significant semantic and cultural loss when onymic components as carriers of negative or positive stereotyped images find zero equivalents (Fiedler 2007: 118) and this happens especially in the case of LCCs.

## 2.1. Research methodology

The idea of an in-depth contrastive study on Romanian phraseological units containing OCs occurred to us while working in a team on an English dictionary of onomastic phraseologisms, which provides Romanian versions for each of the 350 terminological entries. Thus, the repertoire of anthroponyms with ICCs used in our paper is based on an inventory of 35 English phraseological and proverbial expressions with anthroponymic components extracted from this work in progress.

The OCs with national or local culture constituents were collected and selected from different lexicographic and onomastic sources. The main one is represented by Iuliu Zanne's 10-volume collection entitled *Proverbele romanilor* [Romanians' Proverbs/The Proverbs of the Romanians], the most comprehensive phraseological corpus created so far in the Romanian culture. Summing up approximately 8000 pages, Zanne's corpus incorporates data drawn from 294 written sources and 340 volunteer informants. Volume VI is entirely dedicated to terminological entries that consist of onomastic units ranged and explained in two chapters: *CAPITOLU XI Proverbe istorice* (Chapter 11. Historical proverbs) and *CAPITOLU XI Credinte – Eresuri – obiceiuri* (Chapter 12. Beliefs – superstitions – customs). Summing up about 1400 entries with personal and/or place names, there is an impressive number of head words (almost 300 personal names and 140 place names). In order to operate a selection of expressions which belong to the national active stock of proverbs and idioms, we also relied on three other recent lexicographic sources: Dumistrăcel (DER 2001), Tomici (DFLR 2009) and Ilinca (DERC 2015, 2016).

## 2.2. Discussions

### 2.2.1. Universal anthroponyms/international idioms with onomastic components

The first category of anthroponymic phrasemes that we have investigated comprises ICCs – universal idioms with onomastic

components of varied origin. Their equivalents into English and French “are identical in terms of structure, semantics and stylistic markedness” (Szerszunowicz 2006: 242). In fact, this is the only class that has absolute equivalents for most idioms. What contributes to this high rate of equivalence of onomastic components is the structural-semantic model based on idioms of biblical, mythological and historical origin.

Biblical names appear in a series of idiomatic expressions and proverbs whose meaning can be easily retrieved by the ones who are familiar with the Old or New Testament writings. By evoking biblical characters that are reputed worldwide, some phraseological units become cultural universals and find total equivalents across different languages. Not surprisingly, the majority of the biblical names that represent the onomastic components of these idioms are male and stand for enduring human types due to some distinctive moral or behavioural characteristics:

- wiseness (inspired by King Solomon’s reputation: Rom. *a avea mintea lui Solomon* (En. *wise as Solomon*, Fr. *aussi sage comme Salomon*);
- criminal propensity: Rom. *semnul/marca lui Cain*<sup>1</sup> (En. *the brand of Cain*, En. *la marque de Caïn*) from the first fratricide mentioned in the Bible (*Genesis*, iv. 15);
- betrayal: Rom. *sărutul lui Iuda* = En. *a Judas kiss* = En. *baiser de Judas* (referring to an act appearing to be an act of friendship, which is in fact harmful to the recipient);
- skepticism: Rom. *a fi Toma necredinciosul* (En. *a doubting Thomas*, Fr. *être comme Saint Thomas*) used for a skeptic who refuses to believe without direct personal experience.

