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Some phonetic remarks on the pronunciation of the name *Onthophagus*

(Insecta: Coleoptera: Scarabaeidae: Onthophagini)

Abstract

A tutorial for the right pronunciation of the name *Onthophagus* is provided.

Key words. *Onthophagus*, accent, pronounce.

Riassunto

[*Alcune osservazioni fonetiche sulla pronuncia del nome Onthophagus* (Insecta: Coleoptera: Scarabaeidae: Onthophagini)]

Viene fornita una guida per la corretta pronuncia del nome *Onthophagus*.

Entomology, as all other sciences, is not only a written discipline, but also a spoken one. It frequently happens that some scientific names are pronounced or accented differently and often incorrectly, regardless of their Greek or Latin origins.

Such is the case with the word *Onthophagus*, the name of a large genus of Coleoptera of the family Scarabaeidae, for which no uniformity in pronunciation exists.

In this short note a tutorial on how to pronounce the name *Onthophagus*, in the correct accent, is provided.

Onthophagus is the name that LATREILLE (1802) first gave to a widely distributed genus of scarab beetles. It is a new Latin word, derived from the two Greek words “ὄνθος” (onthos, the dung of animals) and “φάγος” (phagos, eater) (MULSANT, 1842; AGASSIZ, 1846).

In the Latin language, the pronunciation of a word depends on the length of the second-to-last syllable. If the latter contains a long vowel or a diphthong, then the word is called a paroxytone and the stress falls on the second-to-last syllable. If the second-to-last syllable contains a short vowel, then the word is said to be a proparoxytone, and the stress falls on the third-to-last syllable. Words in which the accent falls on the last syllable (oxytones) do not exist in Latin. Furthermore, the stress can never fall before the third-to-last syllable.

But how can we know whether a vowel is long or rather short? It usually suffices to check the word into a Latin dictionary: if the vowel of the second-to-last syllable has a straight bar (¯) above it as a diacritical mark, then it is long; if the vowel has a diacritical mark shaped like the bottom half of a circle above it (ˇ), then it is short.

Unfortunately the word *Onthophagus* cannot be found in a dictionary. How can we proceed? How should this word and all the other words representing generic and subgeneric taxa of Onthophagini having the same suffix, be pronounced?

There is some confusion in this regard. Those who deal in Onthophagini, have heard the pronunciation of *Onthophagus* sometimes as a proparoxytone word, i.e. with stress on the third-to-last syllable [Ontòfagus], sometimes as a paroxytone word, i.e. with stress on the second-to-last syllable [Ontofàgus] and even as an oxytone word, i.e. with stress on the last syllable [Ontofagùs].

The “α” within the Greek word φάγος (-phagos) is short, and remains short in the Latinized form “-phagus”. *Onthophagus*, being a Latin form and hence having the second-to-last syllable short, has to have the stress falling on the third-to-last syllable. The same is the case for the word “anthropophagous”, from the Latin “*anthropophāgus*” (and from the Greek “άνθρωπόφαγος”, composed of “άνθρωπος” anthropos, man, and “φάγος”, phagos, eater), that being a proparoxytone word is stressed on the third-to-last syllable [antropòfagus]. Therefore, *Onthophagus*, being a proparoxytone word, should always be pronounced “Ontòfagus”.

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