

RELIGIOUS ANTHROPONYMS IN RUSSIAN AND UZBEK NAMING SYSTEMS

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ABSTRACT

This article examines religious anthroponyms in Russian and Uzbek as a historically layered segment of the personal naming system where confession, cultural memory, and language contact converge. The study is based on a contrastive qualitative analysis of Russian Orthodox, biblical, saint based, and dual medieval names, together with Uzbek Islamic, theophoric, calendrical, and honorific personal names. The material shows that Russian naming developed through the long interaction of pre Christian Slavic and canonical Christian forms, whereas Uzbek naming preserved a more visibly productive system of Islamic and older theonymic elements. The comparison reveals asymmetry in transparency. In Russian, the religious source is often canonically inherited but semantically opaque in present usage, while in Uzbek the religious marker frequently remains morphologically salient through components such as *alloh*, *din*, *islom*, *xudo*, and *tangri*. The article argues that religious anthroponyms in the two traditions perform not only identificatory but also mnemonic, symbolic, and status marking functions, and that their comparative study clarifies how naming systems encode conversion, adaptation, and continuity.

Keywords. Religious anthroponyms, Russian anthroponymy, Uzbek anthroponymy, onomastics, linguistic identity, Islamization, Christianization, personal names, cultural memory.

INTRODUCTION

Personal naming never remains a purely technical act, because the chosen form condenses ancestry, symbolic preference, and social expectation into a compact sign that then circulates through family memory and public usage. E. Matthews writes that "Personal names are a statement of identity". [8] That premise is crucial here. R.M. Hogg, N.F. Blake, S. Romaine, R. Lass formulates the broader linguistic point with unusual precision when she notes that "Personal names, although less transparently motivated, likewise ultimately derive from elements of common language". [5]

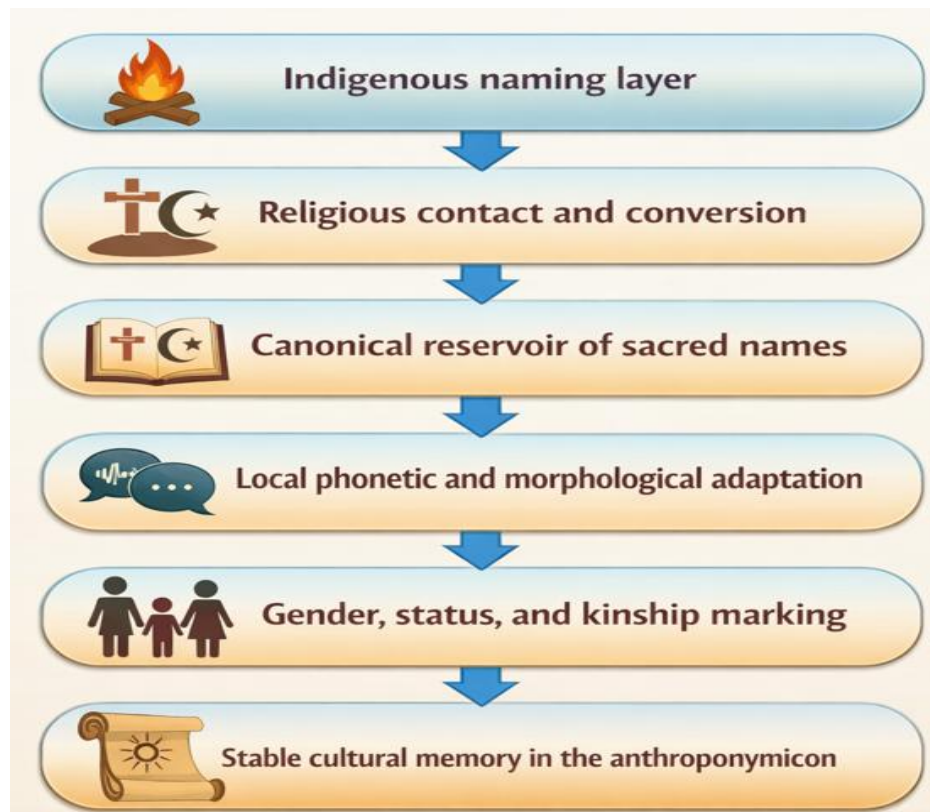
For Russian and Uzbek, this general principle acquires a specifically religious shape. The two traditions were formed through different confessional histories, different channels of borrowing, and different relations between canonical form and everyday speech. In the Russian area, Christianization linked naming to the Orthodox calendar and to the cult of saints. In the Uzbek area, Islamization strengthened Arabic and Persian layers and simultaneously reinterpreted older Turkic and theonymic formations through new religious semantics. I.K.Kozieva states that “It has been proven that religion is one of the components of national culture”. [6] The social dimension is equally important. B.Güzelderen, Ü.Y.Yeşildal, and F.Düzgün observe that “Names often serve as initial indicators of individuals’ cultural identities and beliefs”. [4] M.Obojska, from a socio onomastic angle, sharpens the claim even further. She writes that “Names are not neutral and, in different contexts, may index a variety of personal properties”. [10]

