

BIBLICAL CHARACTERS IN SHIP NAMES IN THE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURIES*

SVITLANA NASAKINA
Odesa State Agrarian University, Ukraine
svetlana.15@meta.ua

Резюме: В данной статье представлены результаты исследования названий кораблей 18-19 веков в историческом, религиозном и ономастическом аспектах. Названия кораблей не только помогают идентифицировать страну, они в некотором роде отражают систему верований народа в определённый исторический период. В нашем исследовании кроме номинативной функции были выделены просветительная и символическая функции названий кораблей 18-19 веков. Материал взят из газет исследуемого исторического периода, а также из материалов, который содержится в различных опубликованных документах 18-19 веков. В статье дается обзор сходных и различных тенденций в присвоении библейских названий морским судам в нескольких странах. Кроме того, особое внимание было уделено типологии названий кораблей.

Ключевые слова: названия кораблей, ономастика, библейские имена, символическая функция, образовательная функция.

1. Introduction

This paper examines the biblical characters in ship names in the 18th-19th centuries. Considering the whole history of the mankind, it should be said that the Bible is one of the precedent text for the people around the world regardless of religious denomination, that is, the Bible is the culturally significant book, the plots and characters of which were used and are used in studies and works of art.

According to Gubskij (2007, 43), the Bible is “собрание древних текстов, канонизированное иудаизмом и христианством в качестве «священного писания»” (the collection of ancient texts canonized by Judaism and Christianity as “scripture”) (my translation). The characteristic of the 18th and 19th centuries was the fact that the Bible texts influenced the development of world culture. It should also be noted that the biblical characters, plots, and motifs influenced literature, various forms of art, national culture and traditions; the *Bible* was studied in educational establishments in the Christian countries as well. Besides, the images of the Bible were associated with the political and cultural problems of that epoch. Since

* *Библейские персонажи названиях кораблей в 18-19 веках.*

ship names always reflect state priorities, that is, the events and the personalities important for a certain country, the biblical characters were often seen in ship names of European countries.

It is necessary to note that the issue of ship names is a research subject for onomasticians and historians (Cacia 2014; Grinëv 2015; Schybergson 2009, etc.). At the same time, little has been done so far into the research of the biblical characters in ship names in the 18th and 19th centuries, that's why the novelty of our work lies in the fact that it is for the first time that a comprehensive analysis of biblical characters in British, Italian and Russian ship names has been performed.

This paper is a part of a larger research project which analyses differences and similarities in ship names in different countries and different epochs. Ship names research could be useful in understanding the historical events, religious traditions and symbolic signs. In this context the aim of our paper is to present specific tendencies in ship naming in the 18th and 19th centuries in the Christian countries in some details. The investigation is based on the analysis of British, Italian and Russian ship names. Among the sources for our research were lists of naval and merchant ships contained in the local newspaper "Odesskiy Vestnik" (1827-1893) and in published documents from the 18th and 19th centuries. The research targeted the following questions: On what basis were the biblical characters in ship names chosen? What are their specific functions?

2. Historical background

In order to understand why the ships were named after the biblical characters, both historical and religious aspects have to be taken into account. Firstly, as soon as the Christianity started to spread across Europe, it became one of the principal and the most dominant beliefs. The Orthodox Christian priest and theologian Florovskiy (1998a, 256) claimed that "Христианство вошло в историю как новый социальный порядок, новое социальное измерение" (Christianity entered in history as the new social order, the new social dimension). The Christian churches played a great role in all the spheres of life of the society. The Christian preachers saw the Bible as a book of overriding importance, which contained the most essential things for the edification of believers. For that reason, texts from the Bible were read at Christian church services throughout the year and most part of the population knew the names of the main biblical characters. A characteristic feature of the Christian world view was the theocentrism, therefore, a great importance in Christianity was given to reading the Bible in order to be closer to God.

