The Names Given to Ships
in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century England

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Only in the course of revising this conference paper for publication did I come across a reference to a published article on Middle English ships' names, O. Arngart's `English *craft* "a vessel" and some other names for vessels',[1] though, as the title suggests, he was principally concerned with generic terms for the various types of vessel, and only to a lesser extent with the names of particular ships (the final three pages). He did, however, conclude, as I hope this essay will also demonstrate, that `[ships' names] make a not inconsiderable contribution to etymology and lexicography'.

Arngart cites two other names which confirm the astonishing ante-datings that a thorough study of such neglected branches of onomastics would certainly multiply, with all the implications that would have for a proper understanding of the development of the lexicon. A ship named the *Lopside* is recorded in a Patent Roll of 1291: this is undoubtedly related to modern *lopsided*, for which the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*)'s first citation is from a work on ship-building published in 1711, and which it defines as `Orig. *Naut.* (of a ship): Disproportionately heavy on one side; unevenly balanced'.[2] The *Slodogge* of Heacham (1347) is not a *slow-* but a *slough-* or *sleuth*-dog; *OED* notes that `*slow hound* is given by Skinner (1671) as an explanation of "*Slouth* or *Sleuthound*", but is is not clear whether he knew it to be really in use';[3] but the form *slough dog* is not noted by *OED* before Pennant's *Tour of Scotland in 1772* (1774).[4] *OED* labels *slough-dog, -hound*, `Scottish and Northern', and the first element, modern *slot* `hoof-print' and *sleuth*, is the Old Norse *slóð* 'track, trail'. That the *Slodogge* should be sailing out of a port in Norfolk, an area of heavy Scandinavian settlement, is thus appropriate. Semantically, the name perhaps implies a fighting ship that seeks out and 'tracks down' enemy

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[1] *English Studies*, 25 (1943), 161–69.

[2] *Oxford English Dictionary*, edited by J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1989), s.v. *lop-sided, lopsided*.

[3] *Ibid*., s.v. *slow-hound*.   [4] *Ibid*., s.v. *slough-dog*.

vessels.

Arngart based his conclusions on a number of names which he extracted from several Close and Patent Rolls of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. I was drawn to consider this particular, and I think I may fairly say, neglected branch of onomastics, by happening upon *The Vadia Nautarum from the Wardrobe Book of William de Norwell*, published in 1983.[4] In 1338 Edward III assembled a considerable fleet of almost 350 ships from seventy-six ports for an expedition to France. This Edwardian 'Catalogue of Ships' occupies folios 144–152 of *The Wardrobe Book*, where it is entitled *Vadia Nautarum* and provides, I believe, a statistically valid sample of the names of sea-going vessels upon which to base some conclusions concerning nautical onomastics in late medieval England.

The majority of ship-names in this period may be broadly classified as religious, of course, the names of saints being particularly popular, especially those with maritime associations. By far the most popular name, however, is that of the Virgin, with *Mary* accounting for just over 11% (total thirty-nine) of all 344 names,[5] followed by that of saints *Margaret* (twenty-four instances, 7% of total), *Nicholas* (5.5%), *James* (4%), *Katherine* (3.5%), *Peter* (2.9%), *Michael* (2.6%), *Edmond* (2.3%), *Magdalene* (2.3%), and the *Trinity* (3.77%), so that these eleven religious names alone account for over 48%, or almost half, of the 344 names listed. The naming of ships after Mary in pre-Reformation England should hardly surprise us, and appropriately, one of the Virgin's many titles was *Stella Maris*, from the erroneous belief that it expressed the etymological meaning of the Hebrew name *Miriam*.[6] Another name that might possibly allude to the Virgin is the single example of *Burmayden*, i.e. Bower-maiden, which generically refers to a chamber-maid or lady-in-waiting. Two hundred and fifty years later two ships in the fleet which sailed against the Armada were similarly named *Handmaid*, but any allusion to the *Handmaiden of the Lord* seems most unlikely in Protestant Elizabethan England.