Russian material makes visible a long phase of coexistence between church names and older native forms rather than an immediate replacement of one system by another. E.V.Budennaya, K.I.Gurevich, A.A.Kalinin, and D.V.Gerasimov define the problem succinctly when they write that “The study considers several cases of the variation of Christian and original Slavic names of persons in Medieval Rus”. [2] A.Litvina and F.Uspenskij describe the princely pattern even more concretely, noting that “the dominant model of Russian princely naming practice at that time was to use two names”. [7]

Uzbek material, by contrast, preserves greater formal visibility of religious markers. S.A.Melibayeva remarks that “Since Islam came, Muslims’ name Muhammad is the most common for the Uzbek”. [9] In a related formulation, U.A.G‘oyibov writes that “Islamic culture had an immense influence on the formation of Uzbek names”. [3] S.A.Melibayeva also stresses the historical depth of this layer by stating that “the anthroponymy of Uzbeks is not just a system of names, but also an ethnic history of Islamization”. [9]

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study uses a qualitative contrastive design. The analytical sample includes thirty two anthroponyms and name variants drawn from peer reviewed articles, academic book chapters, and historical studies devoted to Russian and Uzbek naming, medieval Rus, and Islamic influence on Uzbek anthroponymy. The material was grouped into five clusters saint based and biblical names, dual naming, transparent theophoric formations, names with religious components such as *din* and *islom*, and hybrid forms shaped by phonetic adaptation. The procedure combined semantic analysis, morphological segmentation, and linguocultural interpretation. Russian examples were examined through the opposition between canonical and vernacular form, as in Mikhail and Mikhalko, Aleksey and Oleksey, Stefan and Stepan, as well as through medieval dual naming such as Vladimir and Basil, Boris and Roman, Gleb and David, Igor and George, and Vsevolod and Gabriel. Uzbek examples were examined through productive religious components and their semantic load, as in Muhammad, Ahmad, Mustafa, Islam, Nurislom, Shayxislom, Faxriislom, Sayidislom, Dinmuhammad, Jamoliddin, Sadrididdin, Dinnura, Xudoyberdi, Tangribardi, Xudoyor, Hayitboy, and Ro‘ziboy.



RESULTS

The first result concerns structural asymmetry. Russian religious anthroponyms are deeply shaped by Christianity, yet in many common cases the sacred source is synchronically less transparent than in Uzbek. The names Ivan, Mariia, Pavel, Nikolai, Anastasiia, Daniil, Georgii, Andrei, Roman, David, Sofiia, Vera, Nadezhda, and Liubov belong to an Orthodox and biblical horizon, but the average speaker does not always process them as morphologically transparent religious formations. Uzbek, in contrast, retains overt markers in many forms. Components such as *islom*, *din*, *alloh*, *xudo*, and *tangri* remain semantically active and immediately legible in names such as *Nurislom*, *Dinmuhammad*, *G‘aybulla*, *Shafqatulla*, *Xudoyberdi*, *Tangriberdi*, and *Xudoyor*.

A second result is the persistence of historical layering in Russian. Christianization did not eliminate earlier naming habits in one movement. Rather, it produced a prolonged coexistence of church and non church forms, especially in elite usage. That is why medieval material repeatedly shows pairings such as *Vladimir* and *Basil*, *Boris* and *Roman*, *Gleb* and *David*, *Igor* and *George*, *Vsevolod* and *Gabriel*, and later the coexistence of canonical and popular forms such as *Aleksey* and *Oleksey* or *Stefan* and *Stepan*. Such doubleness is not a marginal detail. It reveals a naming system in which dynastic legitimacy, liturgical inclusion, and everyday usage were distributed across more than one form.

The Uzbek material yields a different picture. Islamic influence appears not only in borrowed individual names but also in productive compositional models. One can observe names built around *Muhammad* and its variants, including *Muhammad*, *Muhammadali*, *Dinmuhammad*, and historical phonetic forms *Mamat*, *Mahma*, *Mahmat*, and *Mahammad*. The same productivity is visible in formations with *islom*, as in *Islam*, *Nurislom*, *Shayxislom*, *Faxriislom*, *Mardiislom*, and *Sayidiislom*, and with *din*, as in *Rahmiddin*, *Ramziddin*, *Rivojiddin*,

Jamoliddin, and Sadriddin. Even the female form Dinnura shows that an earlier male monopoly has weakened in the modern onomastic space.

