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Н

THE EVOLUTION OF UKRAINIAN CYRILLIC:



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Historical Roots and Modern Digital Fonts



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Acknowledgement of Use of Creation, Editing, and Automation Tools (e.g., AI)

In the course of preparing this report, I have utilized a range of creation, editing, and automation tools to enhance efficiency and accuracy. These tools are acknowledged as follows:

Automation Tools:

- Grammarly for grammar checks;
- Stealthwriter;

Artificial Intelligence Assistance: I have used AI-based tools, including chatGPT, to support the following tasks:

- Refining language and grammar;
- Generating ideas or outlines;
- Create more complete and meaningful texts and format my texts;
- Conducting preliminary searches for relevant literature;

Creation Tools:

- Adobe InDesign for document formatting;

I have ensured that the use of these tools adheres to the ethical guidelines of University of Porto and does not compromise the originality or intellectual contribution of this work. The tools used have been limited to auxiliary functions and have not replaced independent thinking or academic rigor.

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Introduction

The human race selected writing systems as one of the most significant assets in one's culture. Not only do they function as the tools of people's communication and interaction, but also as the continuation of history from generation to generation and centuries. Exploring the world of letters and symbols offers a unique perspective on how design captures and preserves identity¹ across generations. Immersion into this world lets you realize how much is observed when using fonts in the books, posters, or designs and how much hidden history is behind each of them.

Towards this, I will study selected pieces of old book covers, magazines, and newspapers designed by Ukrainian designers as well as typographies I have found relevant from the twentieth century. Particular emphasis will be paid to the exploration of three (probably mope) contemporary typefaces, which will be compared depending on the shape and style, as well as the proportion. The study will culminate in the creation of a demonstration typeface that integrates elements of Ukrainian Cyrillic and Latin scripts, showcasing their unique character and relevance in modern design.

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Keywords: Cyrillic, Ukrainian Cyrillic, fonts, Ukrainian fonts, sign, writing, alphabet, typography, cultural heritage.

Main objective

Understanding the historical development of Ukrainian Cyrillic and its influence on modern typography. History and the distinctive features of Ukrainian typefaces remain largely unknown to the Western community, limiting understanding and appreciation of its significance in the global cultural context. The blending of Ukrainian culture with that of neighboring Eastern European countries, combined with the pervasive effects of Russification, deeply affects national identity by undermining ethnic traditions and diminishing the value of linguistic heritage.

This erosion of cultural and linguistic heritage can be better understood through Stuart Hall's concept of cultural identity, which views identity not as a fixed essence but as a dynamic and contested process. In his theory, identity is constructed through two intertwined dynamics: shared cultural memory (the politics of positionality) and opposition to the "other" (the politics of difference). In Ukraine's case, these dynamics manifest in the long-standing struggle for cultural autonomy and a deliberate distancing from imposed Russian norms, particularly in language and visual culture (Hall, 2018b, pp. 90, 124).

Hall emphasizes that identity is discursive—it is shaped and reshaped through symbols, language, media, and visual representation. In this context, typography becomes a powerful cultural tool. Ukrainian type design not only transmits language but visually encodes identity, memory, and resistance. By reclaiming and reinterpreting historical Cyrillic forms, designers engage in cultural preservation and resist homogenization.

This approach aligns with Eduardo Napoleão's (2021) research on typographic identity, which argues that typefaces can express the cultural and geographic specificity of a place. Typography, therefore, becomes more than a functional tool—it serves as a visual marker of belonging and a vessel of intangible heritage.

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In the Ukrainian context, this is realized through several key strategies:

- Reviving historical letterforms that existed before Soviet standardization, restoring stylistic diversity lost to Russification;
- Emphasizing unique Ukrainian graphemes and ligatures, asserting national specificity within the broader Cyrillic system (Vekshyna, 2023);
- Drawing from vernacular sources—such as hand-painted signage, folk art, and archival documents — which grounds contemporary typefaces in everyday culture and lived experience (Napoleão, 2021).

Applying Hall's theory to graphic design reframes modern Ukrainian type design not merely as an aesthetic practice, but as a political and cultural act. The revival of Ukrainian Cyrillic becomes an intentional strategy for reclaiming visual sovereignty, reinforcing national identity, and reintroducing Ukrainian voices into the global typographic discourse.

The market is saturated with various Cyrillic fonts from other countries, which is significantly larger compared to the Ukrainian font market. The research addresses these challenges by analyzing historical and modern Ukrainian typefaces and proposing a practical solution: a utilitarian typeface designed for broad applications, contributing to the promotion of Ukrainian identity in global typography.

Hypothesis:

In modern conditions, the development of a utilitarian typeface with elements characteristic of Ukrainian letterforms is more relevant than the creation of display typeface, as the practical application of such typefaces will contribute to their broader adoption and the preservation of national identity through typographic solutions in various fields. By emphasizing practicality, such a typeface can bridge the gap between cultural heritage and modern typographic needs, fostering greater recognition of Ukrainian Cyrillic in global design contexts.

Limitation

This study has aspects that will not be covered in this work. Specifically, the study concentrates on the Ukrainian version of Cyrillic and does not delve into regional adaptations or other national variants, such as Russian, Bulgarian, or Serbian Cyrillic due to possible limitations in reading and studying primary materials in these languages. Despite these limitations, the research remains comprehensive in its aim to analyze key aspects of Ukrainian type design and its potential for broader applications.

One significant limitation of this research is its reliance on sources in Ukrainian, Russian, and English. Although these languages offered a wealth of texts that were crucial to the study, some of these may be somewhat problematic for the Portuguese reader who may be inclined to struggle with these languages. This could hamper their ability to directly interact with cited materials with the view to confirming their authenticity. It also does not include an in-depth analysis of the development of Ukrainian Cyrillic in specific regions of Ukraine, as the aim is to maintain a clear focus on nationwide aspects.

The research does not analyze the interaction of Ukrainian Cyrillic with other alphabets, such as Latin, except for the potential creation of a demonstration font featuring a Latin variation. While the study examines modern Ukrainian fonts, the impact of commercial factors or market conditions on their development falls outside the scope of this analysis.

Motivation

This study of the evolution of Ukrainian Cyrillic typefaces provides an in-depth analysis of both historical and contemporary typography, emphasizing the cultural, aesthetic, and functional dimensions of Cyrillic typeface design. By comparing 20th-century typefaces with modern digital revivals, the study reveals key shifts in design practices shaped by political, cultural, and technological changes. Surveys of Ukrainian typeface designers uncover current trends, challenges, and preferences in contemporary typeface creation. This research aims to demonstrate and highlight the identity of the Ukrainian Cyrillic alphabet prior to reforms, exploring how historical forms and styles, once lost, can be revived. The integration of these insights with contemporary practices enhances our understanding of how past typographic traditions can inform future design solutions.

The Ukrainian typeface market is in the early stages of development and independent existence in the typeface world. The growth and exposure of typefaces created by Ukrainian designers makes Ukrainian typefaces available for use in design, typography, outdoor advertising, and navigation within the country, as well as opening up opportunities for collaboration with other countries to promote Ukrainian Cyrillic and help distinguish and differentiate Ukrainian typefaces and typography from other Eastern European countries.

Object

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Font design based on the analysis of conducted surveys, research of historical graphic samples and typefaces, as well as modern digital fonts.

Methodology

The analysis of historical sources, books, articles, and monographs related to the development of Ukrainian Cyrillic and typography. Special attention will be paid to studying the visual characteristics of typefaces (3), such as shape, style, and proportions, which will help to identify the aesthetic and functional aspects of Ukrainian Cyrillic. Additionally, surveys will be administered to designers specializing in Cyrillic script for gathering information. The integration of research findings will aid in formulating generalizations and conclusions, with a demonstration font as a case study to be developed and showcased. This font may support the further development and promotion of Ukrainian Cyrillic.

Nature of Study:

Qualitative

Research Design:

Case Study

To support and triangulate the literature review

- Observation / comparative study of artifacts (*past and current*)
- Conduct a survey
- Design an artifact (*type*) based on the findings (*design-based research*)

The previous chapter (lit review) provided some information on the historical background.

Phase 01

Historical Research

Historical research will delve into the origins, evolution, and cultural significance of Ukrainian Cyrillic. This includes examining the earliest examples of Ukrainian scripts, key changes over centuries, and influential reforms such as Peter I's reform. This research sheds light on the socio-political and artistic factors that shaped Ukrainian Cyrillic, providing context for its modern adaptations and digital reimaginings.

Phase 02

Case Study (Comparative Analysis)

This approach involves examining the similarities and differences between 20th-century and modern Ukrainian fonts, with an emphasis on visual characteristics such as shape, style, and proportion. By selecting XX case/ typefaces and comparing from different eras, we can identify specific stylistic evolutions, such as changes in letterform geometry, spacing, and line weights, and explore how historical and cultural factors have influenced font design over time.

Phase 03

Survey

A questionnaire will be used to collect data from font designers who are experts in creating Cyrillic typefaces. The survey is planned to be conducted after the comparative analysis of 20th-century fonts and modern typefaces (case study). The questionnaire will include both open and closed questions, as well as questions with multiple-choice answers. After gathering the data, a clearer picture will emerge for further font design and the confirmation or refutation of hypotheses (see page XX with the objective and hypothesis).



Phase 04

Developmental Research

Developmental research involves studying the process of change and growth in Ukrainian type design. This approach allows you to analyze the progression of Ukrainian typefaces, tracing how historical events, and cultural shifts influenced font development from early Cyrillic to contemporary digital fonts. Developmental research offers insights into ongoing trends and potential future directions for Ukrainian type design.

Phase 05

Application of Results

Based on conclusions, created a demonstration font that incorporates historical elements with a modern twist. This font will act as a case study for applying research findings to practical design.

Historical Evolution of Cyrillic

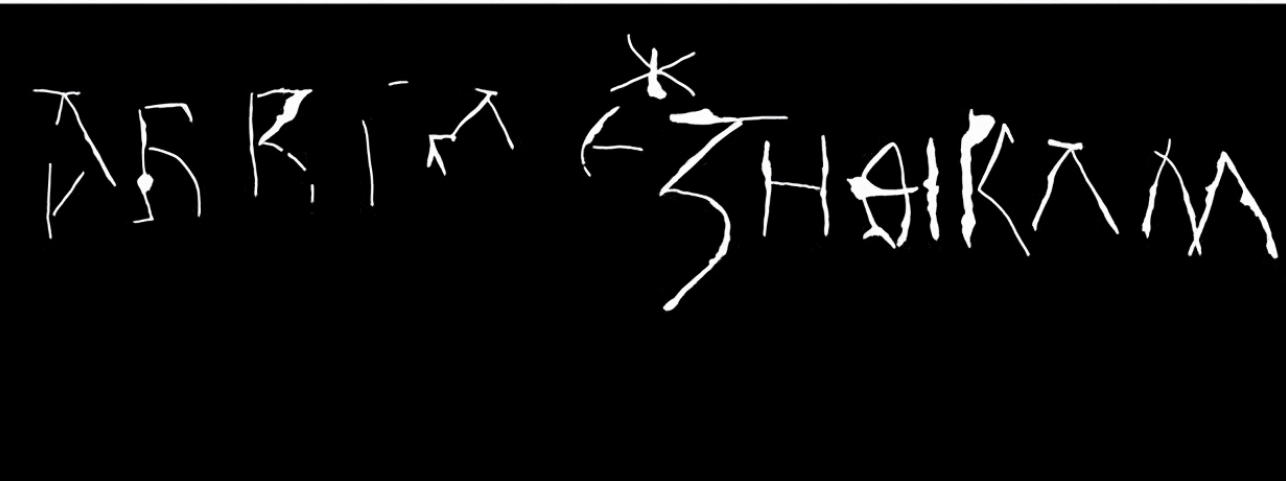
The existence of writing on Ukrainian lands has sparked much interest among scholars (eg. Kuzio, 2016). Although we do not have exhaustive information, there are numerous historical findings that continue to be studied today. The history of Ukrainian writing originates from the times of Kyivan Rus, although for a long time, its emergence was exclusively associated with the church reform of Prince Volodymyr in 988. (Гордиенко Н. С. «Крещение Руси»: факты против легенд и мифов. — Л.: Лениздат, 1986. — 287 с.)

A key role in this process was played by two Greek missionaries, Cyril and Methodius. They undertook a journey to the northeast to engage in educational activities, translating church books into Church Slavonic. It is believed that Cyril created one of the first Slavic alphabets — Glagolitic (around 863). (eg. Вікімедіа, У. П. 2006) However, according to modern researchers, Cyrillic was created by one of his students, with the graphic basis of the script stemming from Eastern Greek writing, while the phonemic structure was inherited from earlier Glagolitic and named in honor of the teacher.

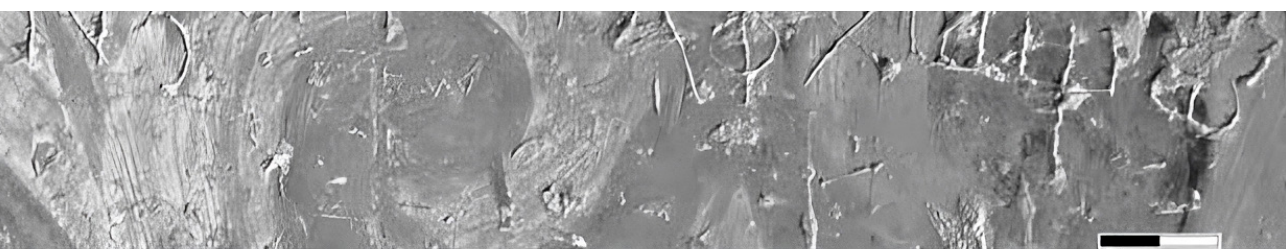
It is assumed that even before the appearance of Glagolitic, another form of writing might have existed on these lands, which possibly influenced later alphabet systems. (Проблеми слов'язнознавства, 1999. Вип. 50. С. 36-45)

Origins and First Examples of Ukrainian Script

The oldest examples of uncial writing in Ukraine are dated back to the 11th — early 18th centuries. One of them is the Graffiti of Saint Sophia Cathedral, a writing system discovered by Ukrainian historian S. Vysotsky on the walls of St. Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv. It is believed that this alphabet is a monument of a transitional period in national writing, when several letters were added to the Greek alphabet to convey specific phonetic features of the Old Ukrainian language (Вікімедіа, У. П. (2013, January 6). Графіті Софії Київської.) (Figure 1).



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Figure 1: Graffiti #100 (Alphabet of Sophia of Kyiv) in the upper part is the alphabet that is drawn on the wall in the lower part is a photograph of the graffiti.

Source: graffiti.pp.ua, Графіті Софії Київської.

The Ostromir Gospel of 1056 is one of the oldest and first dated handwritten books in Old Slavonic and Ukrainian script. The Gospel is written in large, beautiful uncial script, with the letter size gradually increasing toward the end of the book. Вікімедіа, У. П. (2024, August 17). Остромирове Євангеліє (Figure 2).

