

PRESENTING UKRAINIAN ONOMASTICON TO ANGLOPHONE COMMUNITY

Review of:

Chernovatyi L., Schochenmaier E. Reference Dictionary of Ukrainian Names: English–Ukrainian and Ukrainian–English. Monee, IL: Mondonomo, 2023.

The “Reference Dictionary of Ukrainian Names”, which has just been published in Monee, IL, comes out as an act of resistance of Ukrainian researchers who – albeit – had to flee from their cities under bombing as well as an act of support of Slovak colleagues who hosted the refugees. It is part of the series “World Names Reference Books” whose ambition aim is to represent the global diversity of naming and its relevant cultural and practical features. The series has covered Thai, Scandinavian, Celtic and German names. Thus, the “Ukrainian” edition opens the way to the Slavonic section.

The structure of the book is well-thought. The introductory part of theoretical writings is following by nine chapters of alphabetical onomastic information. It ends up with an extremely short although informatively different section which contains the bibliography used for compiling this dictionary.

The theoretical part contains the essential preface entitled “Genesis and metamorphoses of Ukrainian names in time and space” which is an etymological and diachronic sketch of shaping Ukrainian onomasticon which have incorporated ancient pagan worldview, Christian heritage and even rather recent political conditions. The presented context will definitely help the reader to approach and understand – at least partially – the wider cultural context of naming in East Central Europe which has extended over one millennium.

Further theoretical pieces demonstrate how computer software (namely, Nomograph) can help researchers collect the onomastic material, why the present structure of the dictionary was chosen, what principles of transliterating Ukrainian names into English were applied, and how they should be pronounced.

The rest of the chapters refer directly to the onomastic corpus of the dictionary. The first two chapters contain information about male and female names whose semantics can be easily explained. They will be of interest for professional researchers as well as for the amateur ones who admire the beauty of etymology. To my mind, “Куйбіда” is not a male Christian name, but a family name (surname). Similarly, “Дзвінка” is the diminutive of the female name “Дзенислава”.

Chapters 3 and 4 present names according to their origins. This idea is very fruitful for tracing the influences of specific languages (or cultures) on the formation of the Ukrainian naming tradition. Other future dictionaries of the same language family can easily show the intricacy and uniqueness of a particular linguistic and ethnic identity among its neighbours.

This will also help dismantle some myths about “fraternal” relations between nations or their common identity and even sameness.

Diminutives are a peculiar feature of Ukrainian culture. Perhaps, they are a strong cultural marker of uniqueness in any language; however, Ukrainian culture cherishes this feature. It is interesting to see how languages from different cultural zones treat this aspect of interpersonal communication. Chapters 5 to 8 unite the corpora of male and female diminutive names presented in two directions: the reader can search the relevant information either by the main entry name or by its diminutives. This presentation is very thoughtful from the viewpoint of a user.

Chapters 9 to 16 are helpful for bureaucrats who will have to write Ukrainian names in English. This is why the dictionary has an obliging character. However, I would recommend paying attention to the graphical and aesthetic parameters of transliterating. The forms “Darii” and “Mariia” are visually complicated, and the forms “Dariy” and “Mariya” are easier for quick visual perception.

Part 9 (which should have been Chapter 17) contains the register of non-standard spellings and offers correct variants. This chapter is especially interesting for language historians although it is not understandable for common readers. It lacks some introductory comments on why these forms appeared. During different political situations, various solutions were offered to transferring Cyrillic names into Roman characters. The heritage of the 19th century is the application of West Slavonic alphabets. Sporadically, some French graphical solutions were used for English transliterations. The Soviet standard insisted on substituting the natural Ukrainian [h] by the Russian [g].

The bibliographical section is quite short. Partially, it is understandable: the reader will see the dictionary as a source itself. However, it would be better for further academic purposes to advertise some more research. Since literature on Ukrainian onomastics is quite vast, it would be desirable to provide main dictionaries, reviewing books and papers as well as some encyclopaedical and bibliographical editions. In this way, the dictionary could advertise some serious expertise for prospective insightful studies.

In general, the dictionary is an interesting and powerful attempt to present Ukrainian onomasticon to Anglophone community.

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