Legendary and mythological heroes are commonly endowed with superpowers and are capable of amazing exploits. We find their

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<sup>1</sup> Cain was the first fratricide to be mentioned in the Bible [*Genesis*, iv.15].

names as onomastic components of a series of idiomatic expressions with positive connotations:

- financial wealth: Rom. *atingerea lui Midas* (En. *the Midas touch*, Fr. *touche Midas*) also means the talent of a successful businessman or the flair for making money. It alludes to the ability of a legendary Greek king, whose wish to transform everything he touched into gold unfortunately came true and he tragically turned even his daughter into gold;
- spiritual achievement: Rom. *muncile lui Hercule* (En. *labours of Hercules/Herculean task*, Fr. *travaux d'Hercule*) metaphorically representing the spiritual path taken for enlightenment by undertaking tasks which require heroic strength and stamina;
- a complex challenge is called in Romanian *muncă de Sisif* (En. *a task of Sisyphus*, Fr. *travail de Sisyphe*);
- unexpected solutions to difficult situations: Rom. *firul Ariadnei* (En. *Ariadne's thread*; Fr. *le fil d'Ariane*) has become a scientific metaphor for a "method of solving any problem by keeping a trail of all the options available and tried out at all the times".

At the opposite end, we have the anthroponymic idioms with negative connotations or derisive meanings:

- fatal weakness: Rom. *călcâiul lui Ahile* (En. *Achilles' heel /an Achilles' heel*; Fr. *talon d'Achile*) in spite of overall strength, this can actually or potentially lead to downfall. The term alludes to the Greek legend about the heroic warrior Achilles whose mother tried to make him immortal by holding the infant by his heel and dipping him into the River Styx. Eventually, he was killed by an arrow shot into his undipped heel;
- a source of trouble and discord as in *mărul Discordiei* (En. *apple of Discord*; Fr. *la pomme de discorde*) refers to whatever causes trouble, discord, or jealousy;
- a source of inescapable misfortune or a destructive force or influence lies in *cămașa lui Nesus* (En. *the shirt of Nessus*; Fr. *le lit de Procuste*);

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- futility of effort and wasted labour: Rom. *pânza Penelopei* (En. *web of Penelope*; Fr. *toile de Pénélope*);
- an imminent danger in the middle of an apparently fortunate situation: Rom. *sabia lui Damocle* (En. *Damocles sword*; Fr. *l'épée de Damoclès*);
- shocking/petrifying news evoked by Rom. *capul Meduzei* (En. *Medusa's head*; Fr. *la tête de Méduse*);
- the gap between appearance and essence is rendered idiomatically by reference to *cutia Pandorei* (En. *Pandora's box*; Fr. *la boîte de Pandore*), which means a valuable gift that eventually becomes a curse. Therefore, *a deschide cutia Pandorei* (En. *open (a) Pandora's box*; Fr. *ouvrir la boîte de Pandore*) practically involves uncovering something that causes many new and unexpected problems;
- forceful and constraining standards: Rom. *patul lui Procust* (En. *Procrustean bed*; Fr. *le lit de Procruste*) imposes a standard which must be accepted. From this, we also have the expression *stretch on the bed of Procrustes*, which indicates those situations when something or somebody is forced to fit into patterns.

Both real and folktale names of characters can be associated with the accumulation of wealth in a place of riches such as Rom. *peștera lui Aladin* (En. *an Aladdin's cave*; Fr. *la caverne d'Aladin*), which originates in the story of *Aladdin and the Magic Lamp* in *1001 Nights*. *Cresus* (En. *Croesus*, Fr. *Crésus*) is a personal name which is antonomastically used for an extremely rich man due to the reputation gained by the last king of Lydia (560-547 BC) as the richest man on earth at his time. The English also use the simile *as rich as Croesus*, alluding to this legendarily wealthy character. Romanian also has an expression which may be used as a partial equivalent to the English one, but the onomastic component is totally changed. Thus, *a avea bogățiile lui Por împărat* (literally: to have the riches of King Porus) sends to the idea of excessive richness, but the Indian king of Porus,

defeated by Alexander the Great who is evoked by this idiomatic expression, is not universally reputed for this attribute.

The name of the controversial Greek philosopher Diogenes is found in the expression *lampa lui Diogene* (En. *Diogenes's lamp*, Fr. *la lampe de Diogène*), originating in one of his 'philosophical stunts' which supposedly involved his walking the streets of Athens with a lantern in broad daylight in his search of an honest man. The meanings that are universally accepted for this expression are those of a) futile and infuriating investigation and b) sarcastic enquiry.