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[4] *The Vadia Nautarum from The Wardrobe Book of William de Norwell for 1338*, edited by M. Lyon, B. Lyon and H. S. Lucas (Brussels, 1983), ff. 144v–152v.

[5] I have included in this count the form *Mariole*, but as Arngart, `English *craft*', 167, notes, with reference to *la Mariole* of 1312, this diminutive was also in independent use, meaning 'an image of the Virgin Mary' and it is easy to imagine such a statue functioning perhaps as a ship's figurehead.

[6] See *OED*, s.v. *sea-star*.

Most of Christ's disciples were believed to be fishermen by profession, of course, and thus highly suitable patrons for mariners and namesakes for their ships, and yet only two such are significantly represented in the 1338 list, *James* (fourteen instances) and *Peter* (ten), two non-fisher saints being better represented: *Nicholas*, after whom nineteen ships are named, and *Margaret* who, with twenty-four ships named after her, clearly enjoyed 'most-favoured-saint' status, second only to the Virgin herself. Nicholas was early recognised as the patron saint of sailors on account of a miracle recorded in his *Life* when by means of his intervention three sailors were saved from drowning off the coast of Turkey, and it may be that a miracle in St Margaret's *Life* provided the necessary credentials: in the Middle English metrical version preserved in the Auchinleck manuscript, the tyrant Olibrious attempts to drown her in a vat of water, but an angel causes the vat to burst apart and Margaret cannot be drowned.[7] This incident, together with the traditional etymology of her name, which was understood to mean 'pearl', and the first element of which was interpreted as containing OE *mere* 'sea',[8] probably provides a sufficient reason for naming ships after her.

Trinity was presumably felt to be generally protective, and is significantly represented in this list by thirteen ships so named. Christ's name seems not to have been used—at least in that form—though the later London Petty Customs accounts of 1480–81[9] include one local vessel named the *Jesus*; but the 1338 fleet did include one cog named the *Seint Savour*, and another of the persons of the Trinity is commemorated in the vessel whose name is given here as *Seint Spirit*, and in the two cogs called *Spirist* (and this is presumably the sense in which we should understand the name *Goste* given to a contemporary ship recorded in 1340). The protection of the whole company of saints is invoked in the name of another vessel

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[7] I am grateful to David Burnley, for drawing my attention to this passage in the Auchinleck manuscript.

[8] *OED*, s.v. *margarite*[1], gives the following etymological note: `In the early Teut[onic] lang[uage]s the word was adopted with etymologizing perversion: the Goth[ic] *marikreitus* (from the Greek), is influenced by *mari-*, *marei* "sea", while the W[est] Ger[manic] forms, [e.g.] OE. *meregrot*, *-grota* ... are altered so as to express the sense "sea-pebble".'

[9] *The Overseas Trade of London, Exchequer Customs Accounts 1480-1*, edited by H. S. Cobb [= London Record Society, 27] (London, 1990); Arngart, `English craft', 167, notes another in a Patent Roll of 1441.

owned by the king called *Alhalh*-cog, elsewhere referred to as *Tous Seintz*. Other religious names, excluding those of saints, include the relatively popular *Grace Dieu* used as the name of six vessels, the similarly French *Naudieu* (four examples), the first element of which I take to be the same ultimately Latin *navis* seen in the same form in French *naufrage*, and thus meaning something like 'ship under God('s protection)'; Arngart noted a *Dieu la garde*.[10] The single vessel named the *Godebefore* is presumably the pious ejaculation, *God before*, glossed by *OED* as meaning 'under God's guidance ... with God's help or protection',[11] and here antedating *OED*'s first citation from Chaucer by a half century, but other names beginning *Gode-* seem more plausibly interpreted as secular invocations, and it is to these names of non-religious origin I now turn.

