Natural-geographic objects in the New Testament

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Abstract. The article was written in order to find natural-geographic objects in the New Testament of the Bible. Out of 27 books of the New Testament, only 9 books mention particular names of natural-geographic objects. The highest number and variety is in the Acts of the Apostles, where the author mentions 22 particular objects. Natural-geographic objects are also mentioned in the following books of the New Testament: the Gospel of Matthew (11 objects), the Gospel of Mark (9), the Gospel of Luke (7), the Epistle to the Galatians (2), the Epistle to Titus (1), the Epistle to the Hebrews (1); and also in the Book of Revelation (1). In the analysis of the texts of the New Testament, we used 4 types of criteria for distinguishing natural-geographic objects, finding 21 individual names, mentioned in the New Testament texts 62 times overall. At the same time, 9 of them are mentioned in the New Testament more than once. Most often, the names of the following objects are mentioned – the Mount of Olives (11 times), the Jordan River (10 times), the Sea of Galilee (Lake Tiberias, Kinneret or Kinnereth) (7 times), the Island of Cyprus (6 times); and Island of Crete, Mount Sinai, Golgotha Hill (Calvary) – 4 times each. Other names occur twice (2 objects) and only once (12 toponyms). The article distinguishes 4 types of natural-geographic objects: 1) aquatic objects; 2) peninsulas, capes, islands; 3) forms of terrain; 4) other. According to number of mentions, quantitative prevalence is seen for aquatic objects, the names of which are presented in the text 22 times, but their variety is lower (6 concrete names in total) compared with the second group – islands, which constitutes 10 concrete names, but the total number of mentions is lower. Most often, the New Testament mentions the Mount of Olives – a height spanning from the north to the south opposite the eastern wall of the Old City of Jerusalem, left of the Kidron Valley and which has three main peaks: Mount Scopus (826 m above sea level); the Mount of Olives (814 m); and the Mount of Temptation (816 m). The article presents 2 tables and 2 maps. The article is relevant both for scientists and readers of the Bible.

Key words: Bible, New Testament, natural-geographic objects, forms of terrain.

Природно-географічні об’єкти у Новому Завіті Біблії

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Анотація. Статтю написано з метою виявити природно-географічні об’єкти на сторінках Нового Завіту Біблії. З-поміж 27 книг Нового Завіту лише у 9 згадано конкретні назви природно-географічних об’єктів. Найбільша за кількістю наповнюваність та і за різноманітністю цих назв – це книга Дії святих апостолів, в якій автор аж 22 рази використовує певні об’єкти. Природно-географічні об’єкти записані ще в таких новозавітних книгах: Євангелія від Матвія (11 об’єктів), Євангелія від Луки (9), Євангелія від Івана (8), Святої книжки від Луки (7), Послання апостола Павла до Галатів (2), Послання апостола Павла до Тита (1), Послання до єврейв (1); а також у книзі Об’явлення Івана Богослова (1). При читанні текстів Нового Завіту Біблії використано 4 типи критеріїв для виявлення природно-географічних об’єктів. Згідно із цими критеріями у Новому Завіті Біблії нараховано 21 окрему конкретну назву природно-географічних об’єктів, які загалом 62 рази згадуються у новозавітних текстах. При цьому 9 із них зустрічаються у Новому Завіті більше ніж 1 раз. Найчастіше згадуваний конкретні назви таких об’єктів – Олівна гора (11 разів), річка Йордан (10 разів), Тіверіядське (Галілейське, Генісаретське) море (озеро) (7 разів), остриг Кіпр (6 разів); та остриг Крит, гора Сінай, гірське Голова (Череповище) – по 4 рази. Інші назви зустрічаються двічі (2 об’єкти) та всього один раз (12 топонімів). У статті було виіділено 4 типи природно-географічних об’єктів: 1) водні об’єкти; 2) півостри, висоти, остриги; 3) форми рельєфу; 4) інші. За згадуваністю у тексті Нового Завіту кількість перевагу мають водні об’єкти, назви яких 22 рази згадано. Найчастіше згадується Олівна гора – гірський масив на північному березі Єрусалима, який розташований на відстані 826 м від гори Сінай на східному березі старого міста Єрусалима. Вона має три основні вершини: гора Скопус (826 м над рівнем моря); гора Олівна (814 м); гора Спокус (816 м). Стаття буде актуальною як для науковців так і для усіх читачів Біблії.

