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Aleksandar Loma

**Two Serbian Place Names Ending in *-iš* of Romanian Origin  
*Mriš* and *Dešiška*\***

The suffix *-iš* is one of the most productive in Romanian toponymy. It is used for deriving place names with a collective meaning, the derivational stem usually being a tree name, just as in the case of the functionally close suffix *-et* < Lat. *-ētum*, hence doublets such as *Stejăriș(ul)* = *Stejăret(ul)* from *stejar* ‘oak’. Some of those derivatives in *-iš* are used both as appellatives and as place-names: *aluniș* ‘alder grove’, *plopiș* ‘poplar grove’, in the toponymy often *Aluniș(ul)*, *Plopiș(ul)*, also composed *Valea Alunișului*, *Dealul Plopișilor*, etc. (cf. Iordan 1963, 433-439; 138).

Romanian names of this type are to be found in Serbia too. First and foremost this is true of the region with a Romanian-speaking minority (Vlachs) in eastern Serbia; from Crna Reka Gămulescu (1983, 211) cites *Periș* < Rom. *Periș* (*păr* ‘pear’), *Tejiș* < Rom. *teiș* ‘lime grove’ (*tei* ‘lime tree’), as well as *Petriș* ‘stony area’ (*piatră* ‘stone’) and a few etymologically unclear names;<sup>1</sup> Gacović (1993, 60, n. 300) has some additional instances of *Periș*, but also *Fraseniș* (twice) < Rom. *Frăsiniș(ul)* from *frasin* ‘ash tree’, *Goruniș* < Rom. *Goruniș* from *gorun* ‘oak’ (cf. Iordan 1963, 430, 436), *Plopiș* < Rom. *Plopiș(ul)* (see above), *Kraku Vunturiș*. All of them are field names (micro-toponyms) with no historical records, and they for the most part would be of a recent date, the type being productive among the local population (cf. *Metriș*). More interesting are the instances of place names in *-iš* traceable back to Romanian derivatives in *-iš* from other parts of Serbia where there have been no Vlachs for at least four or five centuries. The name of a village near Babušnica in south-eastern Serbia *Valniș* (officially) or *Valuniș* (Belić

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<sup>1</sup> *Venturiș*, which he derives from *vint* ‘wind’ or, alternatively, from a *vintura* ‘to winnow’ (Gămulescu 1983, 205); *Metriș*, according to him, from *metru* ‘(cubic) metre’ (p. 185), thus a recent name related to wood exploitation; *Keriș* / *Čerš* (p. 158).

1905, XLI) is explained by Emil Petrovici (1935, 142f) as deriving from Rom. *Aluniș* 'hazel grove'. To the north of it, in the Svrljig region, there is the village of *Periš* whose name, recorded since 1455/6 (Bojanić 1973, 120; and 1975, 77; 135; cf. Bogdanović 1985, 120), goes according to Skok (II, 662) back to Rom. *Periș* 'pear grove'.<sup>2</sup> Such traces of the medieval Vlachs are not rare in those and the adjacent regions of south-eastern Serbia (cf. Ivić 1982, 527f). Some twenty miles to the northeast of Svrljig another possible instance of a name in *-iš* < Rom. *-iș* is found, and it will be discussed here first.

In the monographic study by Jakša Dinić (2004, 245; 356) dealing with microtoponyms from the region of Zaglavak, the oronym *Mriš* is recorded, designating a stony hill, sparsely covered with crippled trees, which rises on the right side of the Trgoviški Timok river gorge called *Baranica*, a few miles upstream from the town of Knjaževac. Judged by the author as etymologically non-transparent (p. 80), it cannot be explained by means of Slavic and consequently should be suspected of being of foreign provenance. There is in fact among Romanian topographical derivatives in *-iș* one which might be underlying the Serbian oronym: *Meriș* 'apple grove', from *mar* 'apple (tree)'; as a place name it is well attested in Romania (cf. Jordan 1963, 437). However, the syncope of the unaccented *-e-* seems odd; at least it did not occur in the formally similar and geographically close case of *Periš* < *Periș*. Due to the lack of earlier records elucidating the phonetic development of the name *Mriš*, one can only make guesses about its prehistory. We envisage three possible explanations.