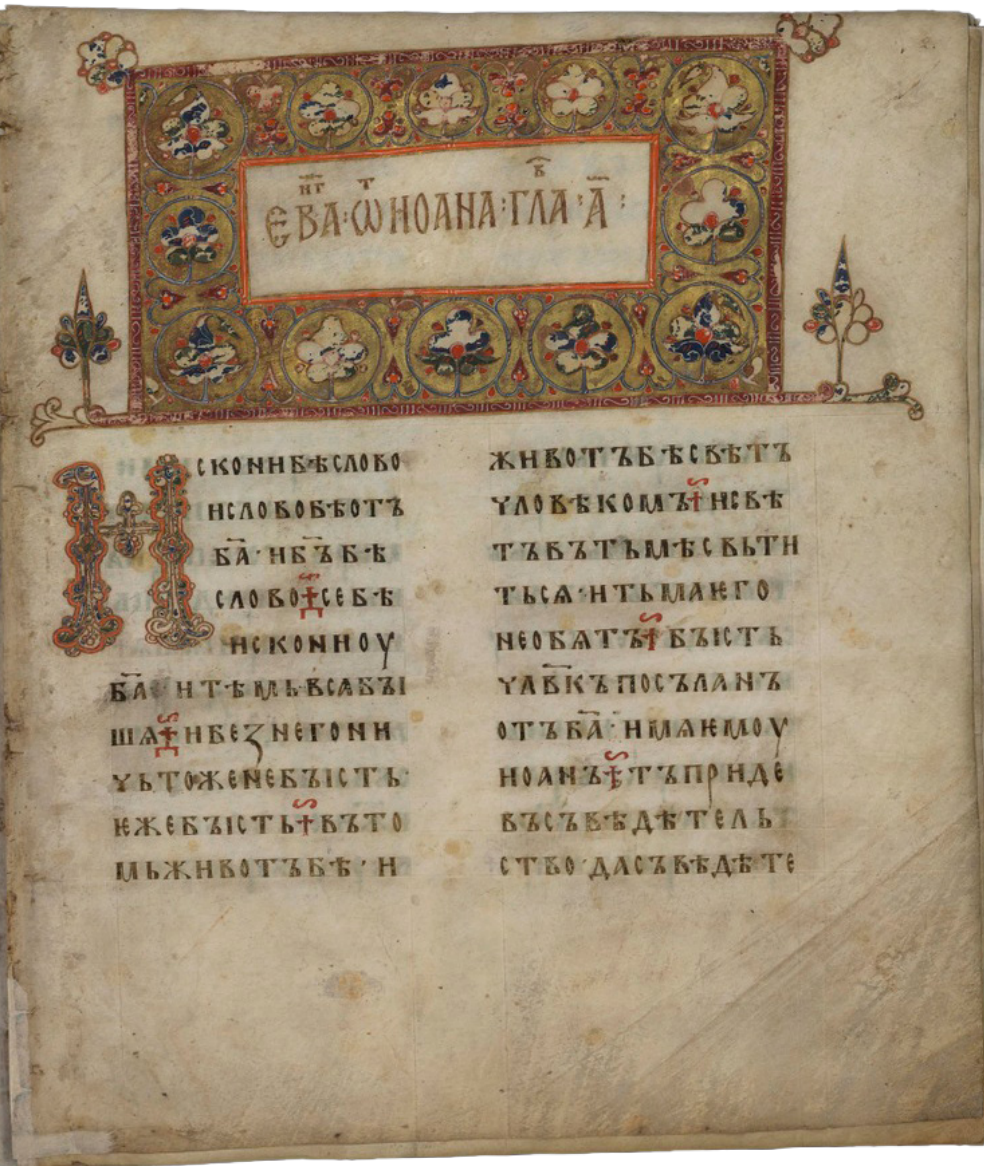
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Uncial is a set of rules for writing analogous to Latin uncial. It was used to transcribe large liturgical books, placing the text on pages in two columns, without spaces between words, without abbreviations, and the letters visually fitted into a square or rectangle.

Figure 2: The Ostromir Gospel is one of the most outstanding monuments of Old Slavic literature.

Source: Проект НЭБ «Книжные памятники», kp.rusneb.ru



Another significant example of Ukrainian writing is the Peresopnytsia Gospel. This outstanding manuscript is one of the first Ukrainian translations of the canonical text, made in 1556–1561. The book was written in uncial and semi-uncial (semi-unicial) with elements of cursive writing. Вікімедія, У. П. (2024b, September 16). Пересопницьке Євангеліє (Figure 3).

Figure 3: The Peresopnytsk Gospel is an important handwritten monument of the ancient Ukrainian literary language and art.

Source: mefodiy.org.ua

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Uncial began to give way to semi-uncial early on, which was smaller than uncial, with less precise main lines in its construction, letters placed at varying distances, more abbreviations, and the script acquired a slant, though it still maintained high-quality writing. Paleography researchers distinguish various forms of semi-uncial. The so-called «running semi-uncial» is characterized by a distinct slant and merged writing of individual letters. Another form of semi-uncial, gradually transitioning to cursive, features frequent abbreviations, merged letters, and their extension above the line, which adds more dynamism to the writing and simplifies its execution. (Horokhivskiy P.I. Special Historical Disciplines: A Course of Lectures: A Study Guide for Full-Time Students. 2nd ed. revised and supplemented. Uman: RVC «Sofia», 2012. – 277 pages.)



Development of Ukrainian Script: Cursive Writing & Book Printing

Cursive, a form of Cyrillic script, emerged semi-uncial in Ukraine in the 16th century. Initially, it was used for clerical purposes, but over the centuries, it gained widespread use in the Cossack Hetmanate. This writing was already for free people, embodying the spirit of the Ukrainian nation.

There are several stages of cursive development:

— Initial Period (16th century): Early examples of cursive still retained features of semi-uncial, and it is also known as «semi-uncial cursive.» The letters of this script are small, elongated, and have sharp corners. (Figure 4) Following the eminent paleographer Izmail Sreznevsky, Ivan Kamanin called this writing style «ustav cursive» (second half of the 15th century - mid-16th century). Mitchenko (2018)

— Second Period: German and Polish Gothic writing influenced this script. Kamanin called this style «Gothic». We will call it transitional handwriting to baroque cursive (second half of the 16th century - beginning of the 17th century). Thus, a whole layer of Ukrainian Baroque culture emerged, absorbing all foreign influences. As a result, society received remarkable examples of national style across all forms of art, including cursive writing. Mitchenko (2018)

— Third Period: By the 18th century, cursive had become a fully developed writing system. It was used not only in administrative and legal documents but also in personal letters and literary works. Separate writing centers and schools formed in places like Kyiv, Lviv, Ostroh, and Lutsk, with a noticeable difference between Ukrainian and Russian cursive. The script was vertical, with a slight rightward slant, and the letters were closely connected.

— Fourth Period: With the development of printing and the spread of more standardized printed fonts in the 19th century, cursive gradually lost its importance. The introduction of the civil type (grazhdanka) replaced it in most official documents, and cursive was used less frequently (Ісиченко, І. Українське середньовіччя: культурні горизонти Київської Русі. Харків: Акта, 2000.) (Figure 4).

The development of printing in Ukraine is considered to have begun in the second half of the 16th century. Among the first books printed in Cyrillic were Ivan Fedorov's *The Apostle* and *The Primer*, both published in 1574 (from the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra Printing House and the Lviv Brotherhood Printing House). For many years, Ivan Fedorov was regarded as the official first printer in Ukrainian lands. There was also a belief that printing came to Ukraine from the Moscow state, but this is not the case. While not diminishing the role and significance of Fedorov in the development of printing, he cannot be considered the founder of Ukrainian printing but rather the initiator of permanent printing in Ukrainian territories.

Modern researchers have evidence that printing on Ukrainian territories appeared much earlier. Чабайовська (2022) The renowned Polish researcher Jerzy Bandtkie, in his study «The History of Printing Houses in the Kingdom of Poland, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and in Foreign Lands Where Polish Affairs Were Conducted,» while analyzing the origins of printing in Lviv, states: «Ivan Fedorov did not establish but rather revived the Ruthenian printing house here in 1573.» (Bandtkie, Jerzy Samuel, 1768–1835)

Peter I's Reform

At the beginning of the 18th century, Peter I initiated sweeping reforms aimed at modernizing state administration, military affairs, education, culture, and the writing system. The old Cyrillic script, with its ornamental, ecclesiastical forms, was too intricate for use in secular texts and administration. To make communication more efficient and unify the written word, the 1708 reform called for the creation of a simplified, standardized script adapted to meet new educational and scientific needs. Seeking to align Cyrillic more closely with Western European norms, Peter I drew inspiration from the Latin alphabet, particularly the typographic styles widely used in Western Europe at the time.

In late 1707, foreign specialists, including Dutch and German engravers, were brought in to develop the new «grazhdansky» (civil) typeface. This typeface had a much simpler appearance—free from excessive ornamentation and old Slavic ligatures, making it clearer and more functional. These changes reflected the influence of Western European fonts, particularly the Latin antiquas, revived in the works of Baskerville and Bodoni, who had created more legible variants of Roman fonts.

As a result of the reform, the number of characters was reduced from 45 to 38. Some old Greek and ustav characters were dropped. Punctuation marks were introduced, and the use of capital letters was standardized. Hyphenation of long Russian words was also an important new addition. (Vekshyna, 2022) Also, according to the spelling reform of 1708–1710, unnecessary letters were removed from the alphabet, including ω («ot,» omega), ψ («psi»), ξ («ksi»), s («zelo»), v («izhitsa»), and the letters Я («yus velikiy») and А («yus maliy») were finally eliminated. The letter E was introduced instead of ie, and the sporadically used letter Я was legalized in place of ia, among other changes. However, the letters ѿ («fita») and ѣ («yat») remained in the alphabet (Figures 5).

The introduction of the civil script had a profound impact on the development of Cyrillic typography. In Ukraine, this typeface became a symbol of imperial unification, as in 1721, Ukraine was fully integrated into the Russian Empire. The civil script, imposed as a modernization tool, also served as a means of appropriation: it rejected the richness and originality of the Ukrainian typographic tradition, replacing it with imperial norms. Thus, while the civil script represented a modern tradition for Russia, it symbolized a period of repression and lost cultural heritage for Ukraine.

Synthesis of Chapter

The historical development of Ukrainian Cyrillic reveals a profound and evolving legacy that reflects the nation's cultural, social, and political transformations over centuries. Key conclusions include:

— **Origins and Early Development:** Ukrainian Cyrillic's foundation lies in the medieval period, beginning with the introduction of Church Slavonic by Cyril and Methodius. The early scripts, including Glagolitic and Cyrillic, were heavily influenced by Greek writing systems but adapted to reflect the phonetic and linguistic needs of the Old Ukrainian language.

— **Significance of Uncial and Semi-Uncial:** The uncial and semi-uncial styles, as seen in artifacts like the Ostromir Gospel and the Peresopnytsia Gospel, demonstrate the meticulous artistry and functionality of early Ukrainian writing. These scripts bridged ecclesiastical purposes with the evolving literary and administrative needs of the time.

— **Emergence of Cursive and National Style:** By the 16th century, cursive writing emerged as a uniquely Ukrainian adaptation of Cyrillic. It transitioned from clerical use to become a widespread script, embodying national identity through its dynamic and expressive forms. The Baroque period further enriched this tradition, integrating foreign influences into a distinctly Ukrainian aesthetic.

— **Printing and the Role of Ivan Fedorov:** The advent of printing marked a transformative era, with Ivan Fedorov playing a pivotal role in standardizing and disseminating written texts. However, evidence suggests printing existed in Ukrainian territories before Fedorov, underlining the region's early embrace of typography.

— **Impact of Peter I's Reform:** The imposition of the civil script in the early 18th century under Peter I symbolized modernization for the Russian Empire but led to the suppression of Ukraine's typographic uniqueness. The reform streamlined the script for administrative purposes but at the cost of the richness and diversity of Ukrainian Cyrillic traditions.

— **Cultural Resilience:** Despite historical challenges, Ukrainian Cyrillic endured as a resilient symbol of national identity. Its adaptability allowed it to thrive in varying forms, from manuscript traditions to printed works, reflecting the cultural and historical narrative of Ukraine.

The historical evolution of Ukrainian Cyrillic underscores its role as both a practical writing system and a cultural artifact. Its journey from ecclesiastical roots to national expressions of identity highlights the interplay between artistic creativity and socio-political forces. These findings provide a critical foundation for understanding the modern revival and adaptation of Ukrainian Cyrillic in contemporary typography and digital design.

Reinterpretation of Ukrainian Fonts XX: Revival Period

The 19th and 20th centuries in Ukrainian history can be characterized as the period of the active fight for the future and development of national identity and the culture, language and literature, the Cyrillic script. This period was characterized by Ukrainians' desire to fight against the policies of such empires that aimed to Russify Ukrainians.

For my comparative study, I have selected several important Ukrainian designers whose works formed the foundation of Ukrainian identity in the typography of the twentieth century. While there are many outstanding Ukrainian graphic artists throughout history, this research will focus specifically on Heorhiy Narbut, Vasyl Krychevskyi, Yakiv Hnizdovsky. These designers not only made significant contributions to the graphic culture of their time but also paved the way for the evolution and reinterpretation of Ukrainian typography.

I chose these three artists because Narbut laid the foundation for Ukrainian graphics and book design, creating a national style rooted in Ukraine's cultural heritage. Krychevskyi became one of the founders of Ukrainian modernism in graphic design, establishing the visual identity of an independent Ukraine. Yakiv Hnizdovsky's contribution lies in popularizing Ukrainian art on the global stage and developing a recognizable personal style that blends Ukrainian and international artistic traditions.

The origins of typographic art in Ukraine are linked to the work of two prominent artists — Heorhiy Narbut and Vasyl Krychevskyi, who were among the founders of the Ukrainian Academy of Arts (Mitchenko, 2018). In the 20th century, Ukrainian graphic artists began to reinterpret Ukrainian fonts. In the 1920s, during the cultural revival following the establishment of the Ukrainian People's Republic (1917–1921), (Wikipedia, 2024) Cyrillic script became a symbol of national resurgence. Artists actively utilized it in artistic fonts and posters, initiating experiments with letterforms.

Heorhiy Narbut



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Figure 6: Heorhiy Narbut.

*Source: Wikipedia contributors. (2025, January 30).
Heorhiy Narbut. Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/
wiki/Heorhiy_Narbut](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heorhiy_Narbut)*

Heorhiy Narbut (February 25, 1886 – May 23, 1920) was born on the Narbutivka farmstead near Hlukhiv, in the Sumy region of Ukraine. From 1906 to 1917, he lived in St. Petersburg, where he studied under renowned artists Ivan Bilibin and Mstislav Dobuzhinsky, later refining his skills in Munich at Simon Hollósy's school. In 1917, Narbut moved to Kyiv, where he became a professor and rector of the Ukrainian Academy of Arts. He died of typhus, but during his short life, he created unique typefaces for government documents and banknotes, blending modernism with elements of early printed books. (Mozhyna, Marchela. 2020. Facebook)

Narbut's typographic designs stand out for their bold innovation. One of his hallmarks was his refreshing experimentation with letterforms: serifs (especially asymmetric) were common in his typefaces. A notable highlight of his work, for instance, is adaptation of the Latin «N» which he creatively adapted into his rendering of the Cyrillic alphabet. In addition, his approach added a sense of movement and vibrancy, and his work was eye-catching in the midst of a period highlighted by more formal and static designs (Figure 7).

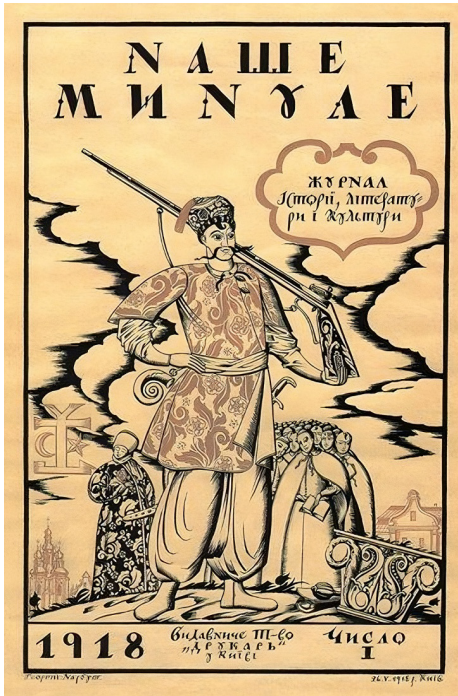


Figure 7.1

Figure 7: An example of the use of the Latin «N».

Source: Mozhyha, Marchela. 2020. "Шрифтові Знадібки." Facebook. Retrieved December 3, 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10215693245620379&set=oa.515476865822319>).

Heorhiy Narbut incorporated the Latin letter «Z» into Cyrillic typefaces, showcasing his innovative approach to stylization (2). While similar forms might have been recognizable from traditional ustav or cursive scripts, closer parallels can be observed in minuscule or italic styles (1, 3, 4). This integration was part of his broader experiments aimed at enriching Cyrillic typography with novel decorative elements (Figure 8).

