

**BIBLICAL PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS AS AN OBJECT OF CONTEMPORARY
RUSSIAN PHRASEOGRAPHY**

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Abstract: This article examines biblical phraseological units as a significant object of contemporary Russian phraseography. The study analyzes the lexicographic representation of biblical idioms in modern Russian phraseological dictionaries, focusing on the evolution of descriptive strategies, etymological commentary, and cultural interpretation. Particular attention is paid to the increasing integration of linguistic, historical, and encyclopedic information within dictionary entries. By comparing general phraseological dictionaries, specialized biblical reference works, and linguocultural lexicographic projects, the article demonstrates a clear tendency toward multidimensional interpretation of biblical phraseology. The findings show that modern Russian phraseography reflects a shift from purely semantic description to culturally oriented and historically grounded lexicographic modeling. Biblical phraseological units are treated not merely as lexicalized idioms but as carriers of religious, ethical, and cultural memory.

Keywords: phraseology, biblical idiom, Russian phraseography, lexicography, cultural commentary, etymology.

1. Introduction

Biblical phraseological units occupy a distinctive position in the Russian linguistic and cultural tradition. Their semantic durability, stylistic versatility, and symbolic density make them a core component of the Russian phraseological system. As noted by S. G. Shulezhkova, the Bible has profoundly influenced the linguistic consciousness of Christian peoples, enriching their languages with idioms, aphorisms, and figurative expressions capable of characterizing virtually every aspect of human experience[1]

In Russian, biblical phraseology functions simultaneously as a linguistic phenomenon and as a cultural-historical archive. These units encode ethical values, mythological imagery, and theological narratives. Consequently, they have long attracted the attention of lexicographers. However, contemporary Russian phraseography demonstrates qualitative changes in the treatment of biblical idioms, reflecting broader shifts in linguistic methodology and cultural awareness.

The object of this study is biblical phraseological units in Russian.
The subject is their representation in contemporary Russian phraseographic practice.

The aim is to analyze the lexicographic strategies used in modern dictionaries when describing biblical idioms and to identify trends in their interpretation and cultural contextualization.[4]

The central hypothesis is that contemporary Russian phraseography increasingly treats biblical idioms as culturally embedded semiotic units rather than merely fixed expressions with stable meanings.

2. Literature Review

Biblical phraseological units (often referred to as “bibleisms”) represent idiomatic expressions whose origin can be traced to the Old or New Testament. Their integration into Russian occurred primarily through Church Slavonic mediation and later through literary adaptation.

Scholars such as V. M. Mokienko and A. V. Grigoriev have emphasized that biblical phraseology constitutes a stable yet dynamic segment of the Russian idiomatic system. It combines archaism with semantic renewal, preserving traditional meanings while acquiring contemporary connotations.[]

Unlike purely colloquial idioms, biblical phraseologisms frequently retain elevated stylistic coloring. At the same time, many have undergone semantic neutralization and are widely used in journalistic and everyday contexts.

Russian phraseography has evolved from descriptive lexicography focused on meaning explanation to multidimensional projects integrating etymology, stylistics, and cultural commentary. The lexicographic works of A. I. Molotkov (1967) represent an earlier stage characterized by concise definitions and brief etymological notes.[5]

Later projects, including the *Dictionary of Russian Phraseology* edited by Mokienko (2001), demonstrate increased attention to historical sources and bibliographic references. Similarly, V. N. Teliya’s *Big Phraseological Dictionary of the Russian Language* (2006) incorporates extensive linguocultural commentary, marking a significant shift toward interpretive lexicography.

The emergence of specialized dictionaries devoted exclusively to biblical phraseology reflects recognition of the unique cultural status of these units. Works by Mokienko (2007) and Granovskaya (2003) exemplify this trend, offering detailed etymological explanations and contextual illustrations.[6]

This shift corresponds to broader cultural processes of religious revival and re-evaluation of historical heritage in post-Soviet Russia.

3. Methodology

The study employs a comparative lexicographic analysis of contemporary Russian phraseological dictionaries, including:

- *Phraseological Dictionary of the Russian Language* (Molotkov, 1967)
- *Big Dictionary of Russian Winged Words* (Berkov, Mokienko, & Shulezhkova, 2000)
- *Dictionary of Russian Phraseology* (Birikh, Mokienko, & Stepanova, 2001)
- *Big Phraseological Dictionary of the Russian Language* (Teliya, 2006)
- *Phraseological Dictionary of Old Church Slavonic* (Shulezhkova, 2011)

The analysis focuses on:

1. Structure of dictionary entries;
2. Etymological depth;
3. Presence of biblical textual references;
4. Cultural and theological commentary;
5. Stylistic and pragmatic labeling.