1) Originally reflected as *\*Meriș*, it underwent the reduction and eventually loss of the vowel in the first pretonic syllable. Such phenomena are not unusual in the local dialect, which is characterized by an expiratory accent (here recorded with the grave) and the presence of a semivowel written as *v*. The toponymic materials collected by Dinić (2004) furnish doublets such as *Prļjùbica* < *Preļjùbica* (p. 191), *Rvðvnsçì* < *Redensçì (dol)* (p. 112), *Grnòvica* < *Gorunòvica* (p. 138); as well as the obviously reduced forms such as *Sbnvkòsnica* < *\*Sènokòsnica* (p. 166), *Dvlbc* < *\*Dolbc* (p. 311, cf. 51), *Posvðvk* < *posedvk* 'estate',<sup>3</sup> the latter being from the same village where *Mriš* is recorded;<sup>4</sup> for the loss of the syllabic value of the prevocalic *r* in *\*Mbriš* > *Mriš*, compare, in the same region, *Svodolçič* (Dinić 2004, 298) < *\*Suodolçič* < *\*Subodol-*. The coexistence of the abovementioned forms *Valniš* and *Valuniš*,

<sup>2</sup> The same etymology goes for all *Periš* cited above; it is unnecessarily questioned by Gacović 1993, 59 f.

<sup>3</sup> The appellative is used in the same dialect, cf. Dinić 1988, 217 and 2004, 54.

<sup>4</sup> Žukovac; Dinić has *Mriš* also from Trgovište, which is due to the circumstance that the hill is situated between two villages.

the former going back via the latter to Rom. *Aluniș*, illustrates the possibility of such a development in a broader area of the south-eastern Serbian Prizren-Timok dialect.<sup>5</sup>

2) *Mriš* < \**Mbriš* goes immediately back to the Romanian form \**Măriș*, which is not attested elsewhere, but might have existed either as (a) a local development of *Meriș*, or as (b) its archaic variant.

a) Since in Romanian the accent is an expiratory one too, the reduction of a pretonic vowel, including *e*, to the semivowel *ă* occurs occasionally in Romanian toponymy. To tell the truth, among the examples cited by Jordan (1963, 338f), there is no \**Măriș* or \**Păriș* and no names ending in *-iș* at all; however, according to the information communicated to me by Dr Biljana Sikimić of the Institute for Balkan Studies, SASA,<sup>6</sup> her Romanian-speaking informants from eastern Serbia see the form \**Măriș* = *Meriș* at least as possible.

b) The uncomplicated and regular development in *Periš* should not be unreservedly used as a counterargument against two alternative hypotheses proposed here as (1) and (2a), because of the difference in status between a well-attested place name such as *Periš*, whose original form has been protected by at least 450 years of administrative use, and a mere field name with no written history and exposed to all manner of disfiguration. Nevertheless, there is a vague possibility that the form \**Măriș* as supposed by *Mriš* may be old and original one. Namely, the expected reflex of the Latin name for the apple tree *mālus* and for its fruit *mālum* would have been \**mar* in Romanian, and the regular derivative in *-iș* therefrom \**Măriș* (cf. above *Stejăriș* from *stejar* 'oak'). However, Romance reflexes of the tree name in question: It. *melo*, Log. *mela*, Engad. *mail*, and also Arom. *mer*, Rom. (with *e* > *ă* before \*-u) *măr*, pl. *meri* m., *mere* n., all presuppose the Vulgar Latin form *mēlus*, with the root vocalism of Common Greek *μῆλον* (cf. REW § 5272). A possible continuation of *mālum* in Romanian could be the rare word *mară* f. 'apple', but in view of *măr* < *mer* it is more convincingly derived from VLat. \**mela* n. pl. (with \**e* < *ē*, *ī*) via \**meară*, cf. Rom. *masă*, Arom. *measa* < VLat. *mesa* < *mensa* and especially the phonetic prehistory of *pară* 'pear' < *peară* (*ea* > *a* behind a labial) < \**peră* < VLat. *pera* < Lat. *pīra* n. pl. (cf. Bourciez

<sup>5</sup> In view of the loss of the pretonic *-u-* in *Valuniș*, one may look for an alternative Romanian source of *Mriš* in presuming \**Muriș* from *mur* 'blackberry (bush)'; but such a form is unattested (at least it is not to be found among the place names in *-iș* listed in Jordan 1963, 433ff), while *Meriș* should be common enough.

<sup>6</sup> Dr Sikimić kindly read the manuscript version of this paper and gave useful comments and suggestions. All responsibility for its possible shortcomings lies with the author alone.

