

Acta Scientifica Naturalis

Former Annual of Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen: Chemistry, Physics, Biology, Geography

Journal homepage: <https://content.sciendo.com/view/journals/asn/asn-overview.xml>

Editorial Note: Rezovska River – the southern border of Bulgaria**Dimcho Zahariev**

*Department of Plant Protection, Botany and Zoology, Faculty of Natural Sciences,
Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen, 115 Universitetska Str., 9700 Shumen, Bulgaria*

In the past, the lands along the banks of the Rezovska River belonged to Bulgaria, and later they belonged to the Ottoman Empire. Today the river is shared between Bulgaria and neighboring Turkey. The twists and turns in history are perhaps best illustrated by the bridge between the two banks of the river south of the town of Malko Tarnovo. This bridge will be discussed again a little later.

The Rezovska River has been chosen as the southern border of the Republic of Bulgaria with the Republic of Turkey. The river is formed by the confluence of the Paspalderesi River and the Velika River on the territory of Turkey. It then flows in a northerly direction for about 3 km and reaches the Bulgarian border 8 km south of the city of Malko Tarnovo at the mouth of its left tributary, the Delievska River. From here to its mouth, the river serves as the border between the two countries. The length of the river is approximately 112 km. It flows into the Black Sea at the Bulgarian village of Rezovo, which is also the southernmost point of the Bulgarian Black Sea coast.

There are different versions about the origin of the name of the river. According to one of them, it is named after King Rezos (in some sources he is referred to as Rez). He is one of the most famous Thracian kings. Ancient Greek poet Homer (8th century BC) describes him in the Iliad as the most powerful among the Thracian allies of Troy. Much later, Euripides (5th century BC) in his tragedy "Rezovska" describes him as the ruler of the Thracian tribe of Edoni, also called Edonians or Edonids, who inhabited Southwestern Thrace along the lower reaches of the Struma River to its mouth. In the east, their lands reached the Nestos River (today Mesta River), which served as a natural border with the lands of True Thrace.

I

In his dialogue "Heroicus", the Roman sophist of Greek origin Flavius Philostratus (3rd century AD) presents one of the most interesting and detailed versions of the life and cult of the Thracian king Rhesus, linking him to the Rhodope Mountains and the Thracian tribe of Bessi.

Due to the spatial distance of the Struma River, the Rhodope Mountains and the Rezovska River, the connection with the name is most likely due to the belief that Rezos is a collective image of the Thracian kings who inhabited the territory of present-day Southern Bulgaria, as described by Homer - a mighty warrior in golden armor with a chariot pulled by invincible horses. Rezos is the most famous of the Thracian kings who participated in the Trojan War. He came to the aid of the Trojans at the end of the war with a ten-thousand-strong army. He was the only one who managed to tame the magical horses, which were as fast as a whirlwind and whiter than snow. They were so powerful that they could decide the outcome of the war themselves, as long as they were given water to drink from the Scamander River (today's Menderes River, Turkey) and then King Rezos himself would become invincible. On the very night of his arrival, he was killed in his sleep by Diomedes and Odysseus, and with this the end of the war was predetermined.

Besides the legend of Tsar Rezos, there are other theories and historical names for the origin of the name of the Rezovska River. In Ottoman registers and Western maps from the 18th century, the river is mentioned by the names Rezvi, Rezve and Büyük Rezve. Some researchers believe that this name may derive from the Arabic word "rizvan" (favour, paradise), due to the beauty of the area around the river.

Another old name for the river is Rezvaya, which is often found in Russian and Bulgarian sources. In Russian, "rezvaya" means "nimble" or "fast" (for a river), which accurately describes the nature of its flow in the upper parts of Strandzha.

In Turkish, the river is called Mutludere - from mutlu, meaning "happy" and dere, meaning "stream" or "ravine". The literal translation is "The Happy River". This name is probably given because of the fertile lands and tranquility of the region in the past.

Some more modern theories view the name as derived from old local words for "cutting" or "slit", describing the way the river "cuts" its deep and meandering valley in the Strandzha Mountain.

The meanders that the river forms are called "budzhaks" by the locals: e.g. Diyado Kirov budzhak (in English Grandfather Kirov budzhak), Golemiya budzhak (in English Big budzhak), etc. The word "budzhak" comes from the Turkish language and means a quiet, sheltered, place surrounded by a river.

In the valley of the Rezovska River, nearly 20 kilometers from the mouth of the river, is the Uzunbudzhak Reserve (from Turkish: "uzun", meaning long, and "budzhak", meaning a quiet, sheltered place), also known as "Lopushna". The reserve is located between the villages of Kosti and Slivarovo. It is included in the list of biosphere reserves under the UNESCO "Man and the Biosphere" program. It is home to a number of relict plants: *Dapne pontica*, *Fritillaria pontica*, *Hypericum calycinum*, *Ilex colhica*,

II

Laurocerasus officinalis, *Mespilus germanica*, *Quercus hartwissiana*, *Rhododendron ponticum*, *Vaccinium arctostaphylos*. The fish *Barbus petenyi* and *Alosa caspia* subsp. *bulgarica* are found in the rivers of the reserve. Until 1964, the critically endangered mammal *Lynx lynx* was also found in the reserve.

