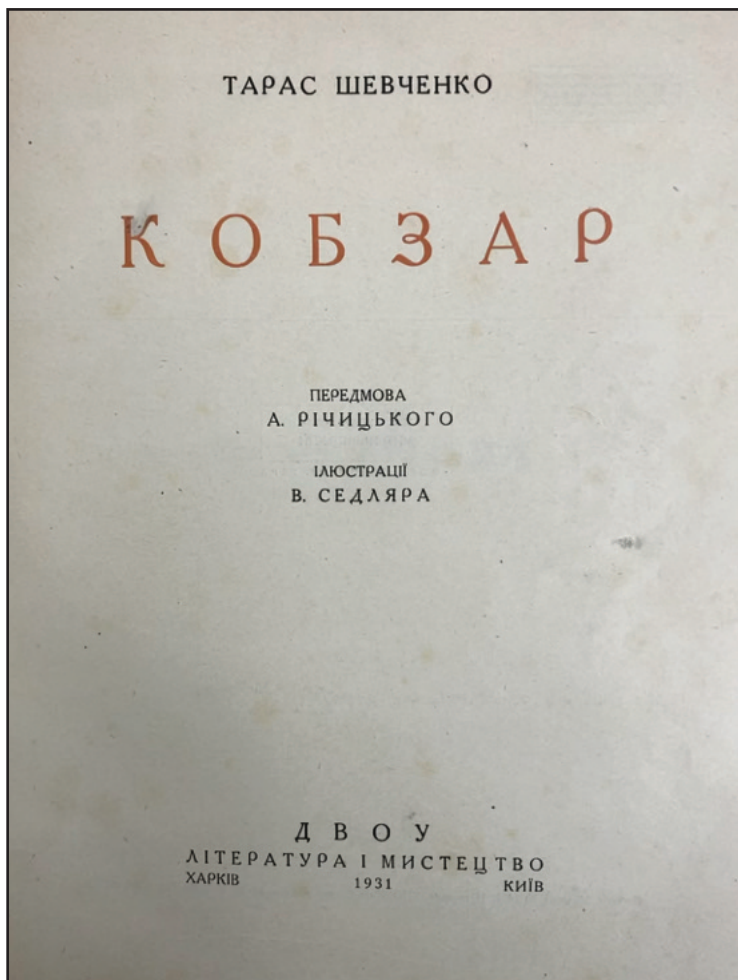


EXPLORING OUR MUSEUM AND LIBRARY

The 1931 Edition of Taras Shevchenko's Kobzar

By Lubow Wolynetz, Curator



The 1931 Edition of Taras Shevchenko's Kobzar. (Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford)

The brutal war in Ukraine continues. The relentless Ukrainian enemy – the muscovite – russians, employ the same destructive tactics in order to destroy Ukraine, her culture, and her independent existence. They crave to make the Ukrainian people, again, subservient to their despotic regime and live in constant fear and humiliation. And if they do not succeed in achieving this, then the next step is to destroy Ukraine and the Ukrainian nation so that not a trace of it will remain. Such tactics and machinations were conducted by this same enemy for centuries and the same attempts are being made by them today.

During the difficult times of its existence, the Ukrainian people often turned for advice and insight to their prophet – Taras Shevchenko. The discerning words of the poet recounted to his people many bitter truths and shamed them for their vacillations, yet acclaimed their heroic attempts of the past, even though not always successful. He inspired them with faith in their own strength, instructed them how to live, what to do, and how to struggle and fight with confidence. Shevchenko addressed his people with excruciating words and thoughts, in his Epistle to the Dead, the Living and Those not Born yet, to Those in Ukraine and Those outside Ukraine – and this is especially significant for us – immigrants. The heroic deeds of our soldiers, their courage, steadfastness in this war, the unparalleled unity of our people, indicate to us that we finally are

hearing, listening and working towards the fulfillment of Taras Shevchenko's Testament in which he appeals to his people to achieve the decisive victory in the fight for freedom.

Taras Shevchenko's Kobzar is an indispensable book of every Ukrainian. Our Library has a number of unique Kobzar editions with original illustration of notable Ukrainian artists. Each artist in his own style depicted the essence of Shevchenko's poetry, his own conception of them and guided the reader to their more profound understanding. The poems chosen to be illustrated, the style and method of presentation of their essence, often depended on the artist's techniques, stylistic approach, personal convictions, circumstances in which the artist found himself at a particular time, on political developments, etc.