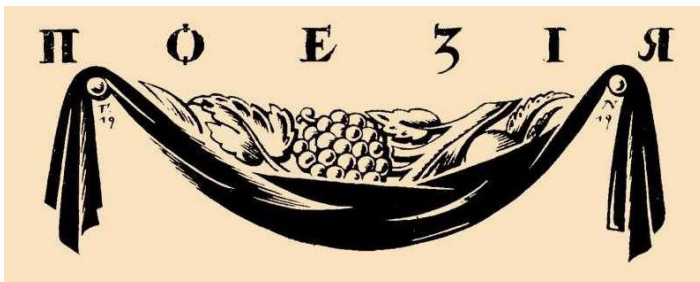


Figure 8.1



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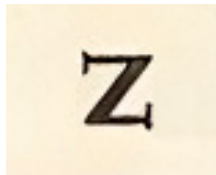


Figure 8.2



Figure 8.3

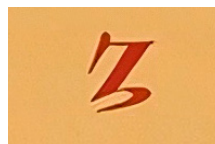
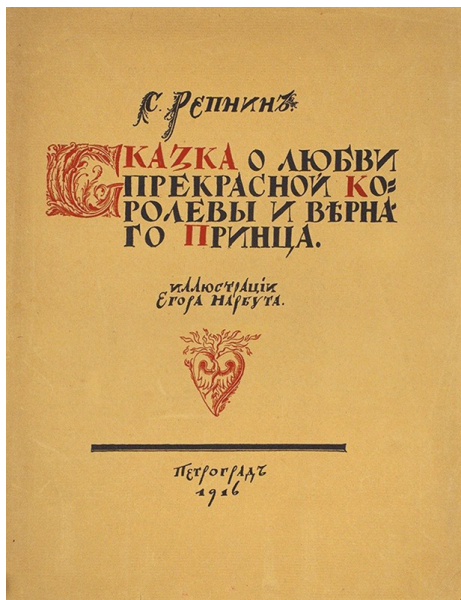


Figure 8.4

Figure 8: An example of the use of the Latin "Z".

Source: Mozhyuna, Marchela. 2020. "Шрифтові Знадібки." Facebook. Retrieved December 3, 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10215693245620379&set=oa.515476865822319>).

Heorhiy Narbut often used the letter «З» in the classical Cyrillic tradition, but with his distinctive stylization. Instead of the standard representation of this letter, he added decorative elements, particularly embellishing it with serifs that had thin, curved ends. (Figure 9)

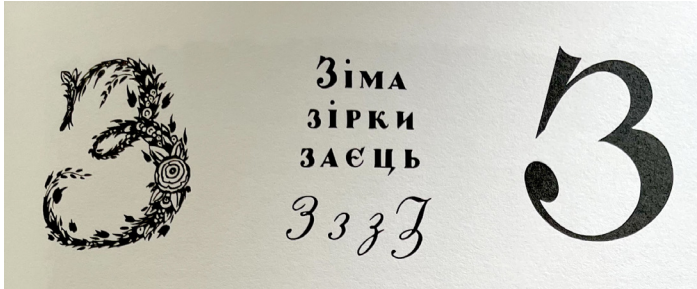


Figure 9: An example of «З».

Source: Mozhyzna, Marchela. 2020. "Шрифтові Знахідки." Facebook. Retrieved December 3, 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10215693245620379&set=oa.515476865822319>).

The letter «А» is distinctive in Narbut's typefaces. The horizontal stroke is often rendered with varying thicknesses and positioned noticeably higher or lower than usual, creating a visually striking effect (1, 2). Instead of using a straight line, Narbut frequently employed a curved or angled stroke — a technique influenced by Art Deco aesthetics (3). Additionally, he designed an uppercase letter based on the shape of the lowercase «а» (4), a deliberate choice to distinguish his work and imbue it with a unique identity (Figure 10).

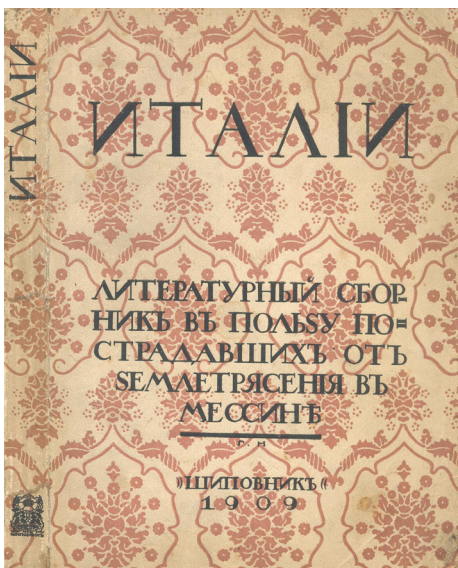
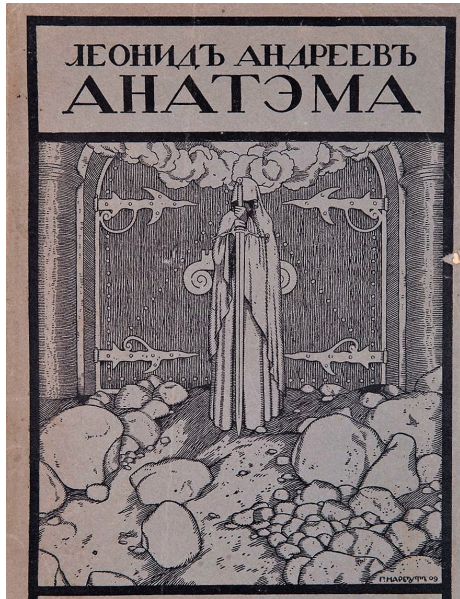


Figure 10.1



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Figure 10.2



Figure 10.3



Figure 10.4

Figure 10: An example of «А».

Source: Mozhyua, Marchela. 2020. "Шрифтові Знадібки." Facebook. Retrieved December 3, 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10215693245620379&set=oa.515476865822319>).

The letter «К» also caught my attention, as it was frequently emphasized by Heorhii Narbut in his typefaces. In many cases, this letter resembles classical sans-serif typography (1), featuring characteristic teardrop terminals and a curved lower leg that adds an element of refinement.

However, in other variations, its execution reveals a pronounced decorative approach. Narbut experimented with the form, incorporating slanted cuts (2), delicate serifs, and smooth curves (3) that made the «К» not only visually appealing but also unique. (Figure 11)

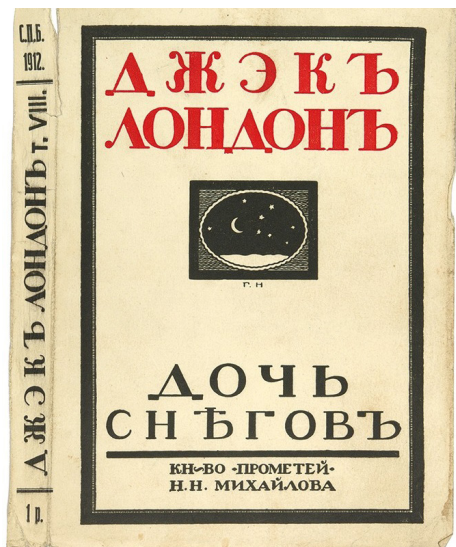


Figure 11.1

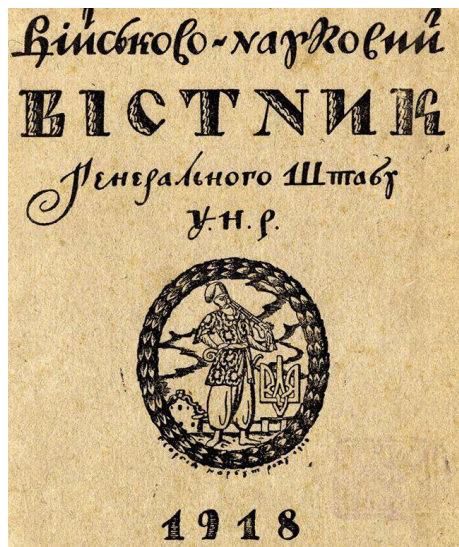


Figure 11.2

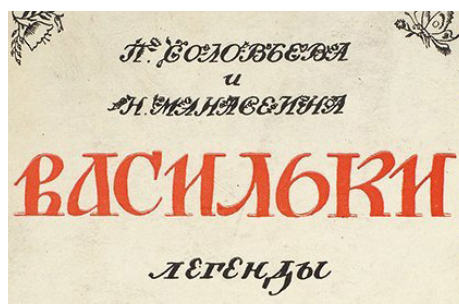


Figure 11.3

Figure 11: An example of «К».

Source: Mozhyna, Marchela. 2020. "Шрифтові Знадібки." Facebook. Retrieved December 3, 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10215693245620379&set=oa.515476865822319>).

Heorhii Narbut drew inspiration from intriguing Baroque elements and dynamic, stylistic features that defined the character of his unique Ukrainian typefaces. His reference to Ukrainian manuscripts and old prints from the 16th–18th centuries provided the fertile ground on which his artistic talent blossomed (Дудник, n.d.) (Figure 12).

Figure 12: A page from the Peresopnytsia Gospel (1556–1561) and the diploma of Professor of Graphics from the Ukrainian Academy of Arts awarded to H. I. Narbut in 1920.

Source: Дудник, І. (n.d.-с). Шрифт Дмитра Растворцева «Нарбуторум». <https://cyreading.blogspot.com/2015/01/blog-post.html>



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During the challenging times of war and devastation from 1917 to 1920, the artist was creating a new Ukrainian style, masterfully reinterpreting the finest examples of the past. In just three years of tireless work, he left us with a vast typographic legacy that set the tone for the entire following decade and continues to be developed and reinterpreted today. (Дудник, n.d.)

Vasyl Krychevskyi



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Figure 13: Vasyl Krychevskyi.

Source: Wikipedia contributors. (2024a, October 31). Vasyl Krychevsky. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vasyl_Krychevsky

Vasyl Krychevskyi (January 12, 1873 – November 15, 1952) was a Ukrainian artist, architect, graphic designer, art historian, and educator. He was born on January 12, 1873, in the village of Vorozhba (now Sumy region, Ukraine). He was self-taught in art and became a renowned architect, artist, graphic designer, and decorator. After World War II, he emigrated, first to Europe and later to the United States, where he passed away on November 15, 1952. His work had a significant impact on Ukrainian art and architecture.

His typefaces are notable for their decorative qualities. Krychevskyi also often added miniature ornaments to the letters, such as drops resembling flower petals, curves, or geometric shapes. His work reflects the search for a national style, characteristic of Ukrainian graphic design during the era of cultural revival (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Example of Vasily Krichevsky's work.

Source: Mozhynda, Marchela. 2020. "Шрифтові Знадібки." Facebook. Retrieved December 3, 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10215693245620379&set=oa.515476865822319>).



In the works of Vasyl Hryhorovych Krychevsky, the letter «У» (Figure 15) stands out with its elegant, curved, rounded tail, which became not only a distinctive feature of his typographic style but also a kind of signature in his designs. This design choice lent the letter sophistication and dynamism, seamlessly integrating it into the overall composition. This approach is rather well illustrated in his work done for banknotes where this feature fitted perfectly into the other ornamental elements underlining the elegance and the national identity of the typefaces.

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Figure 15: Example of Vasily Krichevsky's work.

Source: Mozhyta, Marchela. 2020. "Шрифтові Знахідки." Facebook. Retrieved December 3, 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10215693245620379&set=oa.515476865822319>).

One of the distinctive features of Vasyl Hryhorovych Krychevsky's work was his masterful use of ligatures. He skillfully combined letters, enhancing not only the aesthetic appeal of the typefaces but also creating a sense of unity and harmony in textual compositions (Figure 16).

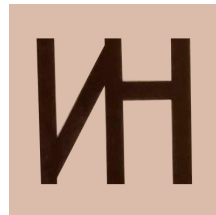
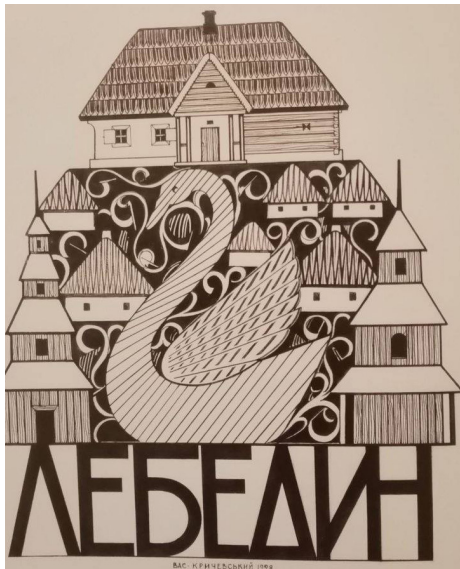


Figure 16.1: Combination of the letters «И» and «Н».

Figure 16: Vasyl Hryhorovych Krychevskyi, 1928.

Source: Mozhyzna, Marchela. 2020. "Шрифтові Знадібки." Facebook. Retrieved December 3, 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10215693245620379&set=oa.515476865822319>).



Figure 17.1: Combination of the letters «П» and «Е».

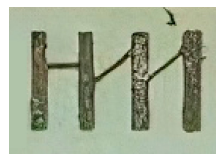


Figure 17.2: Combination of the letters «Н», «И» and «Й».

Figure 17: Vasyl Hryhorovych Krychevskyi, 1918 Kyiv.

Source: Mozhyzna, Marchela. 2020. "Шрифтові Знадібки." Facebook. Retrieved December 3, 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10215693245620379&set=oa.515476865822319>).

A notable feature of his work was the play with letter proportions in his compositions. He often reduced the size of the letters «O», «C» and combined wide letters with narrow ones, shifting the horizontal axis (Figure 16, 17).

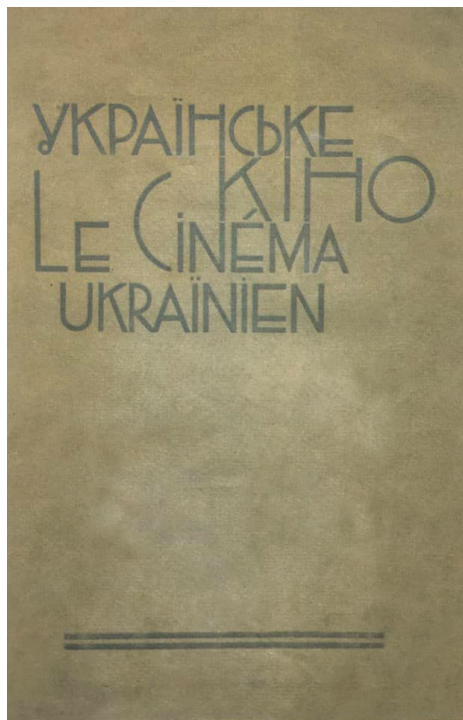


Figure 16: Vasyl Hryhorovych Krychevskyi, 1928 Kyiv.

Source: Mozhyzna, Marchela. 2020. "Шрифтові Знадівки." Facebook. Retrieved December 3, 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10215693245620379&set=oa.515476865822319>).

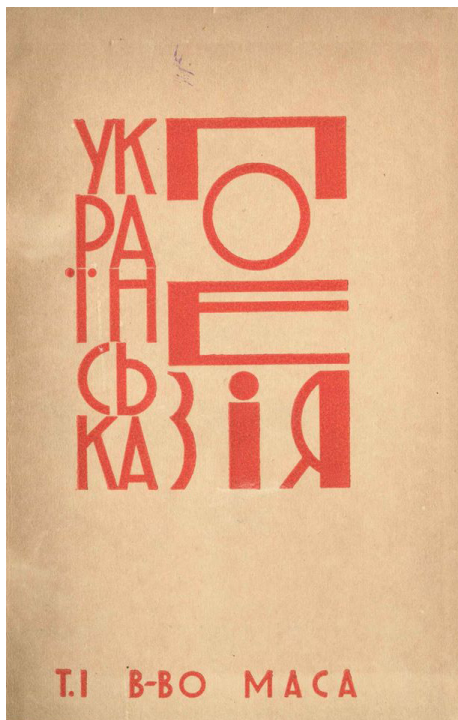


Figure 17: Vasyl Hryhorovych Krychevskyi, 1930 Kyiv.