Secondly, it should be mentioned that the geopolitical world structure in the 18th and 19th centuries differs from that in the 21st century. For example, the Kingdom of Sardinia was a sovereign state in Southern Europe from the early 14th until the mid-19th century. Then on the 17th of March 1861 the Kingdom of Sardinia

changed its name to the Kingdom of Italy, as well as the Kingdom of Naples which became part of Italy after 1861. Therefore, we decided to consider in our research the ships from these kingdoms as Italian ship names. Also, until 1922 the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland was called the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and until 1917 the Russian Federation was called the Russian Empire. In our research we will use the word *British* for ship names from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the word *Russian* for ship names from the Russian Empire. It is worth mentioning that there was the alliance of Church and State in most countries because Christianity was the state religion. As evidence of such unity, we can cite the fact that Count Sergei Uvarov, Minister of Education (1833-1849) in Russian Empire “became well-known as the author of the ‘theory of official narodnost, i.e. populism’ (Orthodoxy, autocracy and *narodnost*)” (Preobrazhenskiy 1988, 145).

Thirdly, there are three main branches in Christianity: Catholicism, Orthodoxy and Protestantism. Catholicism “evolved in 1054-1204 following the split of the universal Christian church into the Catholic and Orthodox Church; the Protestant Church separated from the Catholic Church in the 16th century” (Primakov/Vlasov 1986, 71). In the 18th and 19th centuries Catholicism was the main religion in the Italian Republic, Orthodoxy accounted for the majority of believers of the Russian Empire, Protestantism was most widespread in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. These three states have been chosen in order to observe the ship names of religious communities belonging to three Christian trends.

Thus, the 18th and 19th centuries occupy a special place in the history of the Christianity in Europe. The domination of the religious ideology resulted in Christianity being the cultural basis in many states. Therefore, the biblical characters in ship names were used and served as understandable symbols. Such ship names are particularly interesting for both national and religious history because they are connected with important historical events of the states concerned and, to some extent, they created the cultural code of the nation. In the context of our paper we can rephrase the statement that “language expresses cultural reality” into “the use of the names of biblical figures expresses religious reality” (Kramsch 1998, 3).

3. Biblical characters in ship names

In this paper we use theological literature as well as onomastic literature. That’s why first of all we should determine the main terms. On the one hand, ship names belong to the category of proper names, that is “linguistic expression that uniquely identifies a person, a group of persons, a place, an animal or an object” (ICOS 2010, 5). On the other hand, the Bible is a collection of religious works of various forms and contents and a large place in it is devoted to the legends about the biblical characters. Though it must be stressed that “Библия хранит прежде всего

Magnalia Dei – великие деяния Божии” (Bible keeps first Magnalia Dei – great deeds of God) (Florovskiy 1998b, 21).

The biblical characters’ names in our research were divided into five groups: 1) theonyms; 2) angels’ names; 3) apostles’ and prophets’ names; 4) persons. According to ICOS, a *theonym* is a “proper name of a god, a goddess, or a divinity” (ICOS, 5). According to the Bible dictionary, *angel* means ‘messenger’ (DHB, 26), *apostle* is a ‘messenger’ or ‘envoy’ (ibid., 31), and prophet is a ‘class of men of God, especially in the Old Testament dispensation, inspired to foretell future and secret events’ (ibid., 355). The category of the persons includes the rest of the biblical characters.

3.1. Theonyms

In our research this group consists of all word combinations including one of the words *God*, *Jesus Christ* and *the Holy Trinity*. *God* is “the name, the derivation of which is uncertain, we give to that eternal, infinite, perfect, and incomprehensible Being, the Creator of all things, who preserves and governs all by his almighty power and wisdom, and is the only proper object of worship” (DHB, 174). The Bible uses various definitions to characterize God. In John 1:4, we can find that “В Нем была жизнь, и жизнь была свет человеков” (There was life in Him, and life was the life of men) (BIBLIYA, 1127, my translation). As a result of our observations we found the Russian ships *Christmas-of-Christ* and *Mother-of-God*. God in the Bible is presented in three persons: as the Father, as the son of God Jesus Christ and as the Holy Spirit. Some Italian and Russian ships were called *The Holy Trinity*.