The third result concerns semantic transparency and symbolic force. In Russian, transparent theophoric formations exist, yet they are less central in the mainstream modern system than saint based and biblical names. Bogdan remains the clearest example. In Uzbek, by contrast, transparent theophoricity is much more productive and historically deeper. Xudoyberdi signals gift from God. Tangriberdi preserves an older Turkic theonymic layer while remaining compatible with later religious interpretation. Xudoyor likewise links naming to divine favor. Here the name does not merely allude to religion. It lexicalizes a theological relation.

The fourth result concerns ritual and calendar memory. Russian naming is strongly linked to saints and church tradition, whereas Uzbek naming preserves not only names of prophetic or sacred origin but also forms connected with religious time. Hayitboy and Ro‘ziboy are especially revealing, since they index feast and fasting practice in the naming system itself. This mechanism differs from the Russian case, where calendrical logic is more often mediated through saint commemorations than through transparent lexical reference to ritual acts.

Type	Russian examples	Uzbek examples	Interpretation
Saint based and biblical names	Ivan, Mariia, Pavel, Nikolai, Daniil, Georgii, Andrei, Roman, David	Muhammad, Ahmad, Mustafa, Yusuf, Maryam	Canonical reservoir linked to scripture and sacred history
Dual or parallel forms	Vladimir and Basil, Boris and Roman, Gleb and David, Igor and George, Vsevolod and Gabriel	Muhammad and Mamat, Muhammad and Mahma, Muhammad and Mahmat, Muhammad and Mahamat	Religious source adapted to local use
Canonical and vernacular variation	Mikhail and Mikhalko, Aleksey and Oleksey, Stefan and Stepan, Yanka	Islam and Nurislom, Dinmuhammad, Jamoliddin, Sadriddin, Dinnura	Variation marks speech practice, intimacy, and integration
Transparent theophoric names	Bogdan	Xudoyberdi, Tangriberdi, Xudoyor, G‘aybulla, Shafqatulla	Direct lexicalized relation to the divine
Ritual and religious calendar names	Vera, Nadezhda, Liubov, Sofiia	Hayitboy, Ro‘ziboy, Shayxislom, Faxriislom, Sayidislom	Names encode confession, piety, and symbolic prestige

Religious anthroponyms in both languages are repositories of social hierarchy and group belonging. Medieval Russian princely names circulated inside dynastic and political logic, and Litvina with Uspenskij show that Christian names could also become clan names. In Uzbek, elements such as sayid, shayx, din, and islom do not merely mark religiosity. They also point to prestige, learnedness, genealogical aspiration, or symbolic proximity to sacred authority. This makes the anthroponym a compressed social text.

DISCUSSION

The contrast between the two naming systems should not be reduced to a binary opposition between Christian and Islamic repertoires. The deeper difference lies in the form of religious inscription. Russian Christian names entered largely through the liturgical and saintly canon,

then passed through phonetic domestication and long vernacular circulation. As a result, the contemporary system often contains a sacred genealogy without overt morphological marking. Uzbek Islamic names, on the other hand, preserve many transparent stems and components whose religious meaning remains recoverable even outside specialist analysis.

This divergence affects cultural memory. A Russian name such as Nikolai or Anastasiia points to a religious tradition mainly through historical knowledge, church usage, and conventional recognition. An Uzbek name such as Nurislom or Xudoyberdi tends to present its religious content on the surface of the form itself. The former model is canon based and historically opaque. The latter is morphologically expressive.

Even so, the systems converge in one essential respect. Both use religious anthroponyms to stabilize belonging. Whether the mechanism is saint based inheritance, dynastic dual naming, or transparent Islamic composition, the personal name mediates between individual biography and collective tradition. It identifies, but more than that, it positions. That is why I.J.Arboleda Guirao writes that “Names identify, not only mean”. [1]

CONCLUSION

Religious anthroponyms in Russian and Uzbek preserve the memory of conversion, canon formation, and cultural adaptation, yet they do so through different formal strategies. Russian material foregrounds coexistence, parallel naming, and the long afterlife of Christian canon within vernacular usage. Uzbek material foregrounds productive composition, overt semantic markers, and the continuing visibility of Islamic and older theonymic elements.

For that reason, the comparison is methodologically revealing. It shows that religious naming cannot be studied only as etymology, nor only as social symbolism. The anthroponym is a point where language structure, ritual authority, historical change, and identity practice meet. In Russian and Uzbek alike, the name remains a compact archive of faith and culture.

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