

Potamonyms of the Vistula River Basin as a Part of Cultural Heritage

Urszula BIJAK*

There are many ways in which cultural heritage can be defined, depending on the branch of science that is dealing with this term. With no doubt, a language, including proper names, is a medium of the non-material cultural heritage. The aim of my article is to present a “hydronymic map” of the Vistula basin from the linguistic point of view. I will focus on: 1/the cultural heritage reflected by the river names, which are chronologically and genetically differentiated and represent several layers: archaic Pre-Slavic names, so-called “Old-European”, Polish, other Slavic (Czech, Slovak, Boyko, Lemko, Ukrainian, Belarusian) and non-Slavic (Baltic, German, Vlach, Latin); 2/ the image of the lingual reality constructed by the river names, the creation of names which is a result of action of a number of different motives, incentives, ways of thinking and experiencing the reality; 3/the changes of hydronyms, variability (so called polyonymy) characteristic for this onimic category coming from the lack of naming memory, collapse of naming tradition through the centuries.

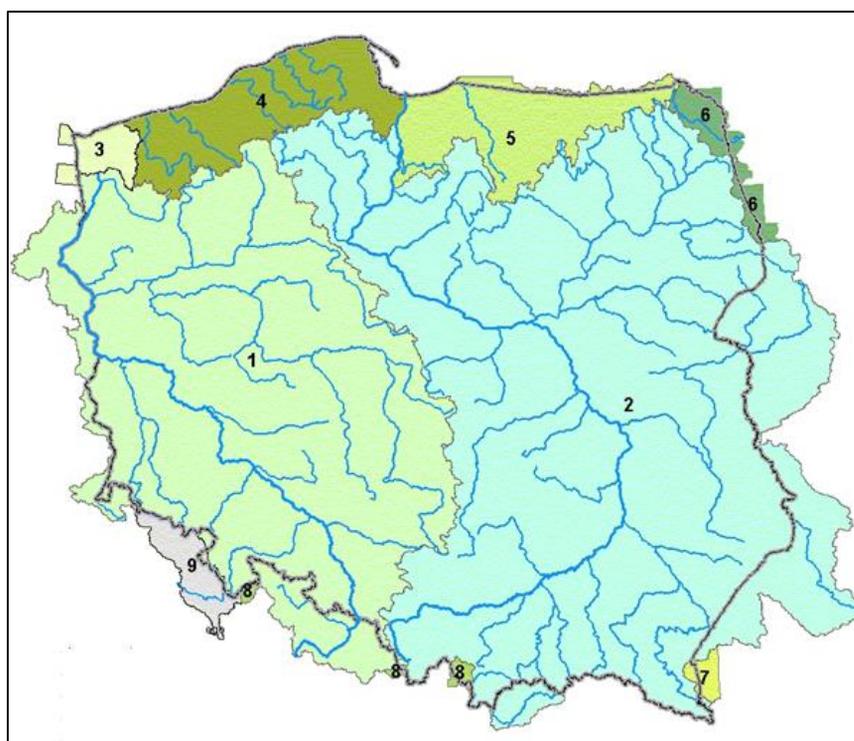
1. Introduction

There are many ways in which cultural heritage can be defined, depending on the branch of science that is dealing with this term. The conceptual and territorial range of the term can also differ (Lewandowska 2007). With no doubt, a language, including proper names, is a medium of the non-material cultural heritage. Hydronymy occupies a significant position within the realm of geographical names and from the beginning of the 20th century it played an important role as a research topic for linguists. Since then, a large number of research papers and monographs focusing on

* Professor, Institute of the Polish Language, Polish Academy of Sciences, Kraków, Poland

Polish water names have been created. It would be difficult to quote them all, however, I would like to mention: an important book series *Hydronymia Europaea*, published in Mainz (Germany) dealing with Polish hydronymy and consisting of 20 volumes and also a significant, comprehensive project carried out at the Institute of the Polish Language PAS Electronic dictionary of the hydronyms of Poland, which will be available to be accessed online in 2016. This historical hydronomasticon, based on the published monographs and enriched with additional sources, consists of the names of water objects in Poland's contemporary borders. Almost 40 thousand lemmas and 140 thousand source records of the second millennium (the earliest dating back to the eleventh century to contemporary standardized forms) have been gathered, and connected by 28 thousand cross references.