Naming ships in honor of *God*, *Jesus Christ* and *the Holy Trinity* boded well as sailors hoped for protection from God, Christ and the Holy Spirit.

3.2. Angel names

According to the Bible context, angels were created by God, they serve God, pass on his will to people and fight against His enemies. From the *Bible* we find out that there are guardian angels not only for individuals, but also for peoples and countries. People knew of angels’ existence since the time of the Old Testament. For example, Patriarch Jacob in Gen. 48:16 talked about “the Angel who had delivered me from all harm” (BIBLIYA, 51). Another example proves the existence of the guardian angels for any countries: in Deut. 32:8 we can read “Когда Всевышний давал уделы народам и расселял сынов человеческих, тогда поставил пределы народов по числу сынов Израилевых” (When the Most High gave inheritance to the nations and settled the sons of men, then he set up the boundaries of the nations according to the number of sons of Israel) (BIBLIYA, 202).

The Archangel is the supreme angel. In the Bible there are *Archangel Michael* (his name means ‘who is like God’), *Archangel Gabriel* (his name means ‘God is my

strength'), *Archangel Raphael* (his name means 'God heals'), *Archangel Uriel* (his name means 'God is my light'), *Archangel Selaphiel* (his name means 'the prayer of God'), *Archangel Jeremil* (his name means 'eminence to God'). In our research it was observed that *Archangel Michael* was found in analyzed ship names and it can be assumed that they have signs of a cross-cultural universal. *Archangel Michael* is an archangel in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, and Lutheran traditions, he is called "Saint Michael the Archangel" and "Saint Michael." We found out that *Archangel Michael* was a common name for ships in different cultures because he is known for exceptional strength to protect people. Christians think that God often sends Archangel Michael to help people who face time of troubles.

Interestingly, there were Russian ship named in honour of Archangel Barachiel, Archangel Uriel, Archangel Yehudiel, Archangel Selaphiel. The names of *Archangel Yehudiel* and *Archangel Barachiel* are not in the Bible, *Archangel Yehudiel* means 'laudation of God' and *Archangel Barachiel* means 'the blessing of God'.

Therefore, the domination of the Christian ideology in the European countries resulted in certain way of ships naming and led to the advancement of Christianity in the world. Such ship names had a symbolic function, since they were attributes of ships from Christian countries.

3.3. The apostles' and prophets' names

The apostles are the chosen disciples of Jesus Christ who have heard His sermons and witnessed His miracles or His death on the cross. Besides, other seventy disciples are called apostles, although they were not direct witnesses of the life of Jesus Christ. When reading the Bible as our guide we can come to the conclusion that apostles and prophets were walking from one place to another in order to give the word of God to people of different nationalities and from different countries. Here we can trace the similarities between ships sailing and prophets walking and make a guess that due to this similarity ships were called in honour of Apostles or Prophets.

We found out that analyzed countries chose different Apostles names for the ships and we can explain it by the different cultural and historical traditions. For example, Apostle Andrew was worshiped in Russia because people believed that he brought Christianity to this country. The Italian ship *Apostle Stephen* was named after "the Christian martyr, Acts 6:5" (Potts 1922, 231). There were the Russian ships named *Apostle Peter* and *Apostle Paul* and the British ship *Apostle Thomas*. Typically, ship names might include the word *Saint* before the name of the Apostle but it wasn't always the case. As Grinëv (2015, 203) noted, "the names of ships are often given in abbreviated form, when the word *Svyatoi* (*Sn*), 'Saint', is omitted". It must be mentioned that the name of *Maria Magdalene* was observed in Italian and Russian ships of the 18th and 19th centuries. Maria Magdalene was "foremost among the

honorable women of substance who ministered unto Christ and his disciples, Matt. 28: 1-10” (DHB, 276).