Source: Mozhyzna, Marchela. 2020. "Шрифтові Знадівки." Facebook. Retrieved December 3, 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10215693245620379&set=oa.515476865822319>).

Some works include Greek letters, such as the Greek sigma and zeta «Z» (Figure 18) shown here. While the «C» shaped form was more common in Cyrillic, the «Σ» (sigma) form has been used as an alternative throughout history. (Yana Vekshyna)

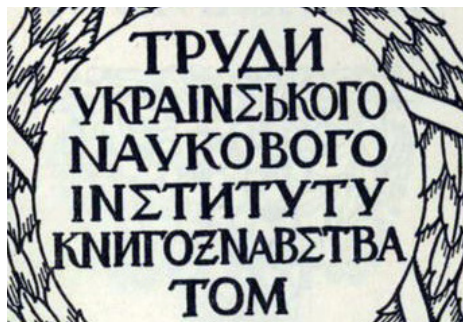


Figure 18: Vasyl Hryhorovych Krychevskyi, 1926 Kyiv.

Source: Mozhyzna, Marchela. 2020. "Шрифтові Знадівки." Facebook. Retrieved December 3, 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10215693245620379&set=oa.515476865822319>).

In this example, we return to the letter «Y» where the ligature «Oy» (Figure 18.1) is clearly visible, allowing us to trace the origins of the early Cyrillic alphabet. Over time, this ligature evolved into a distinct symbol, the modern «Y»



Figure 18.1: Cyrillic letter monograph «Oy».



Figure 18.2

Figure 18: Book covers by M. Hrushevsky «National Cultural Movement» (1912).

Source: Mozhyzna, Marchela. 2020. "Шрифтові Знадібки." Facebook. Retrieved December 3, 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10215693245620379&set=oa.515476865822319>).

Studying the works of Vasyl Krychevsky in the process of the formation of Ukrainian typography, it can be stated that he is one of the originators of the national typographic culture. His attitude to type design was traditional Ukrainian yet he did not shun from novelty, using history combined with modern styles of the period that he was working in.

Vasyl Hryhorovych Krychevskyi was a prominent Ukrainian architect, artist, and graphic designer who made a significant contribution to the development of Ukrainian culture and art. (Вікімедіа, 2025)

His legacy is an inexhaustible source of inspiration for contemporary artists who, building upon his achievements, continue to develop Ukrainian printing culture. His fonts are part of our cultural heritage, deserving preservation and popularization. (Рубан, 2004)

Yakiv Hnizdovsky



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Figure 20: Vasyl Krychevskiy.

Source: Wikipedia-Autoren. (n.d.). Datei:Hnizdovsky TrinityChurch.jpg – Wikipedia. https://de.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Hnizdovsky_TrinityChurch.jpg

Yakiv Hnizdovsky (January 1915 – November 8, 1985) was born on January 27, 1915, in the village of Pylypche, now Ternopil Oblast, Ukraine. In 1933, he began studying at the Lviv Theological Seminary. Thanks to the support of Andrey Sheptytsky, he studied at the Warsaw Academy of Arts in 1938. In 1939, he continued his education at the Zagreb Academy of Arts. In 1945–1946, he lived in a displaced persons camp near Munich, staying there until 1949. In 1949, he moved to the United States, settling in Saint Paul, Minnesota. In 1950, he relocated to New York City. From 1956 to 1958, he honed his skills in Paris. He passed away on November 8, 1985, in New York City. (Mozhyna, Marchela. 2020. Facebook)

Yakiv Hnizdovsky is well-known as a talented graphic artist and painter thanks to numerous publications, his typographic legacy is still awaiting its researcher. This lack of research is likely due to the complexities of his life associated with emigration, as well as the limited attention given by specialists to his typefaces and typographic contributions.

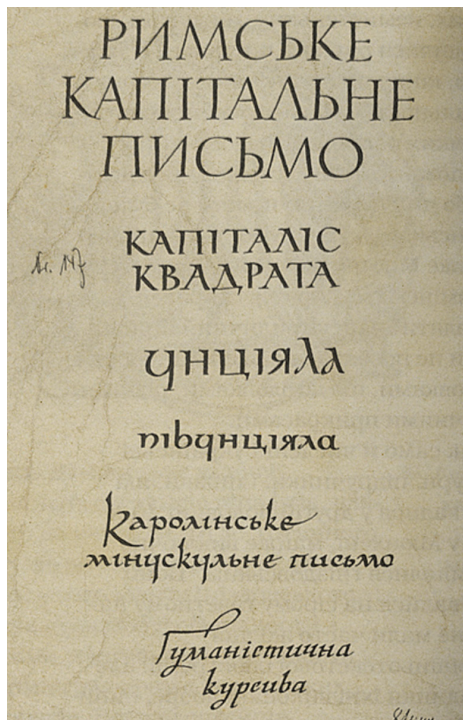
Hnizdovsky did not bypass such a technique as *vyaz* (Figure 19), turning letters into exquisite ornaments. In the later period of his work, he was increasingly attracted to the geometry of letters, and he began to pay more attention to texture than form. (Shum Gallery, 2024b)



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Figure 19: Yakiv Hnizdovsky, 1958, New York

Source: Mozhyha, Marchela. 2020. "Шрифтові Знадібки." Facebook. Retrieved December 3, 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10215693245620379&set=oa.515476865822319>).



He has an excellent knowledge of typographic history. In the image, we see inscriptions in various historical scripts, which the artist mastered perfectly, showcasing his graphic expertise. He meticulously reproduces the distinctive features of each style, paying close attention to letterforms, proportions, line thickness, slant angles, and more. This reflects his deep understanding of letter structures and their aesthetic value (Figure 20).

Figure 20: Inscriptions in various historical handwritings. Historical fonts. 1948.

Source: Дудник, І. (п. д. - а). Гніздовський (5 майстрів українського шрифтового стилю). <https://cyreading.blogspot.com/2015/08/5.html>

44

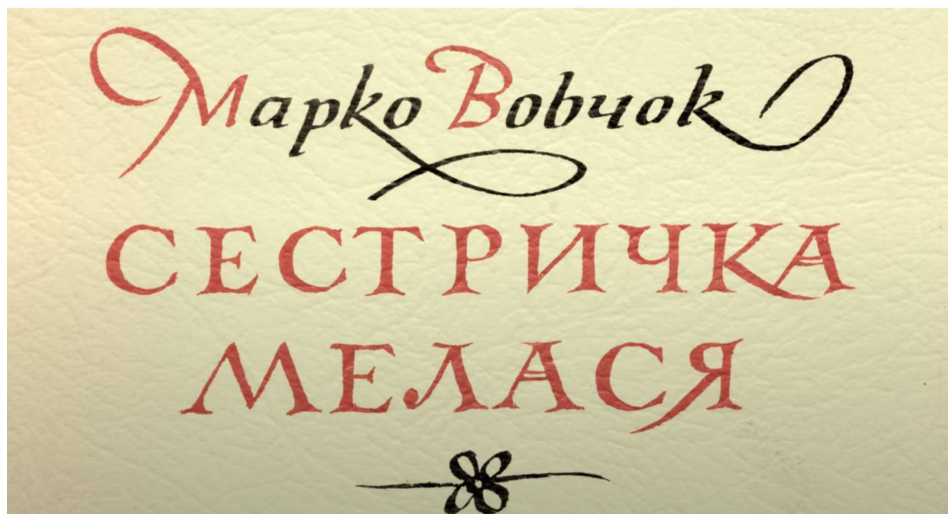


Figure 21: Yakiv Hnizdovsky 1966.

Source: Mozhyuna, Marchela. 2020. "Шрифтові Знадібки." Facebook. Retrieved December 3, 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10215693245620379&set=oa.515476865822319>).

Hnizdovsky utilizes the medieval technique of repeating horizontal elements, which can be observed in ancient manuscripts.



Figure 22: Yakiv Hnizdovsky 1947 Munich. Letters «Н» and «А».

Source: Mozhyzna, Marchela. 2020. "Шрифтові Знахідки." Facebook. Retrieved December 3, 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10215693245620379&set=oa.515476865822319>).

In the example of the letters «Н» and «А» (Figure 22), we can see the use of two horizontal crossbars. Hnizdovsky applies this approach in his projects, favoring the variant with two horizontal strokes. This design adds a historical touch and introduces a certain Romanesque flavor, while still retaining echoes of Renaissance motifs.

He often used flourishes and lines in his works, which conveyed his unique style and recognizability (Figure 23, 24).

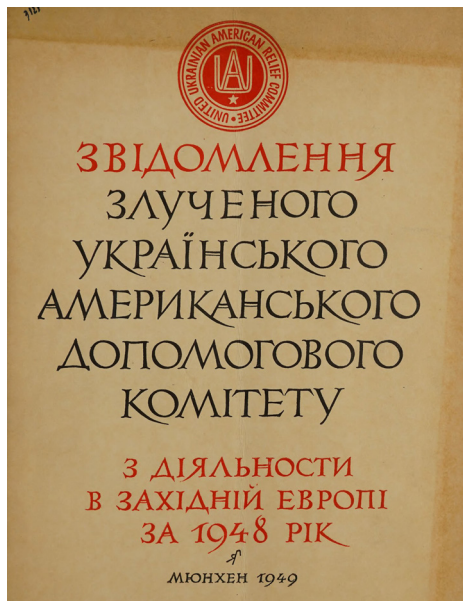


Figure 23: Yakiv Hnizdovsky 1949, Munich.

Source: Mozhyzna, Marchela. 2020. "Шрифтові Знахідки." Facebook. Retrieved December 3, 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10215693245620379&set=oa.515476865822319>).

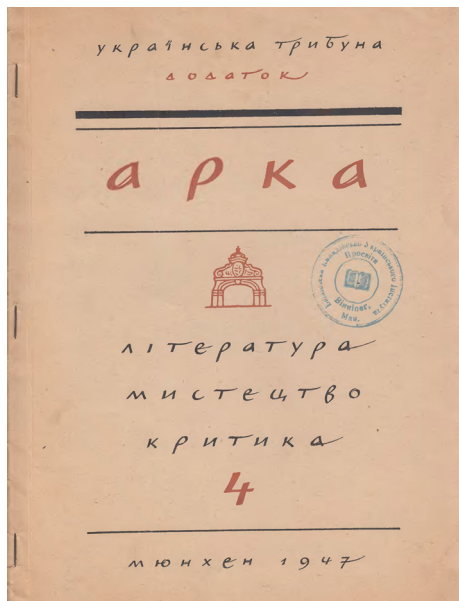


Figure 24: Yakiv Hnizdovsky 1947, Munich.

Source: Mozhyzna, Marchela. 2020. "Шрифтові Знахідки." Facebook. Retrieved December 3, 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10215693245620379&set=oa.515476865822319>).

In Hnizdovsky's work, a significant collection of projects related to typographic compositions has been preserved. In these works, he gradually transitions to a geometric and ornamental understanding of letters, where he sometimes focuses more on texture than on the form of typographic elements (Figure 25, 26). This phenomenon is particularly intriguing, as his fascination with natural textures is reflected in his type designs and compositions.

Hnizdovsky's ornamental approach is evident in his use of horizontal and vertical elements, which create a kind of "fence" structure that shapes the typographic composition. This technique lends his work a unique character and distinct expressiveness.

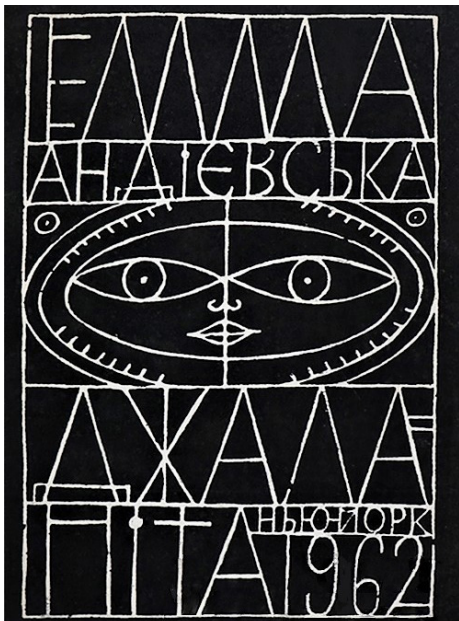


Figure 25: Yakiv Hnizdovsky 1962. New York.

Source: Mozhyna, Marchela. 2020. "Шрифтові Знадібки." Facebook. Retrieved December 3, 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10215693245620379&set=oa.515476865822319>).

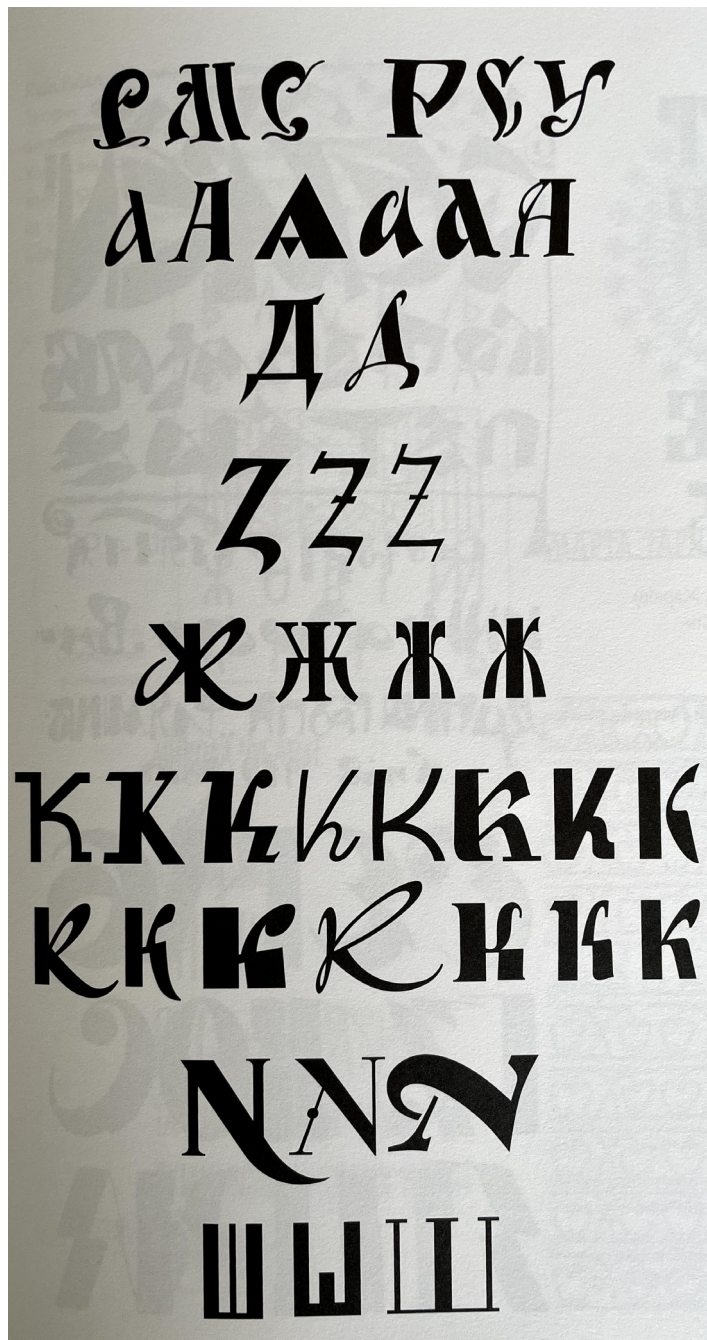


Figure 26: Yakiv Hnizdovsky 1971. Munich.

Source: Mozhyna, Marchela. 2020. "Шрифтові Знадібки." Facebook. Retrieved December 3, 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10215693245620379&set=oa.515476865822319>).

Yakiv Hnizdovsky is a prominent figure in 20th-century Ukrainian art. His unique work not only enriched global artistic culture but also showcased how harmoniously Ukrainian traditions can integrate into the international art scene. He serves as a vivid example of how national identity can influence the development of art on a global scale.