1956, §§ 458, 460). Moreover, the form *mară* being scarcely ever attested,<sup>7</sup> whereas *pară* is the normal word for ‘pear’, Tiktin seems to be right in assuming that the former is secondarily modelled on the latter.<sup>8</sup> Thus the assumption about the Classic Latin *mālum* / *mālus* continuing in Romanian remains without a credible support, especially in view of its being absent in the other Romance languages,<sup>9</sup> and despite few traces it has left in the Balkan and Danube area, such as the place name *ad Malum* on the right bank of the Danube near Bononia/Vidin, recorded on the Peutinger map, in the Ravenna Cosmography and perhaps also in Procopius (cf. Beševliev 1970, 115), or the SCr word *mo(l)granj*, *malogranj* ‘pomegranate’ implying, by the vocalism of its first syllable, the Dalmatian form *\*malo* ‘apple’ rather than the Italian *melo*, *melagranato* (cf. Skok II, 451).

To conclude, of three possible ways to derive the oronym *Mriš* from Romanian *Meriș* discussed here only the first two can claim some probability.

\* \* \*

The second place name we are dealing with here is *Desiș*. Originally this was the name for what today is *Deșișka*, a village in the region of Toplica. The modern name form, attested at least since the second half of the nineteenth century (cf. Milićević 1884, 390), shows the same assimilation *š – š̄ < s – š̄* as observed in *šušanj* ‘dry brushwood’ < *sušanj* (cf. Skok III, 357) and an enlargement *-ka* going back to the secondary adjective suffix *-ska*.<sup>10</sup> The original form *Desiș* occurs in a Turkish census registry (*defter*) of 1445 (Zirojević & Eren 1968, 386; 407 n. 68);<sup>11</sup> it has no Slavic etymology and can hardly be anything else than Romanian *desiș* ‘thicket’.

<sup>7</sup> Tiktin II, s.v. *măr*, gives only two attestations, both from the end of the nineteenth century, one in a folk song and the other from the Banat as cited in an article of Gustav Weigand (*Jahresbericht des Instituts für rumänische Sprache zu Leipzig* III, 217).

<sup>8</sup> In the Romanian vernacular of the village Urovica near Negotin Dr Biljana Sikimić has recorded the plural form *miară* ‘pears’.

<sup>9</sup> The form with *-ă-* may have been eliminated for euphemistic reasons, after the loss of difference between the long and short *a* in late Latin led to a homonymy of *mālus* ‘apple tree’ and *mālus* ‘bad, evil’ (in Romanian this adjective has been replaced by *rău* < *reus*, probably to avoid confusion with *mare* ‘big’, of uncertain origin).

<sup>10</sup> *Deșișka* < *Desiș-ska* may have meant ‘the village that once was *Desiș*’, thus designated after it was deserted and/or relocated; such a commemorative function of *-ska* is observed elsewhere, in north-western Serbia as well as in Czech toponymy; more on this topic is to appear in *Onomatološki prilozi* XIX.

<sup>11</sup> The editors read *Deșiș*, but the original spelling – as far as I was able to see from the facsimile enclosed, table 8 – is *دسيش* = *d(e)siš*, i.e. without a diacritic transforming

The Romanian word is derived from the adjective *des* ‘thick’, of Latin origin (*densus*), with the same suffix *-iș* discussed above. It is noticeable that its Serbian synonym *gustiš*, from *gust* < CSI *\*gostyšb* ‘thick’, shows an analogous structure and an overlapping suffix. In view of more than thousand years of contact between the two languages, this may not be a mere coincidence; it appears reasonable to assume that one word is coined on the model of the other, *desiș* after *gustiš* or vice versa. The word *gustiš* is attested only since the eighteenth century and has no counterparts in other Slavic languages, but in Serbo-Croatian it seems to be old enough, if judged by the fact that it is widespread all over the Shtokavian-speaking areas, and also by its semantic scope; namely, it is an abstract noun and may designate anything thick, not only a dense growth of shrubs or underbrush, *thicket*, but also a thick soup, a syrupy liquid, a sediment and the like.<sup>12</sup> The meaning of the Romanian word is, on the contrary, a concrete one, and might reflect a concretization of Serb. *gustiš*. Moreover, the suffix in *gust-iș* is indigenous, it originated from CSI *\*-yšb* serving to build abstract nouns from adjectives, e.g. CSI *\*męk-yšb* ‘something soft’ > SCR *mękiš*, Pol. *miękisz*, Russ. *mjakiš*, etc., whereas Rom. *-iș* is considered to have been borrowed from South Slavic *-iš* going back to the same CSI *\*-yšb* (cf. Skok I 734).<sup>13</sup> Thus it seems probable that *desiș* arose as a kind of a semi-calque on Serb. *gustiš*, but it soon came to be perceived as a native word, which, once analyzed in *des* ‘thick’ and a “suffixal” *-iș*, may have given birth to the derivation of collectives in *-iș* from tree names, which started rivalling the inherited type in *-et*. An inverse process left toponymic traces in western Serbia, where together with names in *-et* of purely Romanian origin, such as *Kornet* < Rom. *Cornet(ul)* < Lat. *cornētum* ‘a grove of cornel-trees’, the hybrids are found derived with Romanian *-et* from Serbian tree names: *Brezet* (*breza* ‘birch’), *Vrbet* (*vrba* ‘willow’), *Jelet*