The second most popular secular name in the 1338 fleet is *Godyer* (fourteen examples; 4% of total), the fifth most popular ship's name in the entire catalogue, which as a surname, Reaney interpreted as `possibly elliptic for "as I hope to have a good year"'[12]—a reading which to me seems confirmed by the synonymous French *Bonan* recorded at Bristol in 1340.[13] The *Middle English Dictionary* (*MED*) gives four further instances of the name from 1230 to 1417.[14]

Three ships in the 1338 list are named *Godale*, and Arngart interpreted the name (noting four examples dated 1230–1343) as 'good ale'. Semantically, I cannot see how this could be sensible, however, and I suggest it ought rather to be interpreted 'good health/fortune', as hinted at by the form *Godhale* of 1340,[15] and that it is an optative form, wishing good fortune on all who sail in her, further examples of which are noted below.[16]

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[10] Arngart, `English *craft*', 167, but unlocated.

[11] *OED*, s.v. *god*, sense 9c.

[12] P. H. Reaney, *A Dictionary of British Surnames*, 2nd edn (London, 1976), s.n. *Goodyear*. Arngart, `English *craft*', 167, n. 13, agrees, suggesting that 'here it is evidently used in the original sense "(a wish for) a good year"'.

[13] Arngart, `English *craft*', 167, n. 13, notes another, out of Gosford, in a Close Roll of 1317.

[14] *Middle English Dictionary*, edited by H. Kurath and S. M. Kuhn (Ann Arbor, 1952–), s.v. *g_d* adj., sense 9b.

[15] Arngart, `English *craft*', 167, and n. 14.

[16] I am grateful to David Burnley for the suggestion that the -*a*- spellings for expected -*e*- in Middle English *hele* may well reflect the metropolitan nature of the sources. Note, however, the parallel Middle English form entered in *OED*, s.v. *hale*,

The etymology of the name *Godb(e)yete*, borne by three ships in the fleet, is no longer transparent, but the second element is Middle English *biyete* meaning 'property, goods, possessions, profit, gain', so that it could mean `good bargain', as Von Feilitzen analysed the same name when applied to a property in twelfth-century Winchester.[17] However, commenting on this etymological suggestion, Arngart, who noted examples of the name dating from 1312, preferred to interpret the compound in the light of the semantically related French *Bonegayne* (1293) and *Richegaigne* (1326), as '[a ship] that yielded good returns or for which a good yield was augured'.[18] Once again, however, it seems to me that the compound is more likely to be an implicitly optative formation, '(may I have/may it yield) good profit/return': these are, after all, vessels whose primary function is commerce, profitable trade. *MED* notes a contemporary vessel similarly named the *Godchep* (but said to be of *Dordraugh*, so perhaps an English ship trading out of Dordrecht?). A few other names seem to allude to the hope of doing good business, the *Plente*, for instance,[19] and two further French names, most notably the vessel whose name was transcribed as *Waynpayn*, literally 'bread-winner', a word which is found in English at this date to denote a fairly lowly kind of servant, but also as a nickname: for example in the *Durham Account Rolls*, which record the payment of 2d to *Le Waynpain* in 1364.[20] It is recorded from the seventeenth century in the French dictionaries in the sense 'tool by which one gains one's bread', but the present instance seems to suggest it is of much older formation: indeed, Arngart noted an example as early as 1230.[21] The other still very obviously French name is *Portejoye* though, of course, the joy hoped for might not necessarily have been commercial. In a Close Roll of 1235 Arngart noted a name which might perhaps reflect disappointed commercial hopes, the *navis que vocatur Smaldeling*, which he interpreted as 'small sharing,

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sb.[1]

[17] O. von Feilitzen, `The personal names and bynames of the Winton Domesday', in *Winchester in the Early Middle Ages. An Edition and Discussion of the Winton Domesday*, edited by M. Biddle, Winchester Studies, I (Oxford, 1976), pp. 143–229 (pp. 158–59).

[18] I thank Alexander Rumble for referring me to the note `Domus *Godebiete*' by O. Arngart in *Studia Neophilologica*, 51 (1979), 125–26.

[19] Cf. *Navis Regis vocatæ La Plente* (1350), in Rymer, *Foedera* (1825), III.i.195.