This image showcases variations of Cyrillic letterforms collected by Vitaliy Mitchenko, created by artists of the 20th century. These forms reflect experiments with geometry, contrast, line dynamics, and ornamental elements characteristic of the graphic art of that period (Figure 27).



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Figure 27: Variants of letterforms by Ukrainian designers in the early 20th century.

Source: Mitchenko, V. (2018). *Каліграфія, взаємовпливи шрифтів: теорія і практика, кирилиця і латиниця, історія і сучасність.*

Soviet Ukraine Period

The influence of the Soviet period on the development of Ukrainian Cyrillic writing is marked by contradictory trends. The policy of unifying visual styles, enforced by Soviet authorities, led to the implementation of standardized typefaces in the printed materials of all union republics, regardless of the thematic focus or national characteristics of the publications. This process negatively affected Ukrainian typography, resulting in the partial loss of its unique features.

The typographic solutions of this period were often ideologically charged and predominantly used for the design of propaganda materials. Such policies severely restricted the creative potential of graphic artists and designers by imposing rigid standards of design. (Лариса, 2025b)

However, despite the ideological control and censorship, Ukrainian artists managed to preserve opportunities for creative self-expression and maintaining national identity. They developed original typefaces that, despite the overarching influence of Soviet trends, retained distinctive features and reflected Ukrainian cultural identity.

Thus, the Soviet period in the history of Ukrainian Cyrillic writing represents an ambiguous chapter. On the one hand, it saw processes of standardization and unification, which undermined certain aspects of national uniqueness. On the other hand, Ukrainian artists continued to develop the traditions of Ukrainian typography, adapting them to the constraints of the era. (Кирилізація В СРСР — Вікіпедія, 2023)

Post-Soviet to Modern Ukrainian Typography

After the declaration of independence on August 24, 1991, Ukraine began the process of reviving its national identity, including reforms in the field of language. (Yarmoshchuk, 2023)

After the collapse of the USSR, Ukrainian designers were able to turn to their national heritage and create fonts based on the traditions of Ukrainian manuscript and print culture and with the advent of the digital font era, we were able to develop our own fonts for the first time on the basis of market competition, but there was one problem. Due to the centralized nature, Moscow inherited most of the font base of the Soviet Union. This former center continued (21st Century Ukrainian Society and Fonts, n.d.) by habit, to attract people and resources. Therefore, the independent development of Ukrainian fonts and competition with Moscow for the Cyrillic market began in the most unequal conditions.

After the restoration of independence, there was actually no graphic design in Ukraine. (Sadko, 2024b)

During this period, font design in Ukraine was a relatively isolated field, without developed professional communities or platforms for sharing experience. This is confirmed by the fact that in the early 2000s, there was a serious problem with fonts in Ukrainian graphic design, especially with the availability or quality of Cyrillic. There was no font education, competitions, exhibitions, festivals, or a font community. In essence, there were several font enthusiasts who created something. (Admin, 2020)

During this period, only one type foundry operated in Ukraine — 2D Typo. The Ukrainian type community began to actively develop in 2004. Until that time, typography in Ukraine was a relatively isolated sphere, without strong design networks or specialized platforms for exchanging knowledge and experience.

At that time, the social network LiveJournal (abbreviated as LJ or ZhZh in the Ukrainian-speaking environment) was very popular in the post-Soviet space. It was a collective blog where people could discuss certain topics, share ideas and form virtual communities of interest (Figure 28).

50

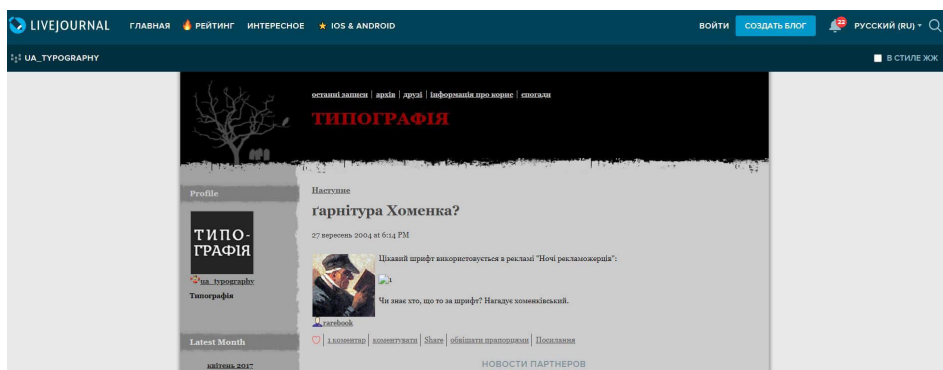


Figure 28: The Website Page of LiveJournal.

Source: Admin. (2020, November 10). Шрифтовий стрибок: як розвивався шрифтовий дизайн в Україні останні 20 років. *Telegraf — Журнал Дизайнерів*. <https://telegraf.design/shryftovyy-strybok-yak-rozvyvavsya-shryftovyy-dyzajn-v-ukrayini-za-ostanni-20-rokiv/?utm-source=chatgpt.com>

An important event for the development of Ukrainian typography was the creation of the «ua-typography» community in LiveJournal, initiated by art historian Ihor Dudnyk. For several years, this online space became the main platform for discussing issues related to Ukrainian fonts and calligraphy. (Admin, 2020)

Ihor Dudnyk is an art historian who played an important role in popularizing Ukrainian typographic culture. He brought together designers, artists, and enthusiasts interested in the history and development of Ukrainian type. His initiative contributed to the study and creation of new Ukrainian typefaces that reflected national identity, and not just repeated Russian or general Cyrillic fonts (Dudnyk, n.d.)

During the Soviet era, Ukrainian typography did not have autonomous development, since standards were set in Moscow, and font design was unified for the entire USSR. After gaining independence in 1991, a process of revival of national identity began in Ukraine, particularly in typography.

The creation of the «ua-typography» community became a symbol of a new stage in the development of Ukrainian fonts, which later led to the emergence of independent Ukrainian type foundries, such as AlfaBravo alfabravo.design and Kyiv Type Foundry kyivtypefoundry.com. Today, these studios create modern fonts that reflect the unique cultural heritage of Ukraine.

A significant impetus for the use of fonts, the awareness of their role and expressiveness was the rise of national consciousness, particularly during the Orange Revolution of 2004. (Mass protests in Ukraine against the falsification of the results of the 2004 presidential elections. The name comes from the orange color, which was the symbol of the opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko). More font designers appeared in Ukraine. Ukrainian typographers and designers began to cooperate more actively with foreign colleagues, organize international conferences and participate in competitions. (Sadko, 2024b) This led to an interest in typography, new studios began to appear, the first font events, festivals, which greatly helped development. Over time, designers appeared who occupied various niches of the font market. In 2006, the first meeting of Ukrainian type designers and calligraphers, «Shriftoblok,» took place in Kharkiv. The following year, Oleksiy Chekal organized the inaugural «Cyrillic Festival» at the Kharkiv State Academy of Design and Arts (Figure 29). The event featured lectures, workshops, and exhibitions. (Admin, 2020)

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Figure 29: Festival «Cyrillic Holiday».

Source: Admin. (2020, November 10). Шрифтовий стрибок: як розвивався шрифтовий дизайн в Україні останні 20 років. *Telegraf* — Журнал Дизайнерів. https://telegraf.design/shryftovyy-strybok-yak-rozvyvavsvya-shryftovyy-dyzajn-v-ukrayini-za-ostanni-20-rokiv/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Another step towards the development of Ukrainian fonts and typography was the fact that in 2004, on the occasion of the Independence Day of Ukraine, Vasyl Chebanyk (1933-2025) Ukrainian graphic artist, book illustrator, teacher, author of the Ruthenia alphabetical graphics. First publicly presented a new version of the Ukrainian alphabet. It still remains to be fully realized what Vasyl Yakovych Chebanyk has done for art and Ukrainian identity. Drawings, engravings, typefaces... Chebanik has joined the ranks of great Ukrainian predecessors such as Heorhiy Narbut, Vasyl Krychevsky, and Volodymyr Yurchyshyn (Ukrainian graphic designers 20th century) (Figure 30).

Figure 30: Vasyl Chebanyk.

*Source: Instagram. (n.d.), March 16, 2025
<https://www.instagram.com/p/DHQAKeFCOUG/>*



In the 2010s, several calligraphy schools were established, the most famous of which was the «ArtiYA» Calligraphy School (Sadko, 2024c) (Figure 31).

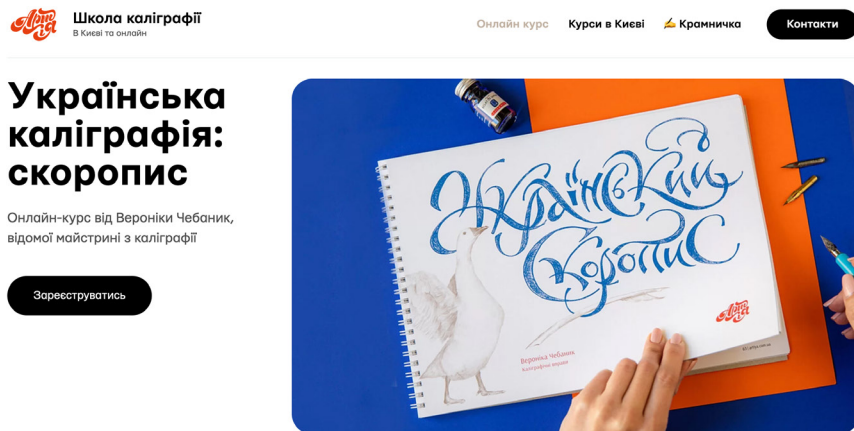


Figure 31: The Website Page of ArtiYA.

Source: Школа «Арт і Я»: навчання каліграфії в Києві та онлайн. (n.d.). Арт і Я. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220724141817/https://www.artiya.school/>

Subsequently, a platform specializing in Cyrillic fonts emerged, contributing to the development of Ukrainian typefaces. Rentafont, established in 2013, became the first international marketplace prioritizing Cyrillic fonts. They were the first to offer font rentals, making the use of fonts developed in Ukraine significantly more accessible than purchasing a license (Rentafont – Rent and Buy Fonts, n.d.) (Figure 32).

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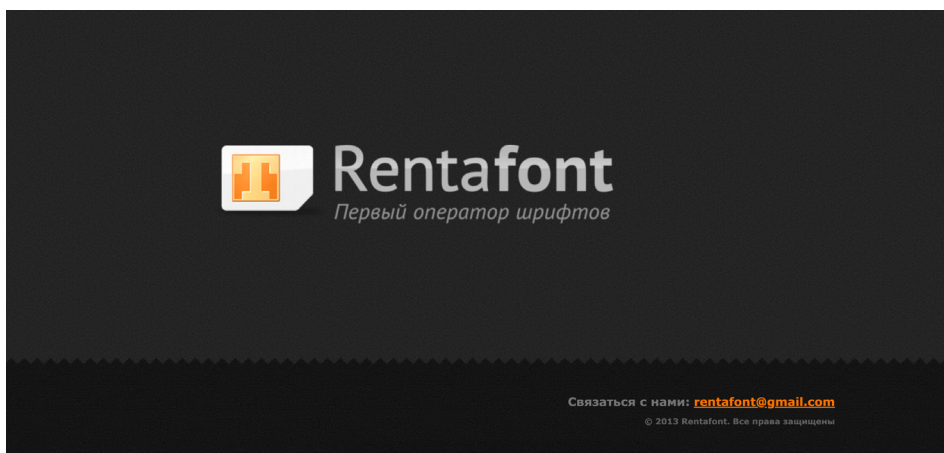


Figure 32: The Website Page Rentafont 2013.

Source: Rentafont. (n.d.). <https://web.archive.org/web/20130616065001/https://rentafont.com/>

If from 2000 to 2015, examples of font development for Ukrainian clients could be counted on one hand, over the past years, their total number has significantly increased. Cities, large and small companies, games, books, magazines, and more have acquired their own fonts. Among them is «Ukraine Now»—the official font for Ukraine’s national brand (Figure 33).



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Figure 33: Ermilov Bold. Official font for the national brand of Ukraine. 2018

Source: Ermilov Bold font for web & desktop on Rentafont. (n.d.). <https://rentafont.com/fonts/ermilov/bold>

NAMU – font for the National Art Museum of Ukraine (Figure 34).

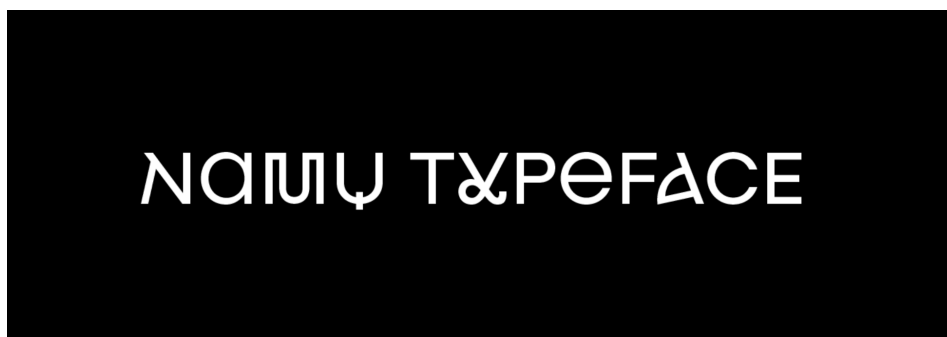


Figure 34: Namu Pro by Dmitry Rastvortsev. 2018.

Source: Behance. (n.d.-b). <https://www.behance.net/gallery/85172675/NAMU-typefaces>

The e-Ukraine typeface is «Ukrainian Helvetica». This font family is used by all state authorities of Ukraine and has become the basis of the state’s visual style online (Figure 35).

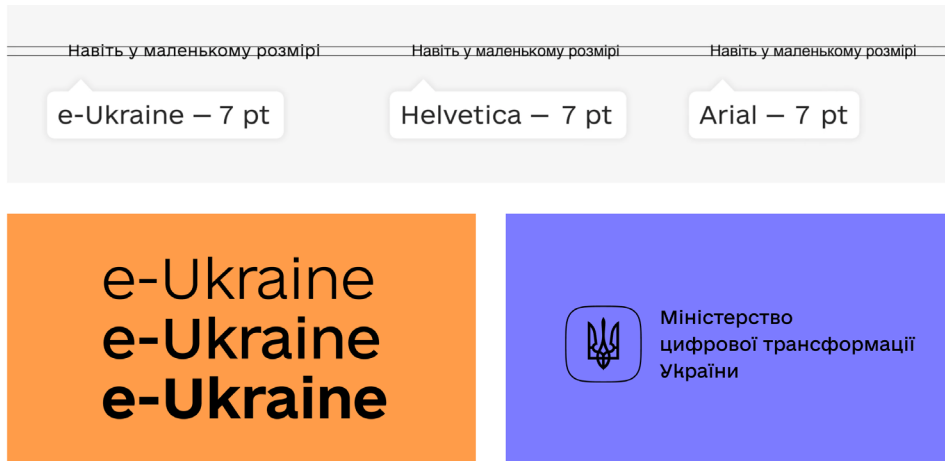


Figure 35: e-Ukraine, Dmitry Rastvortsev. 2019.

Source: Шрифт цифрової держави. (n.d.). <https://thedigital.gov.ua/fonts>

The typeface designed for Ukrainian road signage (Figure 36).



Figure 36: Font Road UA by Andriy Konstantynov. 2021.

Source: Behance. (n.d.). <https://www.behance.net/gallery/111148997/Road-UA-typeface>

Over the years, Ukrainian cities such as Vinnytsia (Figure 37), Kharkiv (Figure 38), Mariupol (Figure 39), Kyiv (Figure 40).



Figure 37: Vinnytsia Old City. Dmitry Rastvortsev, 2019.