In educated circles, a victim of indecision is likened to *măgarul lui Buridan* (En. *Buridan's ass*, Fr. *l'âne de Buridan*), but few people would know that the origin of this expression lies in a paradox exemplified by the French priest and philosopher Jean Buridan (1295-1356) in a fable reflecting the difficulty of making decisions when there is no particular reason to prefer any of the possible alternatives. This situation is different from the one illustrated by *Hobson's choice*, which actually refers to an apparently free choice that offers no real alternative, in the same manner that a Cambridge-located stable owner called Thomas Hobson (1544-1631) would ask his clients to choose between the horse placed closest to the door or none at all.

The Italian explorer Christopher Columbus became the character of an apocryphal story meant to prove that any feat is seemingly impossible until the knack is shown. For any envious person who undermines someone else's achievements, *oul lui Columb* (En. *Columbus's egg*, Fr. *l'oeuf de Colombe*) is nothing but a "brilliant idea or discovery that seems simple or easy"; the only problem is that it appears so only after the fact. This is somewhat similar to the Romanian saying *după război, mulți viteji se arată* (many brave men show up after the war is over).

In order to enhance the idea that something dates back to old times or a person is of a venerable age, biblical characters such as Adam and Eve are evoked in different variants of the same expression: Rom. *de când cu Adam/de când cu moș Adam* (PR, VI, 468) / *de pe când*

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*Adam Babadam* and *de când cu Adam și Eva* (PR, VI, 469). Their correspondents in other languages may lack the onomastic components (French « du temps que les bêtes parlaient ») or preserve them (English: *as old as Adam*). Ancient times are also evoked in the expression *de pe vremea lui tata Noe* (literally “from the times of old father Noah”), which can be rendered into English by the idiom *since Adam was a boy*.

The bosom of Abraham connotes well-being and good life, in a place that is a paradise. This idea is rendered in Romanian by the simile *ca în sânul lui Avram* (Luca, 16:22), meaning *on velvet, (as) snug as a bug in a rug*. Consequently, *a trăi ca în sânul lui Avram* can be rendered into English as *to live in clover, to live like a fighting cock, to live like pigs in clover*.

Some prominent characters of the New Testament narrative who sealed Jesus Christ’s fate are the Jewish high priests, Annas and Caiaphas are also called to mind: the first was former high priest, but influential enough to have Jesus sent to him first; the latter was his son-in-law and held the position of ruling high priest. In this capacity, Caiaphas also questioned Jesus and finally charged him with blasphemy, but sent him to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judaea to be executed. Although reluctant to carry out the death sentence, Pilate finally accepted, but made a symbolical gesture in front of the crowds before condemning Jesus to death: he washed his hands with water saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.” (Matthew 27:24). As Romanian people are mostly Christians, they know these incidents and fully understand the meaning of expressions such as: Rom. *a mâna de la Anna la Pilat* (PR, VI, 477) / *a purta pe cineva de la Ana la Caiafa* (PR, VI, 478) (En. *to send from pillar to post*) and *a se spăla pe mâini ca Pilat din Pont* (En. *to shift off responsibility/task*). The meaning is even more transparent in *a aștepta pe cineva ca pe Hristos* (wait for someone as if it were Christ/Messiah), which makes reference to the long-awaited second coming of the Saviour prophesied in the Bible.

### 2.2.2. National and local anthroponymic phrasemes

From a cross-linguistic perspective, Romanian phraseological units with NCC and LCC are fixed word combinations whose (un)translatability is directly influenced by the cultural character of the onomastic components (Szerszunowicz 2011). Thus, for most of them, we find only partial or zero equivalents in English. In the case of partial equivalents, there are close semantic equivalents, differing in meaning and structure. They may consist of an identical anthroponym, a substituted one or no onomastic element at all.

In order to understand the national or local specificity and the pictorial character of most idioms and proverbs collected in this section, we consider that it is worth explaining their origin and cultural connotations. That involves getting acquainted with real historical or fictional characters that most Romanians themselves would know little if anything about. As long as most of them have cross-equivalents devoid of proprial elements, we can do them justice by valorizing their cultural potential.