This unique edition of Taras Shevchenko's Kobzar about which we will write was published in 1931 in Kyiv with illustrations by the artist Vasyl Sedliar, 1899-1937. Sedliar was a painter, monumentalist, graphic artist, ceramicist. He was born in Poltava region. In 1919 he graduated from the Kyiv Art School and immediately went on to study at the newly founded Ukrainian Academy of Art in Kyiv. The Academy was founded in 1917 by the Central Council (Tentralna Rada) of the Ukrainian People's Republic headed by Mykhailo Hrushevsky. The founders and organizers of the academy were – the rector and professor Mykhailo Boychuk, the

Krychevski brothers (Fedir and Vasy), B. Burachek, O. Murashko,, H. Narbut, and others. Sedliar became the student and disciple of Mykhailo Boychuk. Mykhailo Boychuk created an original art style known as neo-Byzantine. This art mode was a blend of modern art trends with the traditional folk and Byzantine art style. It developed into the "style of simplified monumental forms". For a while Sedliar was also the director of the Mezhyhirsk Ceramic Technical School where they produced ceramics, majolica, faience. He was the author of large murals at the Mezhyhirsk ceramic technical school, at the Kharkiv theatre and others. His art was exhibited in Prague, Venice, France, Italy Berlin. In 1927 together with Mykhailo Boychuk he made a trip to Europe – Germany, France, Italy where he especially was fascinated and admired the new trends in graphic design. He was often visited by notable intellectuals, Les Kurbas (theater director), Oleksander Dovzhenko (film producer), Ostap Vyshnia (writer, satirist), Volodymyr Sosiura (poet), Vadym Meller (artist, theatrical designer). Based on memoirs of eyewitnesses it was Meller who inspired Sedliar to illustrate Taras Shevchenko's poems which he began to do at the end of the 20ies. During Stalin's rule of the soviet Union the political situation in Ukraine began to change negatively towards Ukraine and Ukrainian culture. Stalin began the great purge of all Ukrainian intellectuals, cultural activists, artists, writers. They were persecuted, arrested, jailed, sent to the gulag or executed. It is in this atmosphere that Sedliar began his illustrations to the Kobzar. These illustrations, in reality, reflected very graphically the abuses suffered by the people under the Soviet system of

Stalin's tyranny. Sedliar with a few limited strokes of his pen was able to convey emotions of happiness, despair, protest, helplessness, depict, abuses, cruelty, extreme tragedy. His works received very positive and admirable reviews. Sedliar managed to publish a second edition of the Kobzar in 1933 with a few additional color illustrations. But by then Stalin's purging spread more widely and more intensely with special concentration and attack on all Ukrainian intellectual elite. In 1937 Sedliar and Boychuk and many others were arrested, brutally tortured until they submitted under torture and consented to all absurd, fictional accusations. They were accused of

being members of national-fascist terrorist organizations, spies of the Vatican etc. A secret trial was held and the artists were sentenced to death. The verdict was signed by Stalin himself as well as Kaganovych, Voroshylov and Vyshynsky. Sedliar and Boychuk and others were executed in one of the Kyiv buildings where many executions were held, October 13, 1937. Their bodies were thrown into a common grave outside Kyiv in Bykivnia. A majority of Sedliar works were destroyed. His Kobzar was pulled out of all libraries and book stores. Thus Ukrainian culture was destroyed by the muscovite-russians as they continue to destroy it to the present day. ❖



An illustrations by the artist Vasyl Sedliar in the 1931 Edition of Taras Shevchenko's Kobzar. (Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford)



The tower at the Ukrainian Museum is lit with the colors of the Ukrainian flag in tribute to the 1-year anniversary of russia's "unprovoked and unjustified" attack on Ukraine.

For more information about The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford, please, visit www.ukrainianmuseumlibrary.org, call 203-324-0499 or 203-323-8866.

The Museum is open Wednesday through Friday from 1 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., or by appointment, and is located at: 161 Glenbrook Road, Stamford, CT 06902.