Selected entries (e.g., *forbidden fruit*, *Egyptian darkness*, *to wipe off the face of the earth*, *to pass through fire and water*) were examined across multiple lexicographic sources.

4. Results

Early general dictionaries provide minimal biblical references. For example, the entry *forbidden fruit* in Molotkov's dictionary includes only a brief mention of the Genesis narrative. In contrast, later dictionaries specify book names and chapter references.

The *Big Dictionary of Winged Words* includes precise citations such as Exodus or the Book of Daniel, marking a movement toward scholarly accuracy.

The idiom *to be in seventh heaven* illustrates lexicographic pluralism. The historical-etymological dictionary edited by Mokienko presents four competing interpretations, referencing Aristotle's cosmology, biblical cosmography, Islamic tradition, and Talmudic sources².

This approach reflects contemporary lexicographic transparency: rather than imposing a single authoritative origin, dictionaries acknowledge interpretative diversity.

The most advanced lexicographic model appears in Teliya's dictionary. Each entry includes:

1. Semantic interpretation;
2. Usage illustration;
3. Cultural commentary.

For instance, the idiom *to wipe off the face of the earth* is contextualized within Old Testament theology of divine punishment. The entry cites 3 Kings 9:7 and integrates moral commentary regarding divine justice³.

This structure transforms the dictionary into a cultural encyclopedia rather than a purely linguistic reference.

The *Phraseological Dictionary of Old Church Slavonic* expands lexicographic boundaries by incorporating historical, religious, and socio-cultural information. Entries provide background on events, ritual practices, and theological doctrines.

The idiom *to pass through fire and water* is traced to Psalm 65:12 and linked to broader symbolic traditions of purification and trial.

Such entries demonstrate integration of language, religion, and culture.

School dictionaries include simplified biblical references without extensive commentary. Their function is pedagogical: to enhance students' linguistic competence while introducing cultural heritage.

The entry *colossus on clay feet* provides general reference to Nebuchadnezzar's dream without detailed theological analysis.

5. Discussion

The results confirm that biblical phraseological units remain a central object of Russian phraseography due to their linguistic, cultural, and ethical significance. However, contemporary lexicographic practice reveals qualitative transformation in their treatment.

First, there is a clear shift from minimal semantic glossing toward multidimensional description. Earlier dictionaries prioritized definitional brevity; modern works emphasize historical and theological depth. This change reflects broader methodological developments in linguistics, particularly the rise of linguocultural studies.[1]

Second, biblical phraseology is increasingly presented as part of collective cultural memory. Dictionary entries do not merely explain meaning; they reconstruct narrative context and symbolic background. This aligns with the view that phraseological units preserve "condensed texts" within language.

Third, the inclusion of precise scriptural citations enhances academic credibility and intertextual transparency. Such references allow users to verify biblical origins and contextual nuances.

Fourth, the multiplicity of etymological hypotheses demonstrates a commitment to scholarly pluralism. Rather than simplifying origin narratives, modern phraseography acknowledges complexity and historical layering.[2]

Finally, the integration of encyclopedic material indicates expansion of lexicographic boundaries. Dictionaries now function as hybrid resources combining linguistic analysis with cultural anthropology and theology.

Thus, biblical phraseological units are conceptualized not only as idioms but as semiotic artifacts embedded in religious discourse.

6. Conclusion

Biblical phraseological units constitute a vital component of the Russian phraseological system and remain a consistent focus of contemporary phraseography. Their representation in modern dictionaries reflects significant methodological evolution.

Contemporary Russian phraseography demonstrates a trend toward:

- detailed etymological documentation;
- precise scriptural referencing;
- cultural and theological commentary;
- acknowledgment of interpretative plurality;
- integration of encyclopedic information.

This development indicates movement from descriptive lexicography toward interpretive and culturally oriented phraseography. Biblical idioms are treated as carriers of ethical values, historical memory, and symbolic models embedded within language.[3]

The study confirms that modern Russian phraseography does not merely record biblical phraseological units but actively reconstructs their cultural semantics. As a result, dictionaries serve not only as linguistic tools but as mediators of cultural continuity.

Future research may explore comparative phraseographic traditions in other Slavic languages or analyze digital lexicographic resources.

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