#### Real historical characters

One of the themes that are recurrently present in historical folklore is that of time. The idea of time out of mind/memory is reflected by *a fi de pe vremea lui Ciubăr-Vodă* (PR, VI, 56), an expression explained briefly by Șăineanu, ed. VI (1929), by reference to a certain Hungarian general who only ruled in Moldavia for a couple of months (in 1448) and allegedly ended up being eaten by rats. The mental image of what represents old times differs from one community to another. For the inhabitants of the southern regions of Romania, this dates back to *vremea lui Pazoante Chioru*, which spans chronologically the second half of the Phanariot age (1790-1809). The name was inspired by a nickname conferred to Pazvanoglu, the pasha of Vidin, who raided the area with his so-called “pazvangii”. Both Romanian expressions might have partial equivalents in English, with a substitute of the onomastic component in *when Queen Anne was alive*

(which imposes the disambiguation of the cultural element) or *as old as Adam* (which raises an issue of incongruity between ages).

Given the troubled history of the Romanian people with successive waves of plunderers/invaders/conquerors, it does not come as a surprise that most idioms contain contrastive evaluative elements for the times, ages, periods of independence vs. foreign dominance, peace vs. riot/war, poverty vs. abundance, etc. Even to these days, it is only rulers and aristocrats, on the one hand, and opportunists, social climbers and scoundrels, on the other hand, who are perceived in collective thinking as making headway against any social and political background. One of them was Bimbașa (Sava), the chieftain of the Albanians from Ypsilante's army during the revolt against the Ottoman Turks and head of the princely guard under the reign of several princes (Șuțu, Al. Moruzi and Scarlat Calimah). Reputed for his wealth, bravery and generosity, he came over to the Turks' side and lived a life of luxury until he betrayed them, too. That explains the meaning of the Romanian expression *a trăi ca Bimbașa-Sava* (PR, VI, 455) (he lived like Bimbasa-Sava = En. approx. *live the life of Riley/in the lap of luxury*). Another reference to good living is made in *a petrece ca pe timpul lui Știrbei* (PR, VI, 325), with the meaning "to feast as in Știrbei's times" = *to live in clover*, which brings to attention Barbu Dimitrie Știrbei, who reigned in Wallachia as a "hospodar", enforcing reforms among which the most important was the abolishment of Roma slavery.

However, most often, there was political turmoil leading to instability, poverty and suffering. Thus, the time of Ștefăniță Vodă (1641-1661), nicknamed *Papură-Vodă* (Bullrush Voivode), was for the historical region of Moldavia one of plague and starvation which led people to grinding bulrush for food. While the expression *de pe vremea lui Papură Vodă* (PR, VI, 254) is devoid of this negative connotation, and simply refers to something that is very old, there is another expression suggesting dire poverty: Rom. *Parcă-i în țara lui Papură Vodă* (PR, VI, 255). Reference sources indicate that it may allude to another

character called Neagu Papură<sup>2</sup> (the family name being also based on the appellative meaning “bulrush”). He was a former outlaw who was hired to rid the region of plunderers and thieves, but once dismissed by the boyars for inefficiency, he finally turned himself to his old ways. As the period 1735-1880 in Oltenia was characterized by a void in political power and legislation, the region became “țara lui Papură Vodă”. There was such anarchy that everybody felt that it was a no-man’s-land, incessantly raided by outlaws and avoided even by the Turks who no longer asked tribute for this territory.

In Moldavia, the constant raiders were the Tatars, who were cruel and fearsome warriors whose campaigns mortified the people who had little or no protection against their attacks. Their reputation was enhanced to such an extent that we find several expressions which contain the name of the title Khan (Rom. *Han*), borne by rulers of the Mongol Empire founded by Genghis Khan. Therefore, *țara/cîmpul/tîrgul lui Han-Tătar* (DERC II, 184) (literally, “Tatar Khan’s country/field/borough”) is a place with no ruler, where anybody can do as they please. When someone is felt to be in such a place, one could say: Rom. *Parcă-i în țara lui Han Tătar* (it’s as if being in Tatar Khan’s land/country). An aggravating state of things in terms of instability and theft is grammatically rendered by a comparative statement: Rom. *E mai rău ca pe vremea lui Han Tătar* (it is worse than at the time of Tatar Khan).