[20] See *OED*, s.v. *waynpain*, sense 2.

[21] Arngart, `English *craft*', 167–68.   [23] *Ibid.*, 167.

giving small shares'.

Welfare was the name given to nine ships in the fleet (some 2.6% of total) and seems to have been popular throughout the later Middle Ages;[22] five of seventy-one named ships from another expeditionary force of 1355 were so named; two further fourteenth-century examples come from Ipswich (1325) and Bristol (1379). It seems best to understand this *welfare* as another optative phrase roughly equivalent to 'May it go well, good luck', and thus, more or less synonymous with *Godale* (above), cf. also the Yarmouth cog named *Gowel* in a source of 1417,[23] and, from the late-fifteenth-century Hull Customs Accounts, the charming *Cumwelltohous*.[24] *MED* defines sense 2 of the adjective *sm_th(e)* as `of the wind, weather, sea, etc.: calm, not turbulent', with its first citation from Usk's late-fourteenth-century *Testament of Love*. However, one of the vessels recorded in the 1338 list was named the *Smotheweder*, and thus, as so often, the onomastic antedates the literary use, here by half a century.

With fifteen instances (4.36%), *Blithe* was the fourth most popular name in the fleet and presumably has the same sense that endured into modern times, 'glad, merry, sprightly, cheerful', etc. Semantically, it compares with the single example in the fleet of *Gaillard*, defined by *MED* as 'lively, brisk, gay, high-spirited', but once again here antedating *MED*'s earliest citation (from Chaucer) by half a century.[25] No fewer than eleven ships are named *Rodecog* i.e. 'road-cog'—a technical term not recorded in *MED* except incidentally, as if it were the proper name of a particular ship, rather than a generic.[28] Arngart, noting *le Rodship* (1294) and *la Rodecogge* (1326), also suggested that `possibly these names had some technical meaning'.[26] The *navis que vocatur Holirodeship* (1230), on the other hand, was presumably so named in honour of the Holy Rood.[30] Two other such names which appear to be examples of generics used as specific names are the *Spinace* (an early form of *pinnace*),[27] and the *Galeye*.[28]

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[22] Bizarrely, *OED*, s.v. *welfare* sb., lists *la Welefare de Westm'* from a document of 1310 as an independent sense (1b) of the noun.

[23] *MED*, s.v *cog*.

[24] *The Customs Accounts of Hull 1453–1490*, edited by W. R. Childs, [= Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series, 144] (Leeds, 1986), p. 212.

[25] *MED*, s.v. *gaillard*, sense 2.   [28] *MED*, s.v. *r_de* n.(3), sense 3(a).

[26] Arngart, `English *craft*', 167, n. 13.   [30] *Ibid.*, 167.

[27] *Ibid.*, 166, notes a contemporary Cornish vessel named *la Spinace* of Looe (1343).

[28] *Ibid.*, 166, notes a contemporary *Galie* of Hull (1345).