Figure 1. Hydrological division of Poland



Note: 1. Oder River basin, 2. Vistula River basin, 3. Szczecin Lagoon catchment, 4. Basin of Przymorze rivers, 5. Vistula Lagoon catchment, 6. Nemunas River basin, 7. Dniester River basin, 8. Danube river basin, 9. Elbe River basin

Source: http://www3.imgw.pl/wl/internet/zz/zz_xpages/hydrografia/podzial_hydrograficzny/podzial_hydrograficzny_pliki/mapa1.html (Mai 2013)

Vistula (Polish *Wiśła*) is the largest Polish river, is a symbol of Poland, national unity and strength. Its basin covers a large part of the country.

The aim of my article is to focus on selected river names (potamonyms)¹ from the Vistula basin: the ones that are within the current Polish borders and which are part of the Polish cultural heritage². I would like to present a hydronymic map of the Vistula basin (not a cartographic but a mental one) and I will focus on the cultural heritage reflected by the river names, the image of the lingual reality constructed by the potamonyms, and briefly on the changes of this onymic category during the ages.

2. River names as a reflection of multi-cultural and multi-ethnic heritage, developed through centuries.

Potamonyms of the Vistula basin create a group which is chronologically and genetically differentiated. The following can be distinguished:

- archaic Pre-Slavic names, so-called “Old-European”, which cannot be easily defined as belonging to a certain ethnos and have references all around the Europe, these demonstrate “lingual evidence reaching back even 2000 years” (Rzetelska-Feleszko 2006: 146);
- Proto-Slavic names, which could have been created before the disintegration of the Proto-Slavic society (at the end of the first millennium);
- Polish names and other-Slavic (like Czech, Slovak, Boyko, Lemko, Ukrainian, Belarusian) and foreign, non-Slavic names (Baltic, German, Vlach, Latin) which were developed over the last millennium.

A group of the Old-European hydronyms for the Polish territory has been properly established; even though not all of the hypotheses about the Old-European genesis of certain names are being accepted by all scientists, especially in the case of names with Baltic parallels. As estimated by E. Rzetelska-Feleszko (1991: 62), archaic names

¹ From Greek *ποταμός* ‘river’.

² This text is based on the Electronic dictionary of the hydronyms of Poland as well as the monograph written by myself, devoted to appellative-derived potamonyms (the names of the rivers derived from common nouns) (Bijak 2013) and on the second part of the monograph (I am currently working on), focusing on onymic-derived potamonyms (derived from proper names: personal and geographical).

represent around 1% of all of the river names. The proportion of archaic potamonyms within the number of all of the potamonyms from the Vistula basin is a bit lower: it is less than 1%, and this group of hydronyms consists of around 80 names. These are mainly macrohydronyms (names of the big rivers) with very old documentation, diffused around the whole basin, from the Upper to the Lower Vistula basin, from Malopolska to the Pomorze region. The longest river, which is more than 1000 kilometers long, is the Vistula River, having been documented since the Ancient Times (1st century AD). The reconstructed original form was **U̯eis-lā*, **U̯īs-lā* (Udolph 1990: 308) or **U̯eis-tlā* (Bednarczuk 1992: 158–259) from ie. stem **u̯eis*/**u̯īs* ‘to flow’.