Let’s dwell on the personality of the prophets. In ancient Judea, the prophets constituted a special social group. In the Old Testament, prophets are portrayed as preachers who announced the will of God, His warnings and decisions. The prophets often came into conflict with the ruling power. In our research we found out the Russian ships *Ezekiel* and *Elijah*, and Italian ship *John the Baptist*. The name Ezekiel means ‘God Strengthens’, he was “a prophet from the sacerdotal race” (ibid., 149). In Judaism and Christianity, Ezekiel is viewed as the author of the Book of Ezekiel, which reveals prophecies regarding the destruction of Jerusalem, the restoration of the land of Israel, and “the return and restoration of the people of God” (ibid., 149). The prophet Elijah was one of the most outstanding prophets and he was famous for “peculiar moral grandeur” (ibid., 135). The cult of Saint Elijah was widely present especially in Russian ships naming. John the Baptist was mentioned in the four Gospels and he is honoured in many Christian traditions. It must be kept in mind that “Christ calls him greater than any prophet” (ibid., 232).

The names of apostles and prophets used in ship names, having penetrated much deeper in the consciousness of the people of the 18th and 19th centuries, helped creating the Christian worldview and served as a password between Christian states. Besides, these names fulfilled in some way an educational function, informing the whole world about outstanding figures in Christianity.

3.4. Biblical persons

Biblical persons are the most numerous group of the biblical characters; among them are the diviners, the sapient, the patriarches, etc. In the Orthodox literature, there is an opinion that Greek and Slavic Bibles consist of four groups of books: statutory, historical, edificatory and prophetic (Episkop Varnava 1998, 139-141). The typical edificatory works are the *Psalms* and the *Proverbs of Solomon*, that collected many sayings of allegorical content. In our research such ship names as the one of the British ship *David*, the Italian ship *Asaph*, the Russian ship *King Solomon* were found. According to the dictionary, *Asaph* “is prefixed to twelve Psalms” (DHB, 232). King David, along with the Old Testament prophets, occupies one of the central places in theology. It can be maintained that these names were chosen for ships with the purpose of protecting the shipping crew during navigation.

When imposing a matrix of situation on the means of naming a ship we can observe features of the biblical person that are invested in the “fortune of the ship”. For example, *Ruth* is characterized as “looking upon with delight, satisfied, beauty” (Potts 1922, 206). According to the Bible, the characterization of Ruth as a modest, hard-working and meek woman has mediated associative connection with a biblical pretext (Ruth, collecting ears of corn) (BIBLIYA, 254-255). Some persons are used

only in ship names of a certain country, for instance, British *Adam*, *Samaritan's Hope*, Italian *Joseph*, Russian *Titus*.

Therefore, for 18th and 19th centuries people from different countries, the biblical persons ship names helped to stay in the same cultural and educational circle, based on the Bible principles and laws.

4. Conclusions

The ship names with biblical characters are understandable only for those who live in accordance with the Christian doctrine. Along with similar names in literature, art and philosophy, they made up a significant part of the political ideology of the country. The argument presented above can be summarized as follows. Firstly, ship names with biblical characters reveal not only linguistic but also cultural information adding specific meaning to ship names that may cause associations with certain historical facts, historical persons and even preachments. Secondly, such biblical characters in ship names could be identified as markers of Christian civilization: the functions of the biblical characters in ship names are broader than just singling someone out and could be identified as informational, symbolic, cultural and historic signs. Thirdly, spreading them had a profound impact on the development of religious culture among many people.

Arguably, certain gaps in the biblical onomastics might have been addressed in our research. Comparing biblical characters and the presence of other names important for Christians in ship names in different countries in diachronic aspect could have an interdisciplinary perspective and will be continued in our future research.

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