Ключові слова: Біблія, Новий Завіт, природно-географічні об’єкти, водні об’єкти, форми рельєфу.
Relevance of the topic

In Ukraine, studies in the sphere of geography of religion have begun during its independence. A subsystem of religious geography is biblical geography, development of which leads in turn to expansion of geography of culture in general. Therefore, scientifically substantiated knowledge about the basics of Christianity, the Bible, are relevant. Among Ukrainian geographers, studies in religious geography were performed by the following authors: Lyubiceva O. O. (1998), Kuchabskyi O. H. (2000), Kluchko L. V. (2010), Rovenchak I. I. (2008), Tymchuk O. I. (2017), Patiychuk V. O. (1998), Shabliy O. I. (1994), Shevchuk L. T. (1999) and others. Scientific explorations of biblical geography are practically absent. The objective of the article was determining natural-geographic objects on pages of the New Testament of the Bible. Other important tasks were classification of those objects according to the books of the New Testament, their typologization and characterization of the most mentioned object (Mount of Olives).

Materials and methods

At least 3 main stages of development of biblical geography are distinguished: topographic (related to the abovementioned names E. Robinson and E. Smith, who pioneered biblical cartography); archeological (School of W. F. Albright) and «territorial» (School of A. Alt and M. Noth). In the process of development of biblical geography, another direction branched off and has been established – composing and publishing biblical atlases. Modern atlases usually present data as historic maps with indicated biblical toponyms, providing brief information about them and data on nature. The atlases also contain schemes, plans, photographs, data about changes in identification of places. The majority of atlases have been published in the US, European countries and Israel. Well-known and popular foreign editions of biblical atlases include: «New Bible Atlas» by J. Bimson, J. Kane, J. Paterson, D. Wiseman, Oxford Bible Atlas; Atlases by Erdmann, Baker, and Hammond, Rogerson’s Atlas, Atlases of Zondervan (Atlas of the Bible), internet-edition (Fig. 1). Editions of Atlases of biblical geography which were published in Ukrainian are «Bible Atlas», published in 1994, translated into Ukrainian and edited by Z. O. Tereshkova and S. Khoroshko, and «Atlas of Bible History», published in 2010 by Kartohrafia Publishing House, translated by Mykola Klymchuk and Taras Tsymbala from the English edition «The Collins Atlas of Bible History».

The data provided in atlases were added to the material base of the study. When determining geographic objects in the translation of the New Testament by Ivan Ohienko, we additionally used other Ukrainian translations of the Scripture, encyclopedias and atlases to confirm or specify information about those objects in order to avoid errors in this study.

Results and their analysis

The Bible is commonly known as the most popular book among readers. The Bible consists of the Old and New Testaments. The object of the study was the second part of the Scripture – the New Testament, which is smaller (about 25–30 percent of the text) in the structure of the Holy Book; though it has an essential role content-wise, because it describes the lives of Jesus Christ, apostles, etc. In our study, we used the translation by Ivan Ohienko, the commonest Ukrainian translation of the Bible.

When reading and analyzing the text, we used certain criteria of distinguishing natural-geographic objects:

1) We focused exclusively on natural-geographic names, while names of territories, areas, which have socio-regional (countries, provinces, etc) content were not taken into account (for example, country of the Gadarenes, Galilee, Samaria);

2) general names that had not been specified, the particular content of which is doubtful (that means that sometimes different concrete names are appropriate, but the author gives none), were also not taken into account. i.e. we took into account only names of natural-geographical objects (the Jordan River, the Mount of Olives and others; whereas places simply mentioned as mountains, rivers or lakes were not counted) that had been specified by authors (evangelists, apostles);

3) geographic objects in quotations from prophets, parables, which may contain other meaning of that object (spiritual, symbolic), were not taken into account;

4) toponyms that are not particularly essential in the New Testament texts as natural-geographic (referring to the context of the New Testament and historical data), and may be identified as socio-geographic, were not taken into account (for example, Arabia – more of a political-geographic unit during the times of the New Testament, former Persian province Arabia).

Only 9 of 27 books of the New Testament mention concrete names of natural-geographic objects (Table 1). Most saturated and diverse book according to place names is the Acts of the Apostles, where the author mentions particular objects 22 times. The largest amount of toponyms is in the Gospels: the Gospel of Matthew (11 objects), the Gospel of Mark (9), the Gospel of John (8), the Gospel of Luke (7). Natural-geographic objects are also mentioned in the following New Testament books: in only three of fourteen epistles of Paul the Apostle: the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galathiains (2 objects), the Epistle of Paul to Titus (1 objects), the Epistle to the Hebrews (1); and also the book of Revelations (1 object).
Fig. 1. Palestine in Biblical Times (Physical map of the Holy Land)
Also, we took into account the fact that there is a difference between river and mountain, similarly to island having absolutely other geographic features than lake has. Therefore, in order to avoid an absolute list of rivers, lakes and deserts or peninsulas, we decided to distinguish types of objects of natural-geographical content and classify objects that are similar according to their characteristics to a certain type. Thus, we distinguished 4 types of natural geographic objects: 1) aquatic objects; 2) peninsulas, capes, islands; 3) forms of terrain; 4) other (Table 2).