Other Old-European river names are for example: *Brzura* (today *Bzura*), *Bug*, *Drwęca*, *Jania*, *Krzna*, *Liw*, *Łada*, *Łydynia*, *Narew*, *Nida*, *Pewel*, *Pilca* (today *Pilica*), *Poprad*, *Por* (today *Pór*), *Raba*, *San*, *Skrwa*, *Sona*, *Świder*, *Uszwa*, *Wda*, *Wel*, *Węgra*, *Wiagr* (today *Wiar*), *Wissa*. Many of the names from the macrohydronyms, share a competitive etymology, for instance: *Wkra* is classified as a Baltic name (Lithuanian *vikrus* ‘lively; spry’), and also as Old-European (Indo-European stem **u̯eig-*/**u̯eik-* ‘flex; bend’), similarly *Elk* (Indo-European stem **leik̑u-* or **līk-* ‘to flow’ and Sudovian/Jatvingian **lek-* ‘wet land; swamp’), *Omulew* (Indo-European stem **am-* ‘channel, river trough’ and Lithuanian *āmalas* ‘mistletoe’); *Włodawa* (today *Włodawka*) is considered to be a Slavonic (Old-Polish *włodać* ‘to reign; to rule’), Old-European (**u̯eld-*/**u̯old-* ‘to spin; to twirl; to rotate; to wheel’) and Old-German name, too (with the *wald-* element). In the bases of the Old-European hydronyms, we can distinguish verb-derived cores, concerning the water movement and also roots related to the object type (other than a river), moisture and humidity, water qualities (colour), stream (speed) and the river channel (sinuosity). Within the group of hydronyms sharing the foreign etymology, the most interesting names come from the Warmia and Mazury region and also from the Mazovia borderland (the North-East of Poland) included by L. Bednarczuk (1994) in the mazowiecko-podlaski acreage. This group includes names of the rivers from the Narew basin, such as: *Dybla*, *Gołda*, *Jakać*, *Kubra*, *Liza*, *Sprząśła* (today *Supraśl*), *Strabla* (today *Strabelka*), *Szkwa*, *Więczęta* (today *Wincenta*), which are regarded as having a Baltic etymology. However, some of the scientists who follow the Old-European theory, search for them the Indo-European roots.

Potamonyms, which can be a part of the Proto-Slavic group, are (after the Old-European) the next chronological layer. These are represented by a similar number of

names – around 80. In the stems of these names, several semantic fields can be distinguished, for example:

- colour of water — *Biała* (Proto-Slavic **bělb* ‘white’), *Szreniawa* (**sernb* ‘white, graying’ + suffix *-awa* or **sernjavb* ‘whitish’);
- features of the stream — *Bystrzyca* (**bystrica* ‘fast-flowing water’);
- characteristics of the channel and its shape — *Brda* (**dǫbra* ‘ravine’), *Skawa* (**sǫkava* ‘sinuous’);
- depth — *Płyćwa* (**plyti*/**pluti* ‘to flow’ + suffix **-vna* or **plytb*: **plytvnb*, fem. **plytvna* ‘wide, flat’ also ‘shallow’), *Tanew*, *Tana* (**tnb*: **tnbnvb*, ‘thin’);
- quality of subsoil — *Breń* (**brǫna*: **brǫnbje* ‘soggy soil, mud, clay’);
- coastal flora — *Przemsza* (**permǫši*, *-vne* ‘overgrown with moss’);
- coastal fauna — *Horz* (**orb* ‘horse; stallion’);
- material culture — *Sąpolna* (**sǫpolbje* ‘border field’ + suffix *-na*), *Stobnica* (**stobv* ‘pole, log (stłp)’ + suffix *-nica*)³

Hydronymy of the Vistula River basin is dominated by native names, however on the peripheral areas, other Slavic and foreign non-Slavic names can be found. In the North-East acreage, Baltic names can be distinguished. These can be assigned to the Lithuanian language for example: *Kumiałka* (Lithuanian *kumėlė*, *kumelỹs* ‘horse; stallion’), Prussian: *Ilga* (Old-Prussian *ilga*, Lithuanian *ilgas* ‘long’). Around the South, Czech acreage, for example *Chorni Strumen* (Czech *chorni* ‘upper’, *strumen* ‘stream’), Slovak: *Bela* (*biely* ‘white’), South-East Ukrainian: *Bereźnica* (Ukrainian *bereza* ‘birch-tree’), *Solotwiński* (Ukrainian *solotwa* ‘salty mineral water’), East Belarusian: *Horodnia* (Belarusian *horod* ‘city’). In the South and South-East we come cross Vlach names, for example: *Afony* (Ukrainian dialectal *afyra*, *afora* ‘berry’ from Romanian origin), *Lespedar* (Romanian *lespede* ‘stone board’), *Syhla* (Ukrainian dialectal *sigla*/*sihla* from Romanian *sihlă* ‘forest’). German names are a younger chronological layer within the river names of the Vistula basin: these showed up in the Silesia region (south-west borderland) in the 16th century, in the north and north-east borderland

³ Some of them have also a competitive etymology like Orz, by J. Udolph the name derives from ide. stem **er-/*or-* ‘to move fast’ (1990: 224).