There will always be some names in such a collection that resist easy explanation, and among these I list *Brenell, Saffray, Sauvaye* and *Sopere*. I am tempted to suggest that these are all surnames, i.e. ships named after their owners, *Soper* quite probably, *Brenell* a variety of *Brunel*, and Reaney records *Saffrey* as a variant of *Saffery*, a name of Old English origin composed of themes which ought together to mean 'sea-peace',[29] so perhaps, alternatively, this is a name of the *Smotheweder* type; but I can make nothing of the French-looking *Sauvaye*. There is also a small group of four names which appear, morphologically, to be French feminine hypocoristics in *-ot(e)*, i.e. *Alisot*, *Belot*, *Malote*, and *Sarote*, though I cannot say, in all cases, of which names. The *Milan* might well be named after that Italian city, but I am disposed rather to believe that it is an example of the French word for a kite, *milan* (later used by Caxton in his *Aesop*),[30] and compare the ship named *Faucoun* in the same list. Swooping across the seas in a less predatory fashion, presumably, were the two *Swalewes*.[31] The *Prester* out of Wainfleet is puzzling. If we dismiss the Anglo-French *prester* 'priest', seen in the name of the legendary *Prester John*, as I think we must, that leaves the common or, rather, uncommon noun, *prester*, ultimately of Greek origin, for which *OED* records two senses, the earlier—though not as early as our ship—'a serpent, the bite of which was fabled to cause death by swelling', citing Trevisa's 1398 translation of Bartholomeus's *De Proprietatibus Rerum* xviii. x. (Bodl. MS.), *Prester is an horrible addre alwei wiþ open mouþe and castinge and schedinge venym as he goþe*—which does not seem a very auspicious name to give to a ship—and the other sense, not recorded before 1601, in Holland's translation of Pliny, 'a burning or scorching whirlwind'.[32] Perhaps 'whirlwind' *is* a suitable name for a ship, implying an irresistible career across the seas. The *Messenger*'s name presumably also implies speed, as does the charmingly incongruous *Lightfot*,[33] one of the very many *Names of the Hare*, incidentally, in the fascinating contemporary poem so called. At the surname *Lightfoot*, Reaney draws attention to its use as the name of the

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[29] Reaney, *A Dictionary of British Surnames*, s.n. *Saffery*, *Saffrey*.

[30] *OED*, s.v. *milan*[2].

[31] Arngart, `English *craft*', 168, notes a *Faucon* in 1254 and a *Swalewe* in 1318.

[32] *OED*, s.v. *prester*.

[33] Arngart, `English *craft* "a vessel"', 168, notes *Lightefote* (1326) and *Lytfot* (1343), one of which might be the same vessel.

messenger in the Towneley Play of *Cæsar Augustus*, one *Lyghtfote Nuncius*.[34] Swiftness is certainly the motivation behind the name *Snellard* (1257), an *-ard* derivative of *snell*, 'quick, active': contrast the surviving *sluggard*.

At this point, something of a digression: if there was felt to be nothing incongruous about naming a (presumably footless) ship *Lightfoot*, then what does this have to say to us about the interpretation of medieval nicknames? What we know of the origins of modern nicknames should surely give us pause when attempting to interpret such medieval names, especially in a literal manner. Consider `The Strange Case of the Inept Dairyman'. All students of names must applaud and be grateful for Jan Jönsjö's book, which constitutes a fine collection of such names,[35] but reviewers in this journal and elsewhere have justly pointed out that an appreciation of metaphor is not this author's strong suit. This weakness was brought home for me by the interpretation of the name *Weltkyrne*, said to derive from two Old Norse elements meaning `overturn' and `churn', thus giving the meaning `clumsy maker of butter'. Here it seems to me the error is one of over-interpretation, someone who perhaps once in his life, on one never-to-be-forgotten occasion—his friends would see to that—was unfortunate enough to upset a churn full of cream became branded with this nickname ever after; it seems to me most unlikely to be the sobriquet of a professional butter-maker.

According to the thirteenth-century *Gesta Herewardi Saxonis* reporting the events of *c*.1080, one of Hereward's band, *Leofwine*—a Grim Reaper if ever there was one—acquired the byname *Mowe*, i.e. 'mowing implement, sickle', in the following manner: `chancing to be alone in a meadow cutting grass he had been set upon by a score of local peasants with iron pitchforks and spears in their hands, whereupon quite alone with only his sickle he wounded many and killed some, charging among them like a reaper and finally putting them all to flight'.[36] Without such a report—and how rare such context is—we should probably put him down as a sicklemaker, or perhaps a particularly accomplished mower! Similarly, the nickname *Waynpayn*, which we have just found as the name given to an English ship

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[34] Reaney, *A Dictionary of British Surnames*, s.n. *Lightfoot*.

[35] J. Jönsjö, *Studies on Middle English Nicknames I. Compounds* (Lund, 1979).