The area north of the Rezovska River is part of the Strandzha Mt Nature Park. Along its entire length along the border between Bulgaria and Turkey, the river is surrounded by forests. Almost along its entire length, the river passes through uninhabited areas with well-preserved nature (Fig. 1). Only in its upper reaches (Paspalderesi River) are there two Turkish villages: Burgazdzhik and Derekoy, then the nearest settlement on Bulgarian territory is the village of Slivarovo, and at the mouth is the Bulgarian village of Rezovo. The former Bulgarian villages of Madzhura and Pirgopulo, located along the riverbank, which remained in Turkish territory, were depopulated in 1913.



Figure 1. Rezovska River south of the village of Slivarovo
(Photo by Dimcho Zahariev, 2013)

In the village of Rezovo there is a panoramic platform, often called "Europe Alley", as it is the southeasternmost point of the borders of the European Union, from which you can see the mouth of the river, the Turkish border post and the large beach on Turkish territory. Another attraction in the village is the Orthodox chapel "St. John the Baptist", located on the very shore, just above the mouth of the river.

One of the most popular tourist routes in the area is the village of Rezovo - Silistar Beach. It is a path that passes along steep rocky shores with incredible panoramas of the sea and ends at the Silistar Beach - one of the most beautiful beaches on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. The length of the route is about 6.4 km and takes about 2.5 hours. Along the way, you can visit the Kastrich Fortress. It is located on the Cape Kastrich,

III

3 km north of the village of Rezovo. Almost no remains of the fortress have been preserved, which guarded the coast in the Middle Ages.

One of the landmarks in the Rezovska River area is the village of Slivarovo. The preserved houses have the typical 19th century Strandzha architecture, and although it is not declared an architectural reserve, the place is unique (Fig. 2). The village was founded in the 17th century by settlers from the town of Malko Tarnovo and was originally called Kladara. The name probably comes from the Strandzha word “klada” – a thick old tree that the river carries along its course and when in a narrow place it gets stuck between the two banks, then it serves as a bridge. This is the smallest village in the Strandzha Mt. and one of the smallest in Bulgaria. The area of the village has been inhabited for much longer in time. A large number of artifacts testify to the existence of a settlement in antiquity: the Thracian mound necropolises, traces of metallurgical activity (called “rupi”), including traces of gold mining, the remains of a Thracian fortress and a late antique fortress, as well as the Thracian rock sanctuary in the Vatràlòva Polyana area, with circles cut into the rock with a diameter of 10-15 cm. The sun god Helios was probably worshipped here.



Figure 2. A house in the village of Slivarovo
(Photo by Dimcho Zahariev, 2013)

One of the most visited landmarks on the Rezovska River is the Valchanov Bridge. It is located about 8 km southeast of the town of Malko Tarnovo as the crow flies. It can be reached by a forest road, the distance along which is about 11 km. Initially, the bridge was built with money and on the orders of the legendary Bulgarian outlaw Valchan Voivoda in the early 19th century, when Bulgaria was part of the Ottoman Empire. The purpose of its construction was to ensure the passage of local people from one bank of the river to the other, from the town of Malko Tarnovo to the town of Malak Samokov (now the town of Demirköy) and back,

IV

which was necessary quite often. Until then, there had been no bridge, despite the processing of iron in the town of Malak Samokov and the requests of local people to the Turkish authorities for a road across the river that would provide access there.

The bridge that was built was wooden and was located about a hundred meters east of the current bridge. To this day, remains of the original Vulcan Bridge can be seen in the river on the Turkish side.

Over the years, the old wooden bridge was destroyed by the violent winter and spring waters of the Rezovska River. In 1908, it was rebuilt from marble stones with three arches and a little further up the river. The new bridge was again called the Valchanov Bridge. Two of the arches of the bridge on the Bulgarian side were destroyed after 1947, when it fell behind the border fence, in order to prevent illegal crossing of the river (Fig. 3). The great paradox of the Valchanov Bridge is that in the past it was built to connect, and in modern times it is over a river that divides.



Figure 3. The preserved arch of the Valchanov most near the town of Malko Tarnovo
(Photo by Dimcho Zahariev, 2013)

Rezovska River, this little-known river on the border between two countries, is today increasingly attracting attention as one of the few remaining pristine places not only in Bulgaria, but also in Europe. Its border location is currently a guarantee that it will remain such a place, at least in the near future.

Front Cover

A view of Rezovska River east of the village of Slivarovo

Photo by Prof. Dimcho Zahariev

Date of photo: August 24, 2013

V