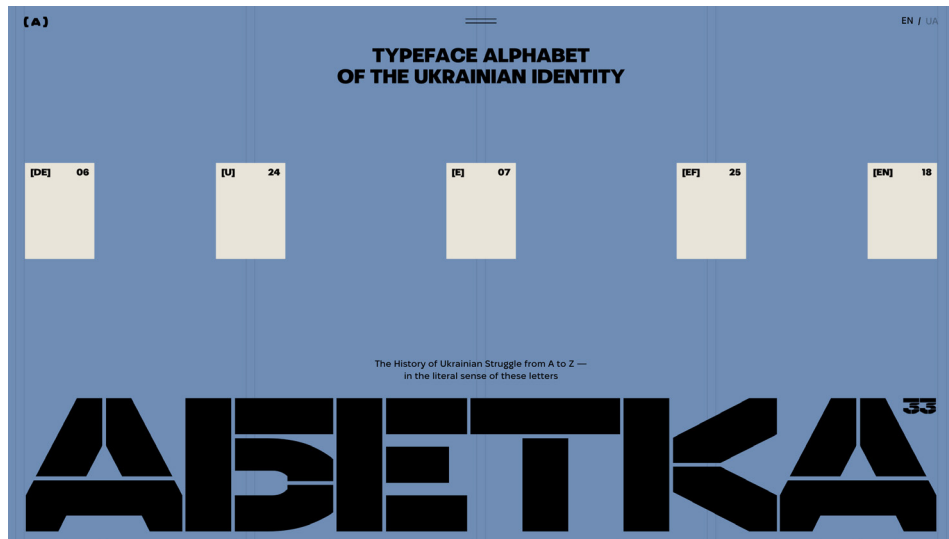
Source: Behance. (n.d.-c). <https://www.behance.net/gallery/85990493/Vinnytsia-Typefamily>

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Figure 38: Old Kharkiv. Bohdan Hdal (Bohdan Hdal), 2017.

Source: Old Kharkiv Font for web & desktop on Rentafont. (n.d.). <https://rentafont.com/fonts/old-kharkiv>



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Figure 41: Website page of the Font Alphabet of Ukrainian Identity. 33 fonts by modern Ukrainian designers. 2021.

Source: Typeface Alphabet of the Ukrainian identity. (n.d.). <https://abetkava.com/en/>

Typeface Alphabet of the Ukrainian Identity. The History of Ukrainian Struggle from A to Z (Figure 41).

In my opinion, all the presented works demonstrate the significant growth in the number of type designers, indicating active development in this field. Moreover, a new generation is emerging that combines advanced technologies with the rich history of Ukrainian design. They will contribute to the further development and promotion of Ukrainian type design on an international level.

Synthesis of Chapter

The study of Ukrainian typography in the 20th century demonstrates the significant role played by individual artists in shaping national identity through fonts. The period of national revival was crucial for the development of Ukrainian Cyrillic, where typographic experiments became part of cultural self-determination. The contributions of Heorhiy Narbut, Vasyl Krychevskiy, and Yakiv Hnizdovsky laid the foundation for modern Ukrainian typographic art.

Heorhiy Narbut expanded the boundaries of Cyrillic typography by experimenting with Latin influences and creating new letterforms that harmoniously combined elements of Ukrainian tradition and European modernism. His works established the graphic language of Ukrainian typography.

Vasyl Krychevskiy developed a national style in graphic design and architecture, using decorative elements characteristic of Ukrainian art. His works demonstrate a synthesis of tradition and innovative approaches in type design, particularly through the use of ornamental details and ligatures.

Yakiv Hnizdovsky applied a geometric approach to letterforms, allowing him to create unique compositions based on structure and texture. His ornamental solutions and use of historical scripts reflect a deep understanding of typographic culture. Furthermore, Hnizdovsky played a key role in popularizing Ukrainian art on the global stage. His graphic works, book illustrations, and typographic experiments gained international recognition, helping to establish Ukrainian visual culture as an integral part of world art.

The Soviet period imposed significant restrictions on the development of Ukrainian typography, standardizing fonts and stripping them of national characteristics. However, even under these conditions, Ukrainian designers found ways to preserve their graphic identity.

The attainment of independence in 1991 marked a new stage in the development of Ukrainian fonts. Gradual integration into the global design community, the creation of specialized platforms, increasing demand for Cyrillic fonts, and the expansion of digital technologies contributed to the flourishing of the field. Independent type foundries emerged, developing original Ukrainian typefaces that meet the contemporary challenges of graphic design.

Thus, Ukrainian typography has undergone a complex journey from experimentation and stylistic exploration to digital revival. Thanks to the efforts of artists and designers, modern Ukrainian typography has gained recognition both nationally and internationally.

Notable examples include presentations at international conferences such as “Ukrainian Type Design: Roots, Identity, Modernity” by Kateryna Korolevtseva at ATypl Paris 2023, as well as Oleksandra Korchevska’s presentations: “Why We Don’t Know Anything About the History of Ukrainian Design?” in 2023, and “Systematic to Parametric: Extracting Variable Design Principles from Ukrainian Type Heritage to Contemporary Fonts” in 2025 in Copenhagen.

This proves that typography is not only a technical means of conveying information but also an essential element of cultural identity that reflects historical processes and artistic traditions of Ukraine.

Modern Digital Fonts

The development of digital technologies has significantly influenced the field of type design. With the advent of interfaces, high-resolution screens, and new requirements for on-screen text readability, modern fonts have begun to serve not only aesthetic but also functional purposes. In the Ukrainian context, this is especially noticeable — new fonts combine contemporary design solutions with elements of visual culture and historical heritage.

In this section, I examine three examples of modern Ukrainian digital fonts: e-Ukraine, LevType Hryvnia, and Fixel. They were chosen for their representativeness of different directions in contemporary type design. For example, e-Ukraine serves as the official state typeface, focused on usability, accessibility, and recognizability. LevType Hryvnia is inspired by historical sources — in particular, the graphic design of early 20th-century Ukrainian banknotes. Fixel represents a more universal approach: it harmoniously blends geometric and humanist characteristics and is suitable for a wide range of applications.

Overall, these examples demonstrate how Ukrainian designers work at the intersection of history, culture, and modern technological demands. Through such projects, contemporary Ukrainian Cyrillic not only preserves its uniqueness but also gains new opportunities for adaptation in the digital environment.

e-Ukraine

The first typeface I will include in the research section on modern fonts will likely be the e-Ukraine font – the Typeface of Electronic Ukraine, also known as «Ukrainian Helvetica.» This typeface family is used by all government authorities of Ukraine and has become the foundation of the state’s visual identity on the Internet.

The font family consists of three sets, each serving a specific function and helping to maintain stylistic consistency in headlines, documents, announcements, brochures, and more. Due to its simple forms and distinctive letter structure, the font is modern and inclusive, ensuring accessibility for visually impaired users of government online services.

These letterforms incorporate traditional elements characteristic of Ukrainian graphic culture from the early 20th century, which, in turn, was partially influenced by the aesthetics of Ukrainian Baroque (Figure 42).

e-Ukraine

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Regular

Аа Бб Вв Гг Гґ Дд Ее
Єє Жж Зз Ии Іі Ії Йй
Кк Лл Мм Нн Оо Пп
Рр Сс Тт Уу Фф Хх
Цц Чч Шш Щщ Ъь
Юю Яя

Ukrainian alphabet e-Ukraine

*Figure 42: Ukrainian alphabet e-Ukraine
by Dmytro Rastvortsev.*

*Source: DIIA by fedoriv.agency.en — page 4. (n.d.). DiiA
by Fedoriv.agency.en. <https://diiA-en.fedoriv.com/4/>*

Some letters here absorbed the traditional forms of Ukrainian graphical culture of the beginning of the 20th century that partially inherited esthetics of Ukrainian baroque.

These letters are used to decorate the text of the main messages «У», «К», «Ж» (Figure 43).

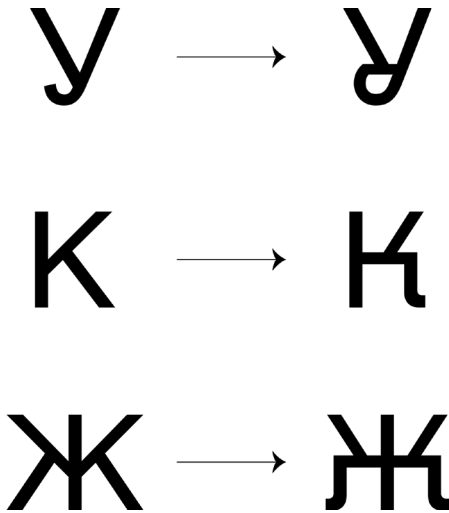


Figure 43: Decorative letters.

Source: DIIA by fedoriv.agency.en — page 4. (n.d.). Diia by Fedoriv.agency.en. <https://diia-en.fedoriv.com/4/>

In 2019 the new team of the new President took the decision to face reforms. They chose the digitalization of Ukraine, the transition to the online way of communication between a citizen and the state as one of the main reformation directions. The service “Diia” which is the application, web-portal, and brand of the digital country in Ukraine has been created as a result of cooperation of the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine, Fedoriv Marketing and Innovations Agency, Spiilka Design Buro (Rastvortsev, 2022) (Figure 44).

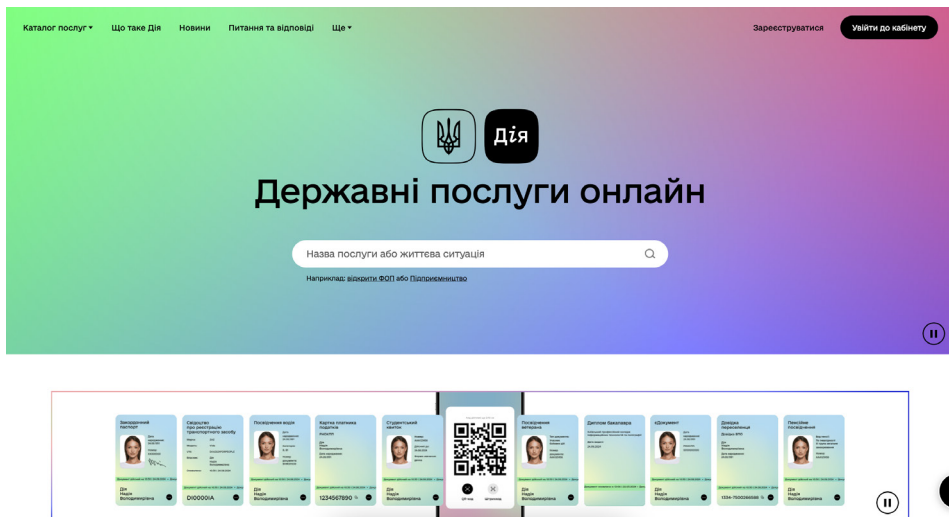


Figure 44: Website Diia — Government services online.

Source: DIIA by fedoriv.agency.en — page 4. (n.d.). Diia by Fedoriv.agency.en. <https://diia-en.fedoriv.com/4/>

It has two groups of typefaces. The first one provides the neutral typesetting; it has more widely spread graphemes of letters with higher readability. The second group (e-Ukraine Head) with its expressive Ukrainianness provides the display typesetting (Figure 45).

e-Ukraine Regular

АБВГГДЕЄЖЗИІЙКЛМНОПРСТУФХЦЧШЩЬЮЯ
абвггдеежзиіійклмнопрстуфхцчшщьюя
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

e-Ukraine Head Regular

АБВГГДЕЄЖЗИІЙКЛМНОПРСТУФХЦЧШЩЬЮЯ
абвггдеежзиіійклмнопрстуфхцчшщьюя
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

Figure 45: e-Ukraine and e-Ukraine Head.

Source: Rastvortsev, D. (2021, December 12). Растворцев про шрифти e-Ukraine - Dmytro Rastvortsev - Medium. Medium. <https://rastvortsev.medium.com>

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In the letters «К», «Ж», and «Я» (e-Ukraine Head), the author aimed to convey Ukrainian identity and references to Khomenko, Narbut, and Ukrainian type design (Figure 46). Some letters also have ascenders and descenders characteristic of Ukrainian handwritten script. This gives the typeface a unique flair and identity. (e-Ukraine (12 Font Styles) Fonts for Web & Desktop on Rentafont, n.d.) The typeface also includes the Ukrainian ampersand (the "ta" ligature), which corresponds to the Latin ampersand & (the "et" ligature). The Ukrainian ampersand can be useful for maintaining visual stylistic consistency in multilingual typesetting. (Rastvortsev, 2021)

Romeo & Juliet
Ромео & Джульєта

Figure 46: Latin and Ukrainian ampersands.

Source: Rastvortsev, D. (2021, December 12). Растворцев про шрифти e-Ukraine - Dmytro Rastvortsev - Medium. Medium. <https://rastvortsev.medium.com>

The e-Ukraine typeface is an important milestone in the development of modern Ukrainian type design. It combines clarity, readability, versatility, and inclusivity, making it an ideal choice for the digital state and various other applications. e-Ukraine is more than just a typeface — it is a communication tool that helps make information accessible and engaging for everyone. Its creation is a significant contribution to the development of Ukrainian visual culture and the shaping of national identity in the digital space.

LevType Hryvnia

LevType Hryvnia is a dynamic typeface that draws inspiration from the typography used on Ukrainian banknotes (Figure 47) designed by Vasyl Krychevskyi in 1918. This font is characterized by its versatility and adaptable design, which allows it to be used in a variety of contexts. By drawing on historical design elements, LevType Hryvnia pays homage to Ukraine's rich cultural heritage and artistic legacy. Whether used in print or digital media, this typeface adds a touch of elegance and sophistication to any project. With its roots firmly planted in Ukrainian design history, LevType Hryvnia is a unique and powerful tool for designers looking to create stunning visuals that capture the essence of this vibrant and dynamic country. (LevType Hryvnia: A Dynamic Typeface Inspired by Ukrainian Banknote Typography | MyFontLib, n.d.)

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Figure 47: State Credit Note of the Ukrainian People's Republic by V. Krychevskyi, 1918. Front side.

Source: Mozhyzna, Marchela. 2020. "Шрифтові Знахідки." Facebook. Retrieved December 3, 2024 (<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10215693245620379&set=oa.515476865822319>)<https://rastvortsev.medium.com>

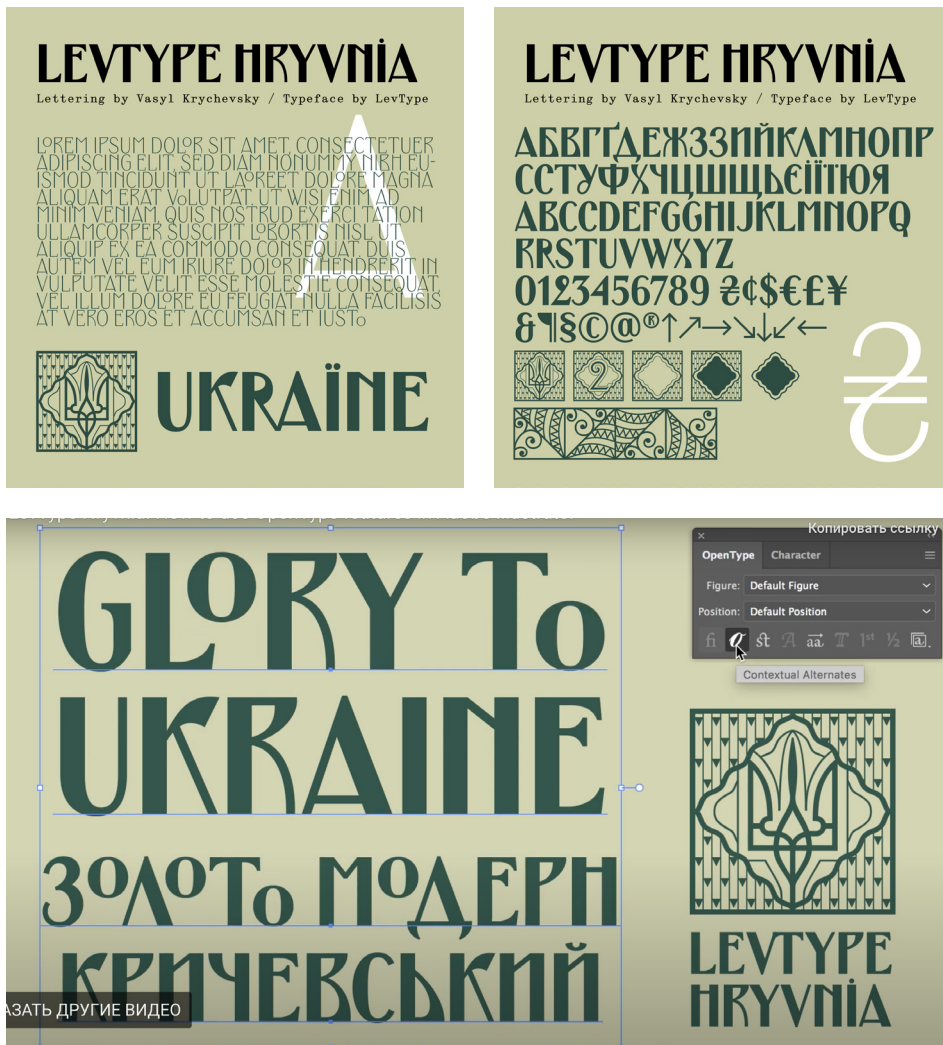


Figure 48: FONT LevType Hryvnia. 2023.