[36] *Three Lives of the Last Englishman*, edited and translated by M. Swanton (New York, 1984), p. 67.

in 1338, in its Parisian form *Gaigne-Pain*, was interpreted by Pachnio in his 1909 study of the names of the 1292 Tax Roll as the nickname of a baker.[37] This seems absurdly literal, and, in any case, a baker does not earn bread, he makes it.

But to return to ships: finally, from the 1338 catalogue, it is possible to isolate a group of floral names: seven *Rose*, three *Garland* and a single *Blome*, with which last I compare the *Flowr'*, plying between Bristol and Honfleur in 1479, bringing from Bordeaux a cargo of French wines and returning with 1200 English onions.

If we now compare the statistics of the 1338 list of 344 ships with a somewhat larger sample of 426 vessels from Castille a century and a half later,[38] we find that *Mary* accounts for no less than a third of all names in the Spanish record, as in England, easily the most popular name, but as it were even more so, whereas St *Margaret* is not evidenced at all, and *Catherine* is slightly less popular than in England, but *Magdalene* much more so, accounting respectively for 2.6% and 6.8% of all names. Of the male saints, *John* is one of the most popular, as popular as he was in England earlier, but *Anthony* is even more popular, a saint not commemorated by a single vessel in the English fleet of 1338. Despite his nautical connexions, *Nicholas* is no more popular than *Peter* in the Castillian fleet and less than half as popular as in the English list, but *The Trinity* (at 8.7%) more than twice as popular. Overall, recognisably non-religious names account for only 4.7% of the total, a much smaller percentage than in the earlier English material. Although the Virgin has—as it were—increased her lead in late medieval Castile, the other saints vary in popularity, with no English ships named after Anthony, who is very popular in Spain, and no Spanish ships named after St Margaret, whose popularity is second only to that of the Virgin in the earlier English catalogue. The next readily accessible list of English and Spanish ship-names is that of the

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[37] R. Pachnio, *Die Beinamen der Pariser Steuerrolle von 1292 under Heranziehung der Steuerrolle von 1313 und zahlreicher Urkunden* (Königsberg, 1909), p. 51.

[38] J. Hadziiossif, `La piété des gens de mer en Méditerrannée et en Atlantique d'après les vocables de navires aux XVe et XVIe siècles', in *Foi chrétienne et milieux maritimes (XVe–XXe siècles): Actes du Colloque, Paris, Collège de France, 23–25 septembre 1987*, edited by A. Cabantous and F. Hildesheimer (Paris, 1989), pp. 169–87.

Armada of 1588. Of course, here we are in a quite different era, especially in post-Reformation England: 250 years after the English list of 1338, and roughly a century after the Spanish material just discussed. The names of 210 English ships which took part in the engagement are recorded, and those of about 136 Spanish vessels. In the English fleet obvious saints' names are few and far between, of course, the exception being a hoy named the *George*, after the national patron saint, presumably; indeed, religious names in general are hard to find, except that the *Grace Dieu* of the earlier list is now the *Grace of God*, and there are two examples of *Gift of God*, one *Ascension*, one *Samaritan* and—more surprisingly—one *Heathen*. There are some Old Testament names, *Solomon* and *Samuel* for instance, though, as ever, we cannot be sure the vessels so named were not named after their owners, and, surprisingly, two examples of *Jonas*—surely tempting fate![39]—but then the *Hazard* is another name which might not inspire confidence.

    The *Makeshift* surely cannot be named after the only attested Elizabethan sense of the noun, 'shifty person, rogue', so—if indeed a nominal compound—must represent a considerable antedating of the modern sense, which *OED* defines as 'That with which one makes shift; a temporary substitute of an inferior kind', but does not find before the first decade of the nineteenth century.[40] More likely perhaps is a form of the original verbal phrase 'to make shift', attested from the fifteenth century, in the sense which *OED* defines as `To attain one's end by contrivance or effort; to succeed; to manage to do something', and which it exemplifies with a, doubtless, merely co-incidentally nautical quotation, from Kyd's contemporary play, *Cornelia* (1594): *A Ship vnrig'd Can make no shift to combat with the Sea* (i. 87),[45] but if so, then perhaps it is best understood as another optative formula, something like '(may we/it) make shift, may we succeed'. As for the *Virgin God Save Her*, I cannot believe this continues