(from 13th century), often only as variations assigned by the administration for the objects that originally had Polish or Baltic names. Most of them were converted to Polish after World War II by The Commission for Establishing Names of Localities and Physiographic Objects. Within the group of names with a German origin, which were adapted into the Polish language and are still in use today, we can provide the following examples: Old-German — *Drybok* (*drī* > *drei* ‘three’ and *bêk* > *Bach* ‘stream’), which have older records; *Holcyna*, documented since the 18th century in the Silesia region (German *Holz* ‘timber’); from the lower Vistula basin: *Bacha* (German *Bach* ‘stream’) which is linked with a couple of objects and *Trynka* (German *Tränke* ‘watering place’). It is also worth mentioning the chancellery Latin calques, which can be found (however rarely) in the medieval documents, for instance: *Aqua Frigida*, *Sancta Maria*.

Potamonyms of the Vistula basin create a multilingual mosaic and these are a relic from the times when a number of different nations and ethnic groups were living within the current borders of Poland, as well as providing evidence that in the middle ages, Latin was an official language in our part of Europe. But this class of onyms is predominated by the names with a Polish origin, which will be discussed further and the motivational bases will be explained.

3. Potamonyms - a coded image of a lingual reality

These aspects will be presented using cognitive approach, especially R. Langacker’s “stage model” because (according to him) “the role of the perceiver is in many ways analogous to that of someone watching the play” (Langacker 1991: 284; 2009: 473–474).

A river – an object which is designed to be named, possess a group of appellative categorial qualities, a meaning, it is situated in a certain geographical area, together with its components, described appellatively and onymically. The creation of a name is “a result of action of a number of different motives, incentives, ways of thinking and experiencing the reality”. To create a name, a single characteristic is enough, a quality of the object which is being submitted to propriation or the feature of the space around, which is being chosen due to a certain need and with the participation of a communicative society (creator). Which river attributes were the main motives of the name creation? Water objects are being seen by the creator through its characteristics, with the use of all of the senses. The following parameters were distinguished: depth,

colour, smell, quality and cleanliness, size, temperature, water movement, water level, or lack of water, acoustics features when the river flows.

The most general conceptual structures within the potamonymic bases are the words *rzeka* ‘river’, *płynąć* ‘to swim; to flow.’ These were used as a base for the most archaic, and the oldest hydronyms, but also for the newer ones. Hydronymic lexemes of a narrower scope, describing the type of the hydrographic object, such as *potok* ‘stream’, *kanal* ‘channel’, *krynica* ‘fount’, *młynówka* ‘leat’, *ruczaj* ‘brook’, *struga* ‘spurt’, *strumień* ‘stream’, *stok* ‘stream, spring’ are very commonly used in the process of hydronymic creation. The focus of a creator is on the qualities of the watercourse’s channel, its shape, features of the subsoil and the coast, described with lower or higher precision. Clarification is being introduced by the adjectives describing the features of a watercourse. The lexemes which name the type and characteristics of an object can appear separately, creating one-word hydronyms, or as a compound name consisting of a hydronymic lexeme and the describing adjective. These are the details from the first plan. Then, the elements from the nearest surroundings and from the background are chosen – characteristics of the coastal grounds, coastal flora and fauna and also cultural (material and spiritual) objects. The last component is the creator's view and perspective, and also spatial relations between the watercourse and other objects – elements of “the stage” forming the landscape.

Most of the appellative-derived potamonyms (deriving from common nouns) were created by using the same base, mainly with topographic semantics, with the use of the same or different type of derivation. A rank-order list of the naming motives that was prepared includes more than 300 “appellative nests” and lexemes, which were used in the hydronyms 3 times or more.