The impact of foreign rulers on the Romanian population was also, most often, dramatic, especially during the Phanariote Age. A representative of the Phanariote Greek families who ruled in Wallachia was Prince Ioan Gheorghe Caradja/Caragea (1754-1844). He earned his ill-famed reputation for doubling tributes and passing very drastic fiscal laws („Legiuirea Caradja” = Caradja’s laws). The expression *după legea lui Caragea* (PR, VI, 44) (by Caragea’s law) does not indicate administering justice, but any felony/crime committed especially by

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.certitudinea.ro/articole/tema-de-gandire/view/Tara-lui-papura-voda-in-vremea-lui-pazvante-chioru>, accessed on April 25<sup>th</sup> 2018.

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the elders, whereas *Se fură ca în (pe) vremea lui Caragea* (PR, VI, 44) (they steal as in Caragea's times) alludes to the injustices and burdensome taxes imposed under his rule. The historical context was not favourable to him either, as one year after his taking power, one of the worst plagues ("ciuma lui Caragea" = Caragea's plague) started to spread, which denotatively refers to the dreadful epidemic whose death toll rose to 60000 people in two years), which he struggled to contain by taking effective sanitary measures, opening quarantine hospitals and restricting access without permission to Bucharest (Giurescu, vol. III, 2007: 239).

Imposing authority was a serious state matter which was dealt with at regional level, too. Thus, the historical province of Oltenia (located in western Wallachia) had a sort of viceroy (whose official title was that of "ban"), selected from the most reputed boyars and appointed by the "voivode"<sup>3</sup>. As he was given free reign over the region, his supremacy is acknowledged by the proverbial expression *voia la dumneata ca la Banul Ghica* (PR, VI, 125) (you have all freedom as at Ban Ghica's) meaning that one can do all that he fancies. The exertion of willingness and authority may lead to conflicting situations when the power of a vassal proves sometimes stronger than the one of a king. It is the reality reflected by the saying *Vodă vra și Hâncu ba* (DER, 192), which accounts for the divergent positions taken by people. The two characters are Duca-Vodă (1672) and the Moldavian boyar Hâncu Mihalcea from Orhei province. The latter managed to overturn the ruling prince who fled to the Turks, but the Ottoman Court reinstated him. Protesters and those who defy the law are also called *din neamul lui Hâncu* (DER, 192-193) (kin to Hâncu).

The practice of rebelling against oppressive rulers inevitably leads to victims on either side. Moreover, some individuals will be sacrificed by the ones in power to save their face. Such a situation is

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<sup>3</sup> <http://enciclopediaie.blogspot.ro/2014/10/ban.html>, accessed on May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

evoked by the expression *a cere capu lu' Moțoc*, which is meant to show the dismissal and even execution of a scapegoat. That was the fate of one of Alexandru Lăpșuneanu's boyars, the High Steward Moțoc, who was delivered to the rioting mob that lynched him. Thus, his name connotes a last minute sacrifice of someone who is not the only one to blame. In fact, not assuming responsibility for one's deeds and assigning it to others seems to be commonly encountered among Romanians, as there is another illustrative expression which is in current use: Rom. *a da vina pe Acarul Păun* (put the blame on Shunter Paun = find a scapegoat). The anecdotic incident that exposed the anonymous Păun to public attention and explains this expression involves a train collision on the route Ploiești-Buzău, for which no railway manager was held responsible, as long as the official investigation concluded that the only one to blame was a pointsman/shunter called Ion Păun. The third proverbial expression referring to laying the blame on someone else is *Beleaua lui Costache o trage Iordache* (Costache's mess/trouble falls on Iordache = to bear someone's trouble). Such cultural practices may not be typically Romanian, but they surely represent a topical subject.