According to the abovementioned criteria, the New Testament of the Bible has 62 mentions of particular natural geographic objects. Most of them are located in the territory of Palestine (Fig. 1). Out of them, only 21 concrete names of natural geographic were distinguished, 9 of them occur in the New Testament texts more than once (see Table 2). Most often, names of the following objects are mentioned – the Mount of Olives (11 times), the Jordan River (10 times), the Sea of Galilee (Lake Tiberias, Kinneret or Kinnereth) (7 times), the Island of Cyprus (6 times); and Island of Crete, Mount Sinai, Golgotha Hill (Calvary) – 4 times each. Other names occur twice (2 objects) or only once (12 toponyms).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book of the New Testament</th>
<th>Number of mentions</th>
<th>Number of objects (numbers in parentheses indicate number of times they occur in those books)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gospel of Matthew</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>the Jordan River (3), the Mount of Olives (3), the Sea of Galilee (Lake) (2), the Judaean desert (1), Golgotha Hill (1), Gethsemane (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gospel of Mark</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>the Jordan River (3), the Mount of Olives (2), the Sea of Galilee (Lake) (2), Golgotha Hill (Calvary) (1), Gethsemane (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gospel of Luke</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>The Mount of Olives (4), the Jordan River (1), the Sea of Galilee (Lake) (1), Golgotha Hill (Calvary) (1),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gospel of John</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>the Jordan River (3), the Tiberias Sea (the Sea of Galilee) (2), The Mount of Olives (1), Golgotha Hill (Calvary) (1), the brook Kidron (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Acts of the Apostles</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Island of Cyprus (6), Island of Crete (3), Mount Sinai (2), the Red Sea (1), the Adriatic Sea (1), Gulf of Sirte (1), the Mount of Olives (1), Samothrace island (1), Chios island (1), Samos island (1), Kos island (1), Rhodes island (1), Cauda island (1), Melita island (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistles of the Apostle Paul</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mount Sinai (2), the Red Sea (1), Crete (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book of Revelation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Patmos island (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The New Testament mentions 6 aquatic objects (Table 2). In total, there are 22 mentions of those toponyms in the New Testament texts. Also, 10 islands are mentioned 18 times in the New Testament. Most of those islands are islands of today’s Greece (Crete, Rhodes, Chios, Samos, Kos, Patmos, Cauda, Samothrace), most currently having names identical to their names two thousand years ago. Three objects were identified to forms of terrain – two mountains (Mount of Olives and Mount Sinai) and one large hill (Golgotha). Texts of the New Testament mention their names 19 times.

It should be noted that elaboration is needed for those toponyms, identification of which faces certain difficulties, i.e. imposes doubts whether it is an actual toponym and what are their geographic locations. One of them is Sirte, which is considered a name of two bays, i.e. a part of a gulf, in the Mediterranean Sea and North African coast (territory of current Libya): Lesser Syrtis is in the Gulf of Gabes, and the Great Sirte – in the Gulf of Sidra. During the journey of Paul to Rome, sailors were afraid that their ship would be wind-driven to the Great Sirte, where the vessel would be stranded (Acts, 27:17) (Bibliynaya entsyklopediya Brokhauza).

Each of those natural-geographic objects (Table 2) is interesting regarding different aspects: geographic characteristic, biblical context in which it is described, its historical and current meanings, etc. We chose an object, the name of which appears in the New Testament texts most often (11 times – the Mount of Olives) and attempted to provide its short complex characteristic, referring to the New Testament texts.

The Mount of Olives (Mount Olivet, Eleona) is an elevation spanning from the north to the south opposite the eastern wall of the Old City of Jerusalem, left of the Kidron Valley. Since the old times, olives have been planted on it, and that is how the name originated.
Mount of Olives is located east of the water-divide line that runs within the borders of the city of Jerusalem, though the mountain is for the most part located higher than the city. This unique circumstance is a result of the main current Nahal Qidron taking over the Wadi al Hitam current (the Valley of Josaphat). If not for this circumstance, they would have belonged to the Nahal Sorek water reservoir, thus leaving the Mount of Olives on the water divide. Despite its location east of the water divide, the western slope of Mount of Olives is under the climatic influence of the Mediterranean Sea. This reality and the fact that it is a topographic border between Jerusalem and the Judaean Desert is obviously a reason that, though this mountain is small, it continues to be very important in the development of Jerusalem. It protects the city from deleterious effects of winds from the desert, and therefore this mount is highly regarded by the city residents (Sefi Ben Yosef). Near the base of the Mount of Olives, on the western slope above the Kidron, there is a possible location of Gethsemane (Mount of Olives).

Mount of Olives has three main peaks: Mount Scopus (826 m above sea level); Mount of Olives (814 m); Mount of Temptation (816 m) (Fig. 2).