Within the group of appellative potamonymic cores, the word (and its derived forms) which is used the most often is *potok* ‘stream’ – almost 600 appearances. As a water name it can be found in the following forms: *Potok*, *Potoki*, *Potoczek*, *Potoczki*, also *Potoczny*, *Potoczańska*, *Potoczanka*, *Międzypotoki*, *Międzypotocze* as well as in the dominant compound formation with an adjective, eg. *Głęboki Potok* (‘deep stream’), *Czarny Potok* and *Potok Czarny* (‘black stream’), *Graniczny Potok* and *Potok Graniczny* (‘border stream’) and also a smaller number of compounds with prepositional phrases such as *Potok od Lasu* (‘stream from the forrest’), *Potok zza Skalki* (‘stream from behind

the rock’). Names which originate from the lexemes dealing with the object type need to be described more specifically, with more details, therefore the biggest group consists of compound formations with adjectives (75% of this group). The base *potok* was very productive over the centuries, used since the 13th century with a growing tendency until 19th and 20th centuries.

The appellative *rzeka* ‘river’ (together with the derivatives) is second on the attendance list and it has more than 300 records in the following forms: *Rzeka, Rzeki, Rzeczka, Rzeczki, Rzeczysko, Rzeczyna; Rzeczycha; Krzyworzeka, Suchorzeczka, Stare Rzeczysko, Nowa Rzeka*. Compound formations are 47% of potamonyms with this core, and the most popular name is *Stara Rzeka* (‘old river’), identifying the old channels. These hydronyms have been documented since the 12th century. The hydronyms which were mentioned above are often only periodic names, dialectal, used in the local contexts.

The third position on the rank list of hydronymic bases is occupied by the adjective *głęboki* (‘deep’). Depth is the watercourses’ feature that is being distinguished most often in hydronymy. As a hydronyms’ base it has been mentioned since the 14th century, ex. *Głęboka Debrz* (‘deep valley, brushwood’). The others are: *Głąbia, Głębiec, Głębiczek, Głęboczka, Głęboka/Głęboki, Głęboki Potok*.

The fourth position in the most common and most often used cores is held by an adjective *czarny* ‘black’ together with its derivatives, eg. *Czarna, Czarnówka, Czarna Struga*. Potamonyms with this core were first documented in the 13th century, within the whole Vistula basin, from the upper to the lower basin.

The fifth position is held by an appellative *kamień* ‘stone’ and derivatives, eg. *Kamienny/Kamienna, Kamienica, Kamionka, Kamiony Stok*.

“Lexical nests” presented above were used more than 100 times in the potamonyms. The rest of the appellative bases (together with derivatives from the primary forms) within the top 100 most often used can be grouped into several semantic fields:

- types of the water objects (natural and artificial): *kanal* ‘channel’, *stok* ‘stream, spring’, *rów* ‘ditch’, *rostoka/roztoka* ‘glen, mountain valley’, *przekopa/przykopa* ‘crosscut, ditch’, *woda* ‘water’, *jezioro* ‘lake’;
- features of the water objects: *stary* ‘old’, *biały* ‘white’, *zimny* ‘cold’, *suchy* ‘dry’, *wielki* ‘big’, *czerwony* ‘red’, *rudy* ‘russet’, *krzywy* ‘crooked’, *bystry* ‘fast’, *mały* ‘small’;

- attributes of the terrain objects: *góra* ‘mountain’, *baba* ‘old women’ in topographic meaning ‘swamp, swampy place in the marsh’, *skała* ‘rock’, *smug* ‘small valley’, *dolina* ‘valley’;
- flora features’ bases: *dąb* ‘oak’, *olcha/olsza* ‘alder’, *las* ‘forest’; *brzoza* ‘birch’, *jasion/jesion* ‘ash’, *lipa* ‘linden’, *jawor* ‘sycamore’ or ‘sycamore maple’, *buk* ‘beech’;
- fauna features’ bases: *bóbr* ‘beaver’, *wilk* ‘wolf’, *niedźwiedź* ‘bear’, *ryba* ‘fish’, *świnia* ‘pig’, *koza* ‘goat’, *żaba* ‘frog’;
- terms relating to the material and spiritual culture: *młyn* ‘mill, watermill’, *granica* ‘border’, *wieś* ‘village’, *most* ‘bridge’ and Old-Polish *mościć* ‘to build the bridge’, *dział* ‘part’, *piekło* ‘hell’.