### Popular and fictional characters

Among the expressions almost fallen out of use that rely on popular or fictional characters, we find *înghite, Agache/Agachi/măi Agapie!* (DERC, II, 247), a jocular invitation addressed to those who love drinking and eating excessively. This is specific to the Moldavian region, where it was made known through a fictional character in Vasile Alecsandri's play *Agachi Flutur*. Both Șăineanu (1929) and Zanne explain it, the latter adding the meaning of "facing the music, suffering the consequences".

Another obsolete expression is represented by *a cârpi anteriorul lui Arvinte* (PR, VI, 15-16), meaning sloppy work that involves ruining things in one part with the illusion of fixing another. The character alluded to in this expression was created by writer Alexandru Donici,

in a fable entitled *Anteriul lui Arvinte* (Arvinte's cassock), which brings forth the type of ridiculous miser who patches his ripped elbows with pieces of cloth from his sleeves, then mends his sleeves by cutting from his lap and so on. Not only does he end up with something that looks worse than a tunic, but he also exposes himself to his peers' ridicule.

As illustrated by other expressions involving real historical characters, there are several idioms meant to point at the state of primitivism and total disorder in the Moldavian and Wallachian regions at the time they were created. The feeling that this is also the current state of affairs in the country is so strong that expressions such as *a umbla ca în satul lui Cremene/a fi în târgul lui Cremene/ca în satu lui Cremene* (DER, 365, 427)/ *satul lui Holbură* or *țara (sau câmpul, târgul) lui Papuc* are frequently used to characterize places with no restrictions, where everybody feels master of his house or everybody speaks and nobody listens. In the case of these three names based on Romanian appellatives – *Cremene* (the common noun *cremene* means flint or silex), *Holbură* (regional variant of *volbura* = the plant called “morning glory”) and *Papuc* (the Romanian for “shoe”), we are not interested in the act of proprial naming and transformation of the appellatives into proper names (“onymisation”), as the denotation and connotation related to the appellatives are not activated in the meaning of the expressions. There are partial equivalents to them, which present onomastic elements in both English (*Tom Tiddler's ground* = a no-man's-land where pickings may be sought or had without effective interference) and French (*C'est la cour du roi Pétaud* – Pétaud was the name of a leader of a gang of beggars, a name originating in the Latin *petere* which means “mendier, demander” = *peto* = *je demande* = *I beg*). It is of no consequence if the users are familiar with such legendary or popular characters as long as they know precisely the meaning of such expressions. It is the case of *a mânca ca în târgul (sau în satul) lui Cremene* (DERC, 386) (eating like one does in the village of Cremene = eating wolfishly and plentifully without caring about the others or inviting them to join in).

Another frequent cultural practice in rural communities is to stigmatise human flaws, to point at some personality traits, attitudes and moods with which people are not that comfortable. By appealing to expressions that allude to anonymous exponents of such situations, the users adopt indirect mockery strategies. Thus, *Dedu-Ivan* (Șăineanu, 251; PR, VI, 73) and *Istrate* (PR, VI, 169) are the popular epitome of idiocy/stupidity, whose names call for pictorial English equivalents such as “blockhead/bone head/banana head/bean head”. The presence of other proper names in expressions connoting the utmost stupidity does not have any impact on the meaning of the expression: *cată Nan iapa și el călare pe ea* (PR, VI, 215) (Nan is looking for his mare and he is mounted on it) or *a fi (lemn) Tănase* (PR, VI, 331-332) (wood head). One of the commonest male names for Romanian peasants is Ion and we find it exposed to derision in *A vorbit și nea Ion, că si el e om* (PR, VI, 160) (That was Uncle John speaking, as he’s human/a man, too). The same Ion is the one that we find as a character in anecdotes and jokes, most often being fooled or taken for a fool. One of the regional expressions that indicates that others can afford to take advantage of him is *a munci ca Ion la popă* (to work like John for the priest), which means that he gets no pay for his work.