We should note the contexts in which the Mount of Olives is mentioned in the New Testament texts of the Bible.

The first verse in Chapter 11 of the Gospel of Mark (shortened: Mk. 11:1) goes as follows: «As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples» [Hereinafter cited from the New International Version – Translator’s note]. That means that the route of Jesus came across the Mount of Olive. It is also a beautiful site that was a sightseeing platform for Jerusalem Temple and the city itself: «As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately» (the Gospel of Mark, 13:3) and place where Jesus preached apocalyptically: the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 24, the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 13, the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 21).

There is a statement that the territory of the mountain was the place of rest for those who sought relief from heat in overcrowded city streets, and also a place of Jesus’ personal prayer to the Heavenly Father. This is confirmed by the Bible: «Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives» (the Gospel of Luke, 21:37), «Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him.» (the Gospel of Luke, 22:39). That means, Jesus was often on this mountain with his disciples, including for purposes of rest and praying (Gospel of Luke, 6:12).

The Mount of Olives is also the place of the Ascension of Jesus Christ: «Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city» (the Acts of the Apostles, 1:12) (Bibliya, 2009).

Table 2. Typization of natural-geographical objects of the New Testament

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of objects</th>
<th>Number of mentions</th>
<th>Names of objects (numbers in parentheses indicate number of times they occur on pages of the New Testament)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aquatic objects</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Tiberias (other names - Sea of Galilee, Kinneret or Kinnereth) Sea (lake) (7), the Red Sea (2), the Adriatic Sea (1), Gulf of Sirte (1), the Jordan River (10), the Kidron river (1),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islands</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Island of Cyprus (6), Island of Crete (4), Samothrace island (1), Chios island (1), Samos island (1),Kos island (1), Rhodes island (1), Cauda island (1),Melita island (1) Patmos island (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forms of terrain</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Mount of Olives (11), Mount Sinai (4), Golgotha Hill (Calvary) (4),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Gethsemane garden (2), the Judaean desert (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Fig. 2. Mount of Olives at the time of the New Testament to the east of Old Jerusalem
Historical records indicate that highest tactical significance of the Mount of Olives was demonstrated during the Roman Siege of Jerusalem in 70 CE. For this reason, the Romans called the northern extension of the range «lookout», or Scopus. According to Flavius Josephus (The Jewish War 5.2.2), it gave «clear view over the great temple». The legions had a large camp on the mountain, which, according to Flavius in this context, lay on the eastern side of the city, and was separated from it by a deep valley, the so-called the Valley of Josaphat, across which the brook Kidron runs, surrounding the city by a small curve, oriented eastward. Before the turn, this current runs down a long valley into the Dead Sea.

Tracing accurate identification of certain elements of Mount of Olives or places in the territory of the mountain, where certain events took place, is a very complicated and practically impossible task. The only things that are concrete are location of the hill itself and location of Bethany, southeast of the mountain. However, there are three variants of the Palm Sunday itinerary along the slope, three Gethsemane gardens, two or three places of the Ascension, two roads to Jericho, etc (Mount of Olives).

On the west and south slopes of the southern margin of Mount of Olives, there is an ancient Jewish cemetery, being buried in which is considered a great honor. Currently, there are no less than 150, 000 graves on the mountain, some of which are attributed to Old Testament characters. On tombstones, there occur well-known names: Absalom – son of King David, politician and Nobel Prize winner Menachem Begin, Chief Rabbi of Israel Abraham Isaac Kook.

On the western and southern parts of the mountain, other than graves, there is Gethsemane (western slope of the mountain), the Church of All Nations and other Christian temples, notable places. In the cave with burial niches, there is a burial site of prophets. There is the campus of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem on the northern height and the Russian Ascension Monastery on the southern height (Mount of Olives). The Mount of Olives remains an attractive touristic center, first of all for many Christians from various corners of the planet.

**Conclusions**

Thus, this paper should promote development of the theory of geography of culture and its important subsystem of biblical geography. Since there are practically no researches by Ukrainian geographers in the sphere of biblical geography, this article is pioneering. In the future, we are looking forward to cooperation and exchange of experience in this sphere with representatives of spiritual educational institutions of Ukraine or geographic scientific schools in other countries. The conducted research into distinguishing geographic objects and their typologization helps raise awareness of the saturation of the New Testament texts with natural-geographic objects, both by number and variety. This allows us to understand that those objects are mentioned in the New Testament quite a high number of times. Attribution of events to particular names of geographic objects helps reveal the content of the event, and at the same time, confirms credibility of this event, because names of actually existing locations is given. Also, this research allows every Christian, representative of other Abrahamic religions and scientist who is interested in religions to improve and systematize his or her knowledge in the sphere of Bible Studies.

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