When creating hydronyms from proper names, the crucial element was the nearness of an object, a referent, within a short distance from the water object, and also (as in the case of imported names) the cultural context (compare eg. biblical *Cedron*, *Jordan*, also *Nil*). Rivers, especially the large ones, were parts of the landscape that were distinguished and named earliest. Names of the big rivers were motivative basis for other water names. *Wisła* was a basis for the following hydronyms: *Wisłok*, *Wisłoka*, *Wisła Mała*, *Wisła Martwa*, *Wisła Królewiecka*, *Stara Wisła*, *Wisłka*, *Wiślina*, and also for settlement names: *Wisła*, *Wisła Mała*, *Wisła Wielka*, *Wiślica*. Many of the macrohydronyms create widely spread “onymic nests” (not including *Wisła*, eg. *Bug*, *Liw*, *Nida*, *Raba San*, *Uzew*). Within the group of onymic-derived hydronyms, large collections are names derived from the names of villages and cities. These include names which are the result of pure transonymization, for example *Jabłonica* (from settlement name *Jabłonica*), suffixal derivatives with the most often used suffix *-ka* (also *-anka*) eg. *Gzówka* (from settlement name *Gzów*), *Przytulanka* (from settlement name *Przytuły*) and compound names eg. *Struga Koprzywnicka* (settlement name *Koprzywnica*), *Rzeka Iwonicza* (settlement name *Iwonicz*). Anthroponyms may also constitute the basis of a hydronyms (especially in the case of mountain streams) like *Potok Tobiaszowski* (personal name *Tobiasz*), *Wojtyczków Potok* (personal name *Wojtyczka*), several of which are female first names, eg. *Ada*, *Agata*, *Halszka*, *Ksenia*, *Maryna*. Personal names which come into the hydronymy are mainly “certificates of ownership or document of remembrance.” A number of onymic-derived hydronyms is similar to the appellative-derived names.

4. Variability of the potamonyms

A quite characteristic feature of the potamonyms is their variability (so called polionymy), manifesting in the appearance of the morphological and lexical variants defining one watercourse. A cumulated example of this polionymy is a group of the hydronymic forms for a small stream of a standardised name *Gielczewka*: **Gielczew* (< Proto-Slavic **gьlčati* ‘to din’, **gьlčь* ‘noise, din’, Polish dialectal *gielczeć* ‘to noise, to sought’) > *Gełczw-ica* (1425) > *Gielczew* (1450) > *Gielcz-ówka* (1786) > *Gielczew* (1839) > *Kielczew-ka* (1859) > *Gielczew* (1881) > *Gielczwi-anka/Gielczew-ski/Gielcz* (1965) > *Gielcz-ówka* (1967) > *Gielczew* (1972) > *Gielczew-ka* (2006). A full range of changes can be found in this example: addition of the suffix *-ica* (*Gełczwica*), *-ka* (*Gielczewka*), *-ówka* (*Gielczówka*), *-anka* (*Gielczwianka*), *-ski* (*Gielczewski*); suffix reduction (*Gielcz*); adideation (*Kielczewka*: *kielcz* ‘stump’). These renominations were linked with a presence of dehydronymic village name *Gielczew*. And also in the 19th and 20th century lexical variants from other cores were appeared: *Radomirka* (from settlement name *Radomirka*), appellative-derived *Belza* (from noun *belza* ‘deep chasm, deep water’) and *Młynówka* (from noun *młynówka* ‘leat’). These changes come from the lack of naming memory within local and non-local users, in the collapse of the naming tradition, changes within the hierarchy of importance in the features of a local space and surroundings, and also in the still verification of proper names’ forms by the naming system.

5. Conclusions

The river names from the Vistula basin presented in this paper, which are chronologically and geographically differentiated, on one hand are a part of the European multi-cultural and multi-ethnic heritage. On the other hand, most of the names are strictly Polish, belonging to the regional and local heritage. Hydronyms, as well as other onyms, share the function of “a cultural archive” (Mrózek 2003: 198), contain „the knowledge about the ways the people can perceive the world” and are linked with the distinctive, folk and ordinary way of viewing reality.

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