For most anthroponymic idioms, “the onymic quality/function of the proper name ceases to be the primary direction of interpretation” (Bugheșiu, 2016: 147). We rely more on the pictorial quality and descriptive potential when retrieving the meaning of the expressions below:

- *Parcă-i miaua lui Roman/Stă ca miaua lui Roman* (PR, VI, 277) (he looks/lies like Roman’s sheep), said of a pensive or unhappy man;
- *a fi Stan Pătitul* (PR, VI, 317) (in Romanian, the one who is “pătit” is surely experienced and knowledgeable);
- *Am gândit că iau pe Stana ș-am luat pe Satana* (PR, VI, 322) (I thought I’d take Stana for a wife, but I’ve taken Satan instead). The play upon words with the two names comes with Stana as

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an exponent of an ideal woman to marry and Satana as the devil incarnate;

- *a umbla teleleu Tănase* (DER, 396) = to idle about absentmindedly;
- *Vrei, nu vrei, bei Gligore/Grigore aghiazmă* (PR, VI, 470) (willy-nilly, drink Grigore holy water) has an English corresponding expression in *needs must when the devil drives*, both used when people do something against their will because someone forces them to.

The choice of some proper names is motivated by the rhyming patterns created by association with some evaluative terms (*omenie – Ilie; cuminte – Melinte, Ivan – divan*), which contributes to their being more easily retained. This is why Romanians say about an inhumane person *Are și el omenie ca cățeaua lui Ilie* (PR, VI, 158) (he has as much humaneness as Ilie's bitch) and about a silent and vixenish one: *cuminte ca cățeaua lui Melinte* (as good as Melinte's bitch). If the female dog owned by a certain Ilie is accused of having eaten the neighbour's lard, the latter appears to have kept silent when biting whoever got close to its master. The expression *Dacă dai nas lui Ivan, el se suie pe divan* (PR, VI, 169-170) (if you encourage Ivan, he climbs the divan) refers to the situations in which whoever is allowed more liberty than is reasonable will desire more than is allowed.

Anecdotic explanations can help to retain expressions such as *a nimerit ca Irimia cu oiștea'n gard* (PR, VI, 166), which is used when saying or doing something really stupid/blunder; this is translatable into English by *to get the wrong sow by the ear/ to put one's foot in one's mouth/ to shoot at a pigeon and kill a crow*. The story behind this is relevant to some Romanians' bad habit of driving a carriage or a car while inebriated and ending up in a fence, lamp post or even worse. Irimia is said to have been a roaring drunk man who refused to let his companion take the reins to drive safely, steered towards a fence and became memorable for his stunt.

Păcală is one of the characters of Romanian anecdotes and Romanian folk tales endowed with intelligence, ingenuity, cleverness, and humour. Similar to other European and Oriental characters such as Bertoldo and Nastratin Hogeia, Păcală manages to trick the stupid, the rich and the proud ones. Akin to him, Pepelea or Perpelea also embodies popular wit, humour and perspicacity dissimulated under the mask of false naivety. In addition to his being a trickster, he likes to laugh at the others, which makes him rather mean at times. One of the popular stories account for the origin of the expression *cuiul lui Pepelea* (PR, VI, 259), which basically refers to the weak point that may cause someone nuisance or the pretext that someone uses to tease/upset someone else. The story goes that Perpelea sold his house to Arvinte and kept a nail to himself in one of the rooms under the pretext that he wants to have where to hang his coat or hat when needed. And the thing is that he paid lots of announced visits to the new owner, prevailing of his right to use the nail.

Tîndală is the opposite of Păcală, an idler who does not work seriously and annoys others. When the two meet, they really make a pair: *S-a găsit Păcală cu Tîndală* (PR, VI, 250).