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[39] I see now from Margaret Aston's unpublished paper, `Ships' names in 16th and 17th century England', that `reflecting the optimism of the start of the new reign', on 3rd July 1559 Elizabeth launched the *Elizabeth Jonas*, `suggestive of a royal resurrection after the engulfing dangers of the previous reign', and she cites from a contemporary writer the following passage: *The ship called the Elizabeth Jonas was named by her Grace in remembrance of her own deliverance from the fury of her enemies from which in one respect she was no less miraculously preserved than was the prophet Jonas from the belly of the whale.*

[40] *OED*, s.v. *makeshift*.   [45] *OED*, s.v. *shift* sb., sense 6b.

the medieval enthusiasm for the Virgin Mary, but must surely allude to the Virgin Queen, Elizabeth, commander of the fleet.

As for the Spanish *Armada* ships: I calculate that no fewer than thirty-three or 24.25%, almost a quarter of the entire fleet, were named after the Virgin. There are very, very few secular names, almost all personal names being quite unambiguously prefaced by *San* or *Santa*.

Returning to fourteenth-century England, there are several other reliable published lists of ships' names from this period itself, or that include this period. The largest I am at present aware of is a list of some seventy-one named ships reconstructed by H. J. Hewitt in his 1958 book about the Black Prince's expedition to Gascony in 1355.[41] Once again *St Mary* scores highest with eleven examples or 15.5% of this sample, and there are six examples of *Margaret* (8.5%) and four (5.6%) of *Nicholas*, pretty much replicating the statistics of the much larger 1338 list. Only one non-religious name can compete with these, but it again confirms the popularity of the name *Welfare* given to five ships in the Black Prince's fleet or 7% of all names listed. Interesting secular names here include another *Plenty*, another *Faucon,* another *Godbiete* and two *Godier*; as well as *Holk* (a generic use of the word *hulk* before it became pejorative),[42] and the mysterious *Blison* and *Glythe*, though the former might be a variant of the surname *Bilson*, and the latter is probably a mistranscription of the popular *Blythe*.

The *State Papers* include a record of thirty-five named English ships captured and burnt in the Bay of Brittany in 1375.[43] The only transparently non-religious name is that of the *Garlond* of Yarmouth, but three others have names which are not those of any well-known saint, including the two *Jonette* (there were five in the 1338 list) and the *Isabelle* of ?Immingham, but, of course, once again, it has to be admitted that we cannot tell whether some of those apparently named after saints were not rather named after their owners who were themselves named after those same saints. The proportion of *apparently* religious names, however, is obviously still very high, perhaps as high as 88.57%, including five *Saint Marie* and one plain *Mary*, four *Trinity*, three *Nicholas*, and two each of *Gracedieu*, *Gabriel*,

[41] H. J. Hewitt, *The Black Prince's Expedition of 1355–1357* (Manchester, 1958), pp. 40–42.

[42] See Arngart, `English *craft*', 164.

[43] Cited in N. H. Nicolas, *A History of the Royal Navy*, 2 vols (London, 1847), II, 510–13 (Appendix 8).

Christopher, and *James*.

Of the twenty-six royal ships listed in a letter of Henry V written in 1417, and constituting in effect a list of the early-fifteenth-century Royal Navy,[44] exactly the same proportion, twenty-three or 88.46% are 'religious' names including four *Marie*, two *Christopher*, two *Nicholas* and two *George*. The three exceptions are two *balingers* named the *Swan* and the *Crachere*,[45] and a *nef* called the *Flaward*: neither of the last two names is transparent.