Source: Behance. (n.d.-d). https://www.behance.net/gallery/173637867/LevType-Hryvnia-FREE-Font?locale=pt_BR

In these letters, one can trace the style of Krychevsky and the techniques he used in his works, such as curved forms, serifs, play with letter sizes, and rather contrasting lines. Stylistically, the font conveys an ornamental and dynamic style, which was also characteristic of Krychevsky. We can see how successfully historical forms can be integrated into a display typeface (Figure 48).

The font is decorative, making it suitable for headlines or short texts. In large text blocks, like any decorative typeface, it may be harder to read. However, it adds contrast and emphasizes the Ukrainian theme and national character.

Fixel Font

Fixel is a typeface in two styles, Text and Display, and offers nine weight options ranging from Thin to Black. Its distinctive feature is a unique combination of geometric and humanist grotesques, which results in open letter forms, wide width, crisp edges, and low contrast, striking a balance between restraint and a sense of playfulness and dynamism (Figure 49).



Figure 49: Font Fixel. 2022.

Source: Fixel Font by
MacPaw. (n.d.). *fixel*.
macpaw.com

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Intentionally designed Fixel typeface to avoid being overly expressive for improved use with large volumes of text. Nevertheless, certain symbols such as the letters «a» and «g» have distinctive features that make Fixel stand out. In addition to the standard set of letterforms, the typeface also includes alternative symbols (Figure 50).



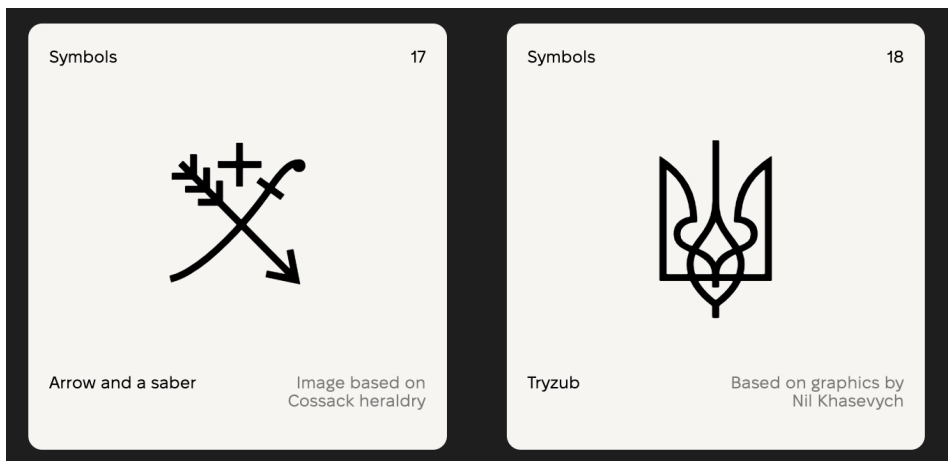


Figure 49: Font Fixel. 2022.

Source: Fixel Font by MacPaw. (n.d.). [fixel.macpaw.com](https://www.macpaw.com)

Created Fixel in part to empower the Ukrainian design community The typeface provides a complete Ukrainian layout and introduces new symbols, highlighting its unique identity. Fixel also served us as an opportunity to pay tribute to our rich cultural heritage, which has endured centuries of constant threat. Fixel can assist designers, amongst others, to foster meaningful communication within an authentic context. (Fixel Font by MacPaw, n.d.)

MacPaw introduced Fixel in November 2022. Initially, the typeface was created for the company's internal needs to emphasize the brand's identity and make its communication more recognizable and consistent. After realizing the value and versatility of the typeface, the MacPaw team decided to share it with the design community, making Fixel free for use in any project.



To mark Fixel's first anniversary, MacPaw, in collaboration with the AlfaBravo studio, introduced and incorporated a collection of authentic Ukrainian symbols into the typeface. This set includes 18 symbols in various styles, bringing together elements of Cossack heraldry, folk decorative art, and 20th-century graphic design (Figure 51).

The new symbols feature iconic figures such as Cossack Mamay, Archistrategos Michael, a woman with a sheaf, Saint George the Dragon Slayer, a lion from 14th–16th-century heraldry, and a Cossack with a musket, as well as flowers and birds from traditional Ukrainian block prints and folk illustrations. The collection also includes elements of the graphic heritage of renowned Ukrainian artists — Heorhii Narbut, Vasyl Krychevsky, and Nil Khasevych. (MacPaw, 2023)

- Cossack Mamay (4) – a legendary figure of a wandering Cossack musician, symbolizing the free spirit of the Ukrainian people.
- Archistrategos Michael (2) – a heavenly warrior, considered the patron of Kyiv and a symbol of the fight against evil.
- Woman with a Sheaf (5) – an embodiment of the hardworking nature of the Ukrainian people and their connection to the land.
- Saint George the Dragon Slayer (15) – a Christian saint defeating a dragon, symbolizing the triumph of good over evil.
- Lion from 14th–16th-century heraldry (1) – a symbol of strength and independence, featured in ancient Ukrainian coats of arms.
- Cossack with a Musket (3) – a warrior-defender figure reflecting the military traditions of the Cossacks.
- Flowers and birds from folk art (6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14) – elements of Ukrainian ornamentation symbolizing nature, harmony, and prosperity.

Additionally, the collection includes visual elements inspired by the works of prominent Ukrainian graphic artists:

- Heorhii Narbut (6, 5, 3) – creator of Ukrainian state symbols and a pioneer of modern graphic design.
- Vasyl Krychevsky (16, 10) – an architect and artist who developed the Ukrainian Art Nouveau style.
- Nil Khasevych (18) – an underground artist who created graphics for the Ukrainian liberation movement.

By incorporating authentic Ukrainian symbols and historical graphic influences, Fixel not only enriches contemporary typography but also serves as a tribute to Ukraine's artistic heritage. The addition of symbols from Cossack heraldry, folk art, and the works of Narbut, Krychevsky, and Khasevych makes Fixel a meaningful bridge between tradition and modern design.

As a result, Fixel empowers designers to create with a sense of cultural authenticity, reinforcing the importance of heritage in visual communication. It stands as an example of how typography can preserve history while remaining relevant in contemporary design practice.

Figure 51: Ukrainian symbols.




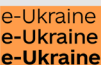


*Source: Fixel Font by MacPaw. (n.d.).
fixel.macpaw.com*

Comparative Analysis

My analysis of selected works relevant to this study covered typography styles, font types, contrast, proportions, composition techniques, and historical origins of letterforms. What were the shapes from the examples considered the most important to decide on the design I will be showing in the next chapter. The results indicate that historical influence on typefaces remains evident regardless of the period—designers consciously refer to traditional forms, adapting them to modern conditions to ensure continuity in typographic culture.

The functionality of a typeface largely determines its visual characteristics. For example, in print publications, optimal legibility at small sizes is crucial, whereas digital formats often require increased contrast and sharp rendering on various screens. Display and decorative typefaces, on the other hand, can have more experimental forms since their main purpose is to attract attention rather than facilitate comfortable reading of large text blocks.

Ukrainian Cyrillic, while preserving its historical roots, continues to evolve in contemporary design. We see its use in both text typefaces optimized for readability and expressive decorative typefaces that reflect national identity through form. Thus, Ukrainian typography not only honors traditions but also constantly evolves, finding new applications in print, digital design, and branding.

№	Designer	Example of Work	Year	Style	Type of Font	Contrast	Proportions	Composition Techniques	Based on Forms (Origins)
1	Heorhii Narbut	Magazine Nashie Mynule (cover) 	1918	Neo-Ukrainian style, modern	Decorative, serif	High	Wide	Influenced Ukrainian graphics and typography. Ornamental decoration, decorative headlines, symmetry	The use of historical Cyrillic graphemes that reflect the traditions of Old Ukrainian script and the aesthetics of Ukrainian Baroque.
2	Vasyl Krychevskyi	Design of UPR banknote (2 hryvnias) 	1918	Ukrainian modern	Decorative, geometric, Display, serif	High	Elongated	Influenced the development of Ukrainian graphic style and design. Symmetry, ornaments in Ukrainian baroque style, heraldic elements	Based on historical elements, cultural and artistic heritage of Ukraine in the works of Vasyl Krychevsky.
3	Yakiv Hnizdovskyi	Cover of the United Ukrainian American Relief Committee report 	1949	Calligraphic, classical	Handwritten, decorative serif	Medium	Balanced	Developed Ukrainian typography in the diaspora. Classical calligraphy, symmetry, ornamentation	Used historical techniques with hints of Romanesque color, while preserving echoes of Renaissance motifs.
4	Dmytro Rastvortsev	e-Ukraine font 	2021	Geometric sans-serif	Sans-serif, grotesque	Low	Balanced	Created for digital and official state communication. Digital interface, web, government documents	These letterforms reflect traditional elements characteristic of Ukrainian graphic culture from the early 20th century, which, in turn, was partially influenced by the aesthetics of Ukrainian Baroque. In the letters K, X, and Я, Ukrainian identity is conveyed, along with references to Khomenko and Narbut. Some letters also feature ascenders and descenders, characteristic of Ukrainian handwritten script.
5	LevType Foundry	LevType Hryvnia 	2023	Neo-Ukrainian Modern	Decorative, display, serif	High	Elongated	Used for headlines, branding, and cultural projects related to Ukrainian design. Branding, cultural, display use.	Inspired by Ukrainian Art Nouveau, historical banknote lettering, symmetrical composition. Ukrainian Art Nouveau of the early 20th century, Vasyl Krychevskyi's lettering embedded in the typeface as a foundation.
6	MacPaw & Альфа5p аво	Fixel font 	2022	Geometric & Humanist Grotesque	Sans-serif, Variable font	Low	Wide	Clean lines, sharp edges, balance between restraint and dynamism. Digital & print typography	A combination of geometric and humanist grotesques, inspired by Ukrainian culture.

The functionality of a typeface largely determines its visual characteristics. For example, in print publications, optimal legibility at small sizes is crucial, whereas digital formats often require increased contrast and sharp rendering on various screens. Display and decorative typefaces, on the other hand, can have more experimental forms since their main purpose is to attract attention rather than facilitate comfortable reading of large text blocks.

Ukrainian Cyrillic, while preserving its historical roots, continues to evolve in contemporary design. We see its use in both text typefaces optimized for readability and expressive decorative typefaces that reflect national identity through form. Thus, Ukrainian typography not only honors traditions but also constantly evolves, finding new applications in print, digital design, and branding.

Key Parameters for Comparison

Proportions:

- 20th-century typefaces often have wide or elongated proportions (Narbut, Krychevskiy, Hnizdovsky).
- Modern typefaces are more balanced (e-Ukraine, Fixel) or elongated for stylistic purposes (LevType Hryvnia).

Contrast:

- Historical typefaces feature high contrast (Narbut, Krychevskiy).
- Modern typefaces, designed for digital use, tend to have low or medium contrast (Fixel, e-Ukraine).

Letterforms:

- Historical typefaces are based on calligraphic traditions, handwritten scripts, or decorative elements.
- Contemporary typefaces combine geometric and humanist elements, striving for simplification and readability.

Composition Techniques:

- Historical typefaces contain more decorative elements and complex rhythms.
- Modern typefaces prioritize functionality while maintaining a smooth rhythm and uniform text density.

Construction Principles:

- Historical typefaces are based on old XX century Cyrillic forms, calligraphy, and book typography.
- Modern typefaces are designed with digital environments in mind, ensuring flexibility and OpenType variability.

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Conclusions and Generalizations

Common Features Between 20th-Century and Contemporary Cyrillic Typefaces:

- Reliance on Ukrainian graphic traditions (Baroque, Modernism, Art Deco).
- Use of characteristic Cyrillic elements.
- Symmetrical or rhythmically precise compositions.

What Differentiates Modern Typefaces from Historical Ones?

- Greater optimization for digital media.
- Fewer excessive decorative details, more functionality, adapt better to different contexts (print, screen, mobile apps, etc.)

Conclusion and Further Direction of Typeface Development

The results of the research and survey will contribute to the creation of a typeface that combines the historical heritage of Ukrainian Cyrillic with the current needs of contemporary design. The goal is to develop a practical text typeface with a strong national character that remains legible at small sizes and is suitable for digital interfaces. To preserve and promote Ukrainian identity, it is appropriate to focus on unique graphemes such as «У», «З», «О», «Н», «І», «Ї», «Ґ», which can be presented with alternative letterforms to highlight typographic individuality depending on the context of use. The design will be based on Ukrainian Modern with serifs — a style that effectively combines tradition and functionality. The letterforms will reflect the restrained elegance of Ukrainian Modernism through stable, low-contrast shapes. The inclusion of ligatures and compositional accents — inspired by the work of Krychevsky — will help give the typeface a distinct Ukrainian character. From a technical perspective, the typeface should meet the following criteria: high legibility at small sizes, clear letter structure and well-considered proportions, adaptation for digital environments (screens, web, applications), and flexibility of use — from interfaces to printed materials. Thus, the future typeface will become not only a design tool but also a carrier of Ukrainian visual culture, capable of harmoniously blending tradition with modernity.

Project Development Overview

To develop this project, I divided the process into several stages. The first step involved conducting a survey among designers who specialize in Ukrainian typefaces. Five respondents participated in the survey, which helped me form a general understanding of the current state of type design in Ukraine and validate my hypothesis. The core of the hypothesis was that, in the present context, developing a utilitarian typeface with distinct features of Ukrainian Cyrillic is more relevant than creating a decorative or experimental display font. This was confirmed by the survey responses: three out of five participants answered the question, “What types of typefaces do you think are currently most lacking in the Ukrainian typographic landscape?” with: “Utilitarian text fonts (for interfaces, signage, long texts) that incorporate clearly recognizable Ukrainian features.”

Based on these findings, I chose to develop a versatile text typeface that could be used across a wide range of media — including print, screens, and mobile applications.

Search for a Stylistic Concept

The next stage was to identify a stylistic direction, supported by comparative analysis of historical and contemporary typefaces. As a result, I defined the following goals: to design a practical text typeface with a strong national character, one that remains legible at small sizes and is suitable for use in digital interfaces. The visual foundation of the typeface is based on Ukrainian Modernism with serifs, a style that successfully combines tradition with functionality. To preserve and promote Ukrainian identity, I decided to include historical alternative forms of specific letters such as «У» (U), «З» (Z), «О» (O), and «Н» (N).

Humanist shapes also play a key role, while the inclusion of ligatures and compositional accents — inspired by the works of Vasyl Krychevskiy (Figure 52) — reinforces the recognizable Ukrainian character of the typeface.

In addition, the contemporary e-Ukraine typeface served as an important reference due to its simple forms, clear structure, and effective letter contrast (Figure 53).



Figure 52: Vasyl Hryhorovych Krychevskiy, 1926 Kyiv.