Female names with rhyming patterns (e.g. Manda, Sanda, Tanda) are used interchangeably to suggest the futility of performing some actions: Rom. *de la Tanda pîn la Manda* (from Tanda to Manda) (PR, VI, 333) (going about pointlessly); *ce mi-e Tanda, ce mi-e Manda!* (it makes no difference at all). The same names are used to refer to equally stupid people who make an odd pair: Rom. *S-a 'ntîlnit Tanda cu Manda (Sanda)* (PR, VI, 333). Moreover, when something amounts to the same thing, the Romanians would say *cum e Tanda, e și Manda* (PR, VI, 334) or use alternatively *Ce mi-e baba Rada, ce mi-e Rada baba!/Ori Rada baba, ori baba Rada./Ce mi-e Rada Baba, ce mi-e Baba Rada!* (PR, VI, 271), whereas the English use proverbial expressions without onomastic components: *what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander* or *that's a horse of the same colour* or *it's tweediedum and tweedledee* and the French *C'est bonnet blanc et blanc bonnet*.

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In some expressions, the names are addressed directly as in *Tronc, Marghioală!* (for someone who said something really inappropriate, using the less popular name Marghioală instead of the diminutive Mărioară will surely make her feel ashamed/embarrassed), in others, indirectly as in *După ce e urâtă o mai chemă și Neacșa* (PR, VI, 221), used when making reference to someone who is not only ugly but also has a bad conduct. Old age in women is epitomized by *Baba Dochia* (PR, VI, 83), whose legend is familiar to Romanians. Thus, whenever there are signs that winter is back when spring is supposed to be already setting, they would say that *Baba Dochia își scutură cojoacele*<sup>4</sup> (Old Dochia is shaking off her winter coats). There is a tradition which many Romanians still respect, which involves choosing Baba Dochia's day in the interval 1-9 March. Depending on how the weather is like on the day that one has chosen (rainy, sunny, cloudy etc.), the whole year is supposed to be exactly like that for the ones who chose it.

The obstinate refusal of giving someone what that person asks for is founded on appeal to some female characters, whose names are regionally used to this purpose: *a da din gardul Mântulesei/Oancei/Răzoaiei/Iloaiei* (DERC, II, 144), literally meaning "to give from Mantuleasa's/Oancea's/Razoia's/Iloaia's fence". When someone feels that there is good enough reason to act in a certain way, he/she uses the expression *are Chira socoteală* (PR, VI, 54-55) (literally, "Chira's got her ways").

### Conclusions

Based on the typologies established by Dobrovolskij and Piirainen (2005: 29-30) and Pierini (2008), our phraseological corpus includes relevant samples of onomastic idioms (e.g. *a trăi ca în sânul lui Avram* = live in clover/on velvet), stereotyped similes (e.g. *cuminte ca cățaua lu' Melinte* = of someone apparently nice and quiet, but attacking you when you least expect it), irreversible binomials (e.g.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://rolandia.eu/legendary-baba-dochia/>, accessed on April 25<sup>th</sup> 2018.

*Păcală și Tândală* – referring to people attributed the opposite roles of the witty and the stupid) and formulae (*Dacă dai nas lui Ivan, el se suie pe divan* = Who is allowed more liberty than is reasonable will desire more than is allowed).

The analysis of Romanian phraseological units with onymic compounds and their English and/or French equivalents reveals different semantic features that justify their treatment as carriers of culture. The continuously changing social and political realities, which are so deeply rooted in Romanians' consciousness, are reflected by a rich inventory of cultural elements mirrored in expressions such as *satul lui Holbură, târgul lui Cremene, țara/cîmpul/ tîrgul lui Han-Tătar*. Somewhat surprisingly, even if the denotation of many names ascribed to local legendary, anecdotic and historical characters is unknown to most contemporary Romanian speakers, their associations and connotations are preserved through idiomatic expressions in current use in order to make reference to the embodiment of wisdom (*Păcală, Pepelea*) or stupidity (*Tândală, Tănase, Dedu-Ivan*), honesty (*Cuza Vodă*) vs. thievishness (*Caragea*), richness (*Bimbașa-Sava, Por Impărat, Știrbei*) vs. poverty (*Papură Vodă*).

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