The Overseas Trade of Bristol is a collection of late medieval records edited by E. M. Carus-Wilson and published in 1937; it includes some 156 English ships'names, but gathered over a considerable period. The most popular names once again follow the trend we have already detected in the 1338 catalogue. Vessels named after the Virgin again predominate and account for 14% of all names, comparing closely to the 11% of the 1338 list. Thereafter, the most popular female names are those of saints *Margaret* and *Catherine*, again just as they were in the 1338 list, but male saints' names are differently represented. *Nicholas*, the most popular male name of the earlier list, is only half as well represented now, but *Michael* has become more popular, whereas *Peter* and *James* have maintained much the same popularity they had in the early list. Presumably named after the saints of that name—it seems otherwise an odd love-gift—is the *Valantyn* of Bristol (1437), but we hear of another built in Southampton in 1416, and a third trading out of London in the 1480s. Of the 'secular' names we have noted in the earlier list, there are single examples here of *Blithe, Goodyer* and *Godhale*, and two *Welfare*.

By the time of the late-fifteenth-century London Petty Customs accounts[46] there has been a noticeable increase in the practice of naming ships after the names of their owners: for example, the *Thomas Fyncham*, the *Thomas Basset*, the *Petir Stokker*, the *Martyn Baldry*, the *Petir Tate*, the *Christopher Howard*, the *George Cobham*, the *John Remyngton*, the *Kateryn Charles*, the *Mary Dawbeney*, the *Mary Elwyn* of Plymouth and the *Mary Gale* of Dartmouth—seemingly a type of self-advertisement that was rare among earlier merchants (yet there are two *Jonette* in the 1338 list, the *Jonette Baddyng* and the *Jonette Salerne*). The *Mary Boston*, however, later

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[44] *Ibid*., II, 514–15.

[45] *Ibid*., II, 165, apparently a generic.

[46] *The Overseas Trade of London*, edited by Cobb.

described in the same accounts as the *Mary* of *Boston*, provides a timely reminder that some of these double names may well conceal a place-name rather than a surname as their second element, almost certainly, where that second name is that of a port, and it is not difficult to think of reasons why the second name might be a place- rather than a surname even where that place is not coastal. In this Eve-of-the-Reformation poll, *Mary* still holds her own in the London records with seven or 13.7% of the names, but the not entirely 'new entry', as it were, in these pop charts, is *Christopher*, alone accounting for 10% of this present sample, whereas, of the admittedly much larger earlier 1338 sample, he could only score half of one percent. Christopher would seem to be an ideal maritime saint: not only was he the patron of travellers—a capacity in which his protection is still (despite official demotion in 1969) widely invoked today—but he was also invoked against water, tempest, and plague, and especially against sudden death. It was popularly believed that whoever saw an image of Christopher would not die that day. Furthermore, for those of an etymological bent, his very name alluded to the episode in his *Legend* when he carried the Christ-child safely across the water—a popular wall-painting to be seen opposite the entrance porch of many a late medieval English parish church. Such images become much more common from the late fourteenth century, coinciding with the increasing number of ships named after the saint in the late-fifteenth-century London records, as opposed to Edward III's 1338 fleet.

What conclusions can be drawn from this analaysis about the way ships were named in late medieval England? None very radical. That the majority should be named after saints is hardly surprising. That the Virgin should have quite so many namesakes is also unsurprising in the late Middle Ages, in England, as in Castille. The similar disappearance of such names in England and their retention amongst the Spanish ships of the Armada era is also entirely predictable. The most interesting aspect of this nautical naming perhaps lies in the relatively small proportion of non-religious names, and specifically, those which are verbal phrases (some of them elliptical, i.e. with the verb understood) of an optative type, such as *Portejoye*, *Plente*, *Godyer*, *God(h)ale*, *Smotheweder*, *Welfare*, *Gowel* and *Cumwelltohous*. At this distance we are perhaps in danger of forgetting that sailing the seas in an age of wooden, wind-driven vessels was always a hazardous enterprise, and onomastic wishful-thinking—'wishful-naming', we might perhaps term it—a further amuletic strategy to bring psychological comfort to the

superstitious mariner.[47]