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the first *s* into *š*; probably the reading with two *š* was influenced by the present name form.

<sup>12</sup> The earliest mention cited by the RJA is from the end of the eighteenth century: *gustiš šume zelene* ‘thicket of the green forest’ in a poem by Jovan Rajić, whereas Vuk in the first edition of his dictionary (1808) gives but a general meaning ‘dichtes ding, res (cibus) solida’; for the area, cf. the attestations from Kosovo (Elezović I, with the old accent *gustiš*) and from the Croatian coast (RJA, in the meaning ‘impassable forest’). The numerous citations in the RSA are almost all from the literary works of authors coming from various Serbian regions; they illustrate two main uses of the word, ‘thicket’ and ‘thick liquid’.

<sup>13</sup> In South Slavic *\*-yšb* coincided phonetically with the rather rare suffix *-išb* (cf. Vailant IV, 672; Sławski 1974, 77); theoretically, *gustiš* could go back to *\*gostišb* as well as to *\*gostyšb*, but the latter reconstruction is more probable, in view of *\*męk-yšb* and of the existence, in Common Slavic, of the *ū*-stem *\*gosty*, *-bve* (cf. SP 8, 171), which might have served as an immediate basis for a derivative in *\*-yšb*.

(*jela* 'fir'), *Lipet* (*lipa* 'lime tree'), which probably mirror the final phase in the Slavicization of the local Vlachs in the late Middle Ages.<sup>14</sup>

Further research will probably bring to light more Romanian formations in *-iș* underlying Serbian place names in *-iș* with no Slavic etymology, cf., e.g., *Surkiš* village in the region of Gornji Lab, attested in a Turkish defter of 1455 as *swrqš* (Pešikan 1984, 24), whose stem, however, remains obscure to me.<sup>15</sup> Within the broader Serbo-Croatian area *Dr̃niš* in the Dalmatian hinterland may be mentioned, known since 1494 (*Sub Darnis*), cf. *Dirnova* in Romania.<sup>16</sup> Of course, there are numerous place names in *-iș* of other, Slavic<sup>17</sup> or substrate,<sup>18</sup> origin.

Department of Classical Studies  
Faculty of Philosophy  
University of Belgrade

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<sup>14</sup> For more detail, see Loma 1985.

<sup>15</sup> In an Old Serbian charter dating from 1346 a man named *Sava Surkiš* is mentioned in the region of Htetovo, today Tetovo in north-western Macedonia (RJA s.v. *Surkiš*), which points to an anthroponymic origin of the place name in question.

<sup>16</sup> According to Jordan 1963, 477, from Slavic \**dьrнь* 'lump of earth', but rather, together with *Drinova*, *Dranov*, etc, from \**dьrнь* > *drěнь* 'dogwood, cornel'.

<sup>17</sup> Appellatives in *-iș*, e.g. *Mekiš* in south-eastern Serbia and Bosnia; archaic possessives in *-jь*, mostly based on hypocoristica in *-iъ* or *-iъь*, e.g. *Ljubiš* in western Serbia = *Libiš* in Bohemia (PN *L'ubislavъ*, cf. Loma 2005, 25), *Hotiș* in the Banjska Charter of 1316. (PN *Hotislavъ*), *Niș*, a village in the upper Ibar valley, probably \**Mniș*, from OSerb *тънишь* 'monk' (Loma 1990, 6) etc; apocoped names in *-iște* < *-ișće*, e.g. *Rastiș* in Montenegro < *Hrastiște* (the apocope may have been inspired by possessive adjectives in *-ișki*).

<sup>18</sup> In the name of the city *Niș* < Latin *Naissus* (cf. Loma 1994), river names *Moriș*, *Tamiș* (cf. especially Schramm 1975), etc.

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