Source: Mozhyzna, Marchela. 2020. "Шрифтові Знадібки." Facebook. Retrieved December 3, 2024

e-Ukraine Regular

АБВГГДЕЄЖЗИІЙКЛМНОПРСТУФХЦЧШЩЬЮЯ
абвггдеежзиіійклмнопрстуфхцчшщьюя
ABCDEFGHIJKL MNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstu vwxyz

e-Ukraine Head Regular

АБВГГДЕЄЖЗИІЙКЛМНОПРСТУФХЦЧШЩЬЮЯ
абвггдеежзиіійклмнопрстуфхцчшщьюя
ABCDEFGHIJKL MNOPQRSTUVWXY Z
abcdefghijklmnopqrstu vwxyz

Figure 53: Ukrainian alphabet e-Ukraine
by Dmytro Rastvortsev.

Source: Rastvortsev, D. (2021, December 12). Растворцев про шрифти e-Ukraine - Dmytro Rastvortsev - Medium. Medium. <https://rastvortsev.medium.com>

Concept

The first stage of typeface design began with the formulation of a core concept — combining strict geometric forms with subtle historical allusions. The main objective was to create a harmonious and recognizable grotesque typeface with restrained yet distinctive details. At this stage, a draft version of several basic characters was developed. Simultaneously, I explored optimal metrics: the proportions of vertical and horizontal elements, and the degree of stroke contrast. Considerable time was dedicated to experimenting with stylistic features intended to enhance visual expressiveness, including: chamfered corners, slanted and slightly curved serifs (to soften the geometric rigidity), and elements hinting at modern design — such as slightly expanded joints, potential ink traps, and variations in serif shapes.

This stage was crucial in establishing the tone of the typeface: balancing neutrality and character, functionality and decoration (Figure 54).

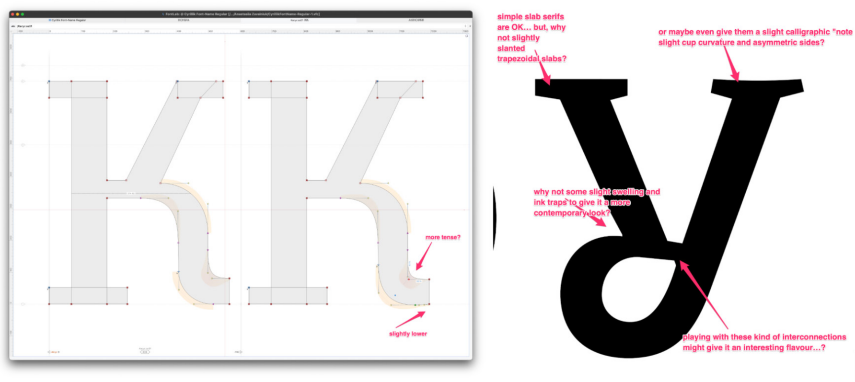


Figure 54: Ukrainian alphabet e-Ukraine by Dmytro Rastvortsev

Source: Rastvortsev, D. (2021, December 12). Растворцев про шрифти e-Ukraine - Dmytro Rastvortsev - Medium. Medium. <https://rastvortsev.medium.com>

The foundation of the typeface lies in the aesthetics of Ukrainian Modernism with serifs, which harmoniously combines tradition and functionality. The letterforms exhibit humanist characteristics. Certain letters — such as «У» (U), «З» (Z), «О» (O), and «Н» (N) — feature alternative glyphs that reflect historical variations of Ukrainian Cyrillic.

The design of the letter «У» (U) was inspired by the work of Vasyl Krychevskyyi (Figure 55) and Heorhiy Narbut (Figure 56), and similar stylistic decisions can also be observed in the contemporary e-Ukraine typeface (Figure 57).

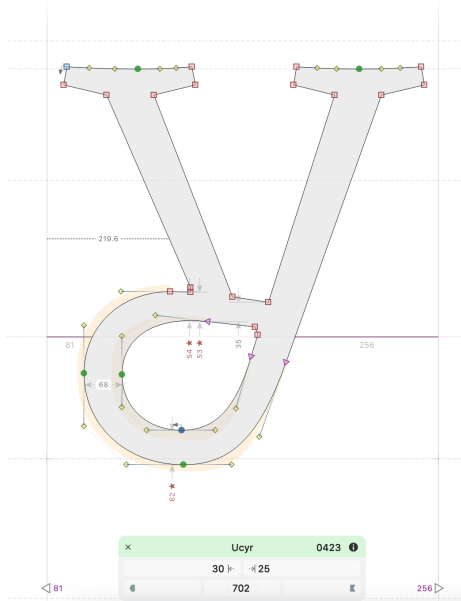


Figure 58: Design of the letter «Y» (U) from the Obrys font.



Figure 55: Letter «Y» (U) by Vasyl Krychevsky.



Figure 56: Letter «Y» (U) by Georgiy Narbut.



Figure 57: Letter «Y» (U) e-Ukraine by Dmytro Rastvortsev.

82

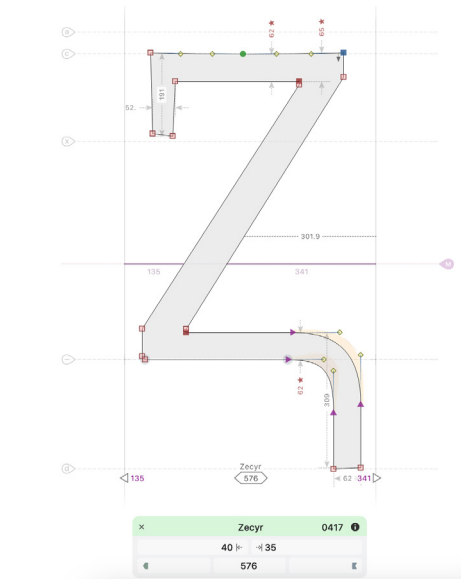


Figure 60: Design of the letter «3» (Z) from the Obrys font.

The letter «3» (Z) is a direct reference to the stylistic approach of Heorhiy Narbut (Figure 59).



Figure 59: Letter «3» (Z) by Georgiy Narbut.

The letter «O» (O) has often been subject to stylistic refinement, as can be seen in the works of Vasyl Krychevskyi (Figure 61).

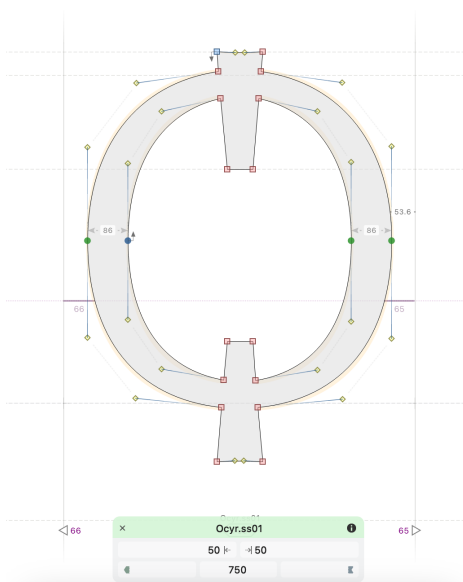


Figure 61: Letters «O» by Vasyl Krychevskyi.



Figure 62: Design of the letter «O» (O) from the Obrys font.

The letter «H» (N) in the works of Narbut (Figure 63), Krychevskyi (Figure 64), and contemporary designers is often stylized to resemble the Latin «N». This approach adds geometric clarity and modernity to the typeface, while also reinforcing Ukrainian identity through the visual language of modernism.

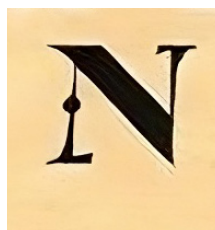
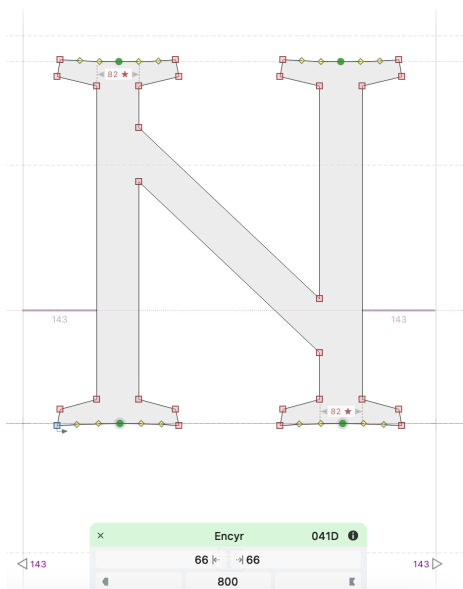


Figure 63: Letter «H» (N) by Georgy Narbut.



Figure 64: Letter «H» (N) by Vasyl Krychevskyi.

Figure 65: Design of the letter «H» (N) from the Obrys font.

To enhance the Ukrainian character of the typeface, turned to the work of Vasyl Krychevskiy (Figure 66) and Yakiv Hnizdovskiy (Figure 67). In their designs, ligatures are not merely decorative elements but carriers of Ukrainian Modernism — a fusion of functionality and expressiveness. I adopted this approach in my own typeface by integrating stylized ligatures as part of its visual language.

Л Ъ ТЬ
ТИ ЇЙ НИЙ

Figure 68: Ligatures “ль” (l’), “нь” (n’), “ть” (t’), “ти” (ty), “її” (ii), “ій” (iy), and “ний” (niy) from the Obrys font.

84

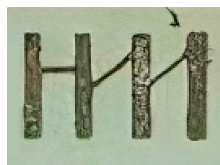


Figure 66: Ligature “ний” (niy) by Vasyl Krychevsky.

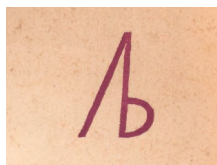


Figure 67: Ligatures “ий” (iy), “ль” (l’) designed by Yakiv Hnizdovskiy.

Designing Latin Letters Informed by Ukrainian Cyrillic

As part of my type design project, a Latin version (Figure 69) of the typeface was created to stylistically align with the Ukrainian Cyrillic. The goal was to ensure visual consistency and to expand the typeface's functionality for broader usage. During the development of the Latin characters, the same principles were applied as in the Cyrillic part: humanist forms, clear stroke contrast, and stylistic details that reflect a distinctly Ukrainian character. This approach allowed the typeface to maintain a cohesive visual identity across both Latin and Cyrillic scripts, and it also contributed to the recognition of the typeface's Ukrainian character in an international context.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N
O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q
r s t u v w x y z

85

Figure 69: The example of a developed Latin font based on Cyrillic from the Obrys font.

Promoting Ukrainian Typography

A key stage of my project was the presentation of the typeface at the IJUP 2025 research conference in Portugal, where it was exhibited in the form of a printed poster (Figure 70). The poster showcased the main ideas behind the typeface, sample letters, stylistic features, and sources of inspiration. The goal of the presentation was to introduce the Portuguese design community to Ukrainian Cyrillic and to demonstrate how historical elements can be effectively integrated into contemporary type design. This was an important step toward promoting Ukrainian visual culture abroad and sharing my experience in type design with fellow conference participants.



86

Figure 70: The poster of the conference and presentation

Style:
Regular

Style:
Old Style Serif

Font
Name:

Obrys

Font
Description:

Obrys is a contemporary serif text typeface inspired by early 20th-century Ukrainian modernism and adapted for the needs of the digital age. Its design is based on the work of prominent Ukrainian artists — Heorhii Narbut, Vasyl Krychevsky, and Yakiv Hnizdovsky — as well as on modern typefaces that reinterpret this heritage in the context of the 21st century.

Font Designer:
Anastasiia Zavalniuk

Porto.
2024

Ӧ ӧ

Ө ө

Ӭ ӭ Ӯ

Uppercase:
Cyrillic

А А Б В Г Г Д

Е Є Ж З З И І

Ї Й К Л М Н Н

О О П Р С Т У

Ф Х Ц Ч Ш Щ

Ь Ю Ю Я

A B C D E F

G H I J K L

M N O P Q

R S T U V

W X Y Z

Lowercase:
Cyrillic

а а б в г г д е

є ж з з и і ї й

к л м н н о п

р с т у ф х ц

ч ш щ ь ю я

a b c d e f g

h i j k l m n

o p q r s t u v

w x y z

Образ письма — спадок поколінь. В кожній рисці — дух предків.

8 рх

Кожна літера має свій характер, свою історію. Вигин «ї» чи твердість «ґ», ширина «ш» і м'якість «ю» — усе це не просто графіка, а відлуння мови, культури й часу. Шрифт — це голос епохи, форма національного відчуття. Писемність — не лише засіб спілкування. Це пам'ять, закладена в знаках. Це краса, що живе в деталях: у нахилі штриха, в ритмі пробілів, у чіткості розчерку. Від «А» до «Я» — абетка нашої ідентичності. Символи формують зміст. Типографіка впливає на сприйняття так само, як слово — на думку. Вона може шепотіти, кричати, співати чи мовчати, але завжди — говорить. Через літери ми відчуваємо минуле і створюємо нове. Від старослов'янської традиції — до сучасного цифрового світу. Шрифт стає мостом. Між поколіннями, між формою і сенсом, між Україною й світом.

10 рх

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12 рх

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Letters carry memory. Form reflects culture. Script is not just style — it is identity.

8 px

Writing is more than the act of recording words; it is the visual expression of thought, time, and place. Each curve, each serif or stroke, each spacing between the lines — all of it matters. Through type, we inherit stories and traditions. Through form, we pass them forward. Typography, when crafted with care, becomes a voice. A font can whisper elegance or declare bold conviction. In a world saturated with noise, the clarity and personality of type help shape how we are understood. Whether on screen or in print, letters are the interface between people and meaning. They guide the eye, evoke emotion, and often speak before words are even read. This is why the design of a typeface is never neutral — it always speaks. Culture lives in details. From the angle of a terminal to the weight of a stem, from a Ukrainian “і” to a soft Latin “a” — the craft of letters is the craft of memory. And memory deserves form.

10 px

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12 px

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Numbers:

0 1 2 3 4

5 6 7 8 9

Numbers

Test:

Площа України становить 603,628 км², що робить її найбільшою країною в Європі.

Населення — близько 36.7 мільйона осіб (станом на 2025 рік).

Україна здобула незалежність 24 серпня 1991 року, тобто понад 30 років тому.

Найвища точка країни — гора Говерла, висотою 2,061 м.

В Україні налічується понад 1,200 міст і 28,000 сіл.

Довжина державного кордону — 6,992.98 км, з яких 1,355 км — морський кордон.

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Font
Name:

Obrys

Font
Description:

Obrys is a contemporary serif text typeface inspired by early 20th-century Ukrainian modernism and adapted for the needs of the digital age. Its design is based on the work of prominent Ukrainian artists — Heorhii Narbut, Vasyl Krychevsky, and Yakiv Hnizdovsky — as well as on modern typefaces that reinterpret this heritage in the context of the 21st century.

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Ѡ ѡ
Ѣ ѣ
Ѥ ѥ
Ѧ ѧ

Conclusion

The process of typeface developing a typeface with elements characteristic of Ukrainian letterforms for the promotion of a broad adoption and the preservation of national Ukrainian identity involved multiple layers, including both research and creative stages. A survey conducted among Ukrainian type designers confirmed the relevance of creating a functional text typeface featuring distinct characteristics of Ukrainian Cyrillic.

The study of historical sources and contemporary examples made it possible to shape a stylistic concept that combines the traditions of Ukrainian Modernism with the demands of the modern digital environment. Special attention was given to developing the typeface's individual character through the use of alternative historical letterforms, humanist proportions, and decorative-functional ligatures. This approach ensured both the recognizability and practicality of the typeface for use in interfaces, print, and mobile applications.

The creation of a Latin version, stylistically aligned with Ukrainian Cyrillic, expanded the typeface's applicability and emphasized its versatility. Presenting the project at the IJUP 2025 international research conference marked an important step in promoting Ukrainian visual culture and demonstrated the potential of Cyrillic as a fully-fledged tool in contemporary design. As a result, the project succeeded in creating an original typeface with a strong national character, while also showing how historical forms can be integrated into modern design without compromising functionality or identity.

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Designer & Editor:
Anastasiia Zavalniuk

Supervision:
Pedro Amado

Fonts:

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