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# The Beliana Encyclopedia: a comprehensive Slovak encyclopedia

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## Abstract

Author informs about the large Slovak encyclopedia “Beliana”. It is noted that of the planned over 20 volumes, only nine have been published so far. The significant contribution of Ukrainians, particularly Mykola Mushynka, in preparing encyclopedia articles dedicated to Ukrainian topics is highlighted.

## Keywords

Beliana, large Slovak encyclopedia, Ukrainian studies, encyclopedia industry.

The Ukrainian diaspora has made significant contributions to the headway of international encyclopedism, which, according to V. Biletsky, “is an important demographic, intellectual, socio-cultural, and informational resource” (2011, p. 29). However, the

cooperation of Ukrainian scientists abroad with the encyclopedias of their host countries or international encyclopedic projects need to be studied. Slovak-Ukrainian cultural and scientific ties are particularly noteworthy for their diversity and breadth, encompassing in Slovak Republic activities such as organizing Ukrainian cultural festivals, publishing Ukrainian-language works, and supporting the operation of Ukrainian local history museums, as well as educational and scientific institutions (Babotova 2007). The scholarly endeavors of Ukrainians in Slovakia are also reflected in their contributions to encyclopedic practice.

The most comprehensive contemporary Slovak encyclopedia is *Beliana* (also known as the Slovak Encyclopedia), named after the 18th-century polymath Matej Bel<sup>1</sup>. Scholars argue that M. Bel was the first who proposed the idea of a multi-author Slovak encyclopedia. His five-volume work, *Notitia Hungariae novae historico-geographica* (Vienna, 1735–1792), was a survey of the history, geography, administration, and culture of the various counties of Slovakia, making a significant cultural contribution. However, at the time, “it would still have been almost laughable to consider this work a Slovak encyclopedia” (Johnson, 1985, p. 165). The first national Slovak encyclopedia is considered to be the six-volume academic *Encyklopédia Slovenska* (Slovak Encyclopedia, 1977–1982), which contains approximately 20,000 entries. Despite certain ideological biases, as noted by O. Johnson, the publication of the encyclopedia became an object of Slovak pride and honor (1985, p. 170), reflecting Slovakia’s aspiration for cultural autonomy within a federated Czechoslovakia. O. Johnson also observes that the development of encyclopedias in Eastern European countries was, in general, a crucial stage in the formation of national cultures and identities, contributing to the emergence and establishment of independent states.

The *Encyclopedia Beliana* has been published by the publishing house “VEDA” since the 1990s, with its preparation overseen by the Encyclopedia Institute of Slovak Academy of Sciences. Initially, the entire encyclopedia was planned to contain approximately 150,000 encyclopedia articles across 12 volumes. However, it later became evident that at least 20 volumes would be needed to accommodate such a number of entries. Additional volumes are planned for preparation following the completion of the main series. As of 2024, the encyclopedia comprises nine printed volumes, covering the letters “A” to “K”. The encyclopedia’s materials are also available online: <https://beliana.sav.sk>.

Thematically, *Beliana* encompasses the culture, science, technology, and art of humankind throughout history. While placing a particular focus on Slovak realities, its articles explore topics spanning the living and non-living natural world, technology, and spiritual culture. Hundreds of authors, consultants, and reviewers from universities, research institutes, and other institutions in Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and beyond have contributed to its creation. Notably, the encyclopedia articles are presented without specifying their authors. The encyclopedia’s value lies in its wealth of unique materials that were previously underrepresented or virtually absent from Slovakia’s literary and cultural heritage.

Ukrainians have made significant contributions to this encyclopedia. Academician Mykola Mušynka was the first to dedicate several years to preparing articles on Ukrainian

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<sup>1</sup> **Matej Bel** (Slovak: *Matej Bel z Očovej*; Hungarian: *Bél Mátyás*; German: *Matthias Bel*; Latin: *Matthias Belius*) was a Slovak scholar, poet, encyclopedist, historian, philosopher, and Enlightenment thinker. As a pioneer of the Slovak Enlightenment, he was one of the most prominent European scholars of the 18th century and a founder of modern geography in Hungary. Born on March 22, 1684, in Očová, and passing away on August 29, 1749, in Bratislava, Bel has been described variously as Slovak, Slovak-Hungarian, or Hungarian. In his own words, he stated: „Lingua Slavus, natione Hungarus, eruditione Germanus“, *meaning*, „Slav by language, Hungarian by nation, German by education“.

studies. He made substantial contributions and proposed new entries on forgotten and banned Ukrainian figures. His encyclopedic work is extensive: as Nadiia Varkhol aptly notes, “M. Mušynka actively collaborated with the Encyclopedia of Ukraine in Paris, the English-language Encyclopedia of Ukraine in Toronto, the Slovak Beliana, and the Kyiv’s Encyclopedia of Modern Ukraine” (2011, p. 9).

For over 15 years, Lubica Babotova, Candidate of Arts, PhDr, Dr. h. c., has been collaborating with the Encyclopedia Institute located in Bratislava. Her primary focus is contributing to the preparation of articles on Ukrainian literature and culture (starting with the letter “H”). Additionally, she works with Slovak scientists from various fields, addressing topics related to Ukrainian history, technology, and more. Notably, the researchers of the Encyclopedia Institute consults with Ukrainian scholars to discuss significant issues encountered during the writing of these encyclopedia articles.

The Encyclopedia Beliana is, without exaggeration, a jewel of Slovak scholarship, preserving and disseminating extensive knowledge about Slovakia and its people. The history of the country is closely intertwined with that of the Western Ukrainian lands, making it only natural that the encyclopedia includes numerous articles featuring the valuable expertise of Ukrainian specialists. The involvement of Ukrainian scholars in creating this multi-volume publication enhances its objectivity, particularly in articles on Ukrainian studies. We believe this practice should be expanded, as it helps to shape a more accurate image of Ukraine and Ukrainians in the minds of other peoples, preventing distortions of historical facts and events in encyclopedias.

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