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Professor Myron Korduba's Contribution Into Geographical *Shevchenkiana*

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Abstract

The article deals with most essential specificities of creative approach and major results of regional geographical studies of Taras Shevchenko, an outstanding Ukrainian poet and painter, disclosed by Myron Korduba (1876 – 1947), Professor, Warsaw University, in his *T. Shevchenko as Regional Ethnographer and Archaeologist*. It was accentuated that, when studying nature and local people, Taras Shevchenko preferred “a good pencil-drawn sketch from nature”; focused on specific natural phenomena, characteristic for this or that

locality; put people and community, their culture and everyday life into a center of his regional geographical cognition.

Key words: Taras Shevchenko; Myron Korduba; regional geographical activity.

Relevance of the research topic

Professor Myron Korduba was a passionate devotee of regional studies throughout his creative life,. It is undoubtedly hundreds of publications where he analyzed local customs and traditions, economy and history of Bukovyna, Halychyna, Holmshchyna and Pidliashshia, North-Western Ukraine and Ukraine on the whole.

Geographical regional studies, where Myron Korduba searched into geographical phenomena and processes, general regularities of development of nature and society in specific local conditions were an essential portion of his scientific exploration [4-8].

T. Shevchenko as Regional Ethnographer and Archaeologist included into Volume VI of *Taras Shevchenko's Complete Works in 16 Volumes* edited by P. Zaytsev and issued by the Ukrainian Scientific Institute (Warsaw; Lviv, 1935) was among Professor Myron Korduba's key investigations where his local historian's brilliant talent manifested itself to its best [6, 256-280].

Analysis of previous research

Scientific value of the aforesaid work by Myron Korduba lies in the fact that geographical regional motives in the creative activity of Taras Shevchenko

at the time of the work's publication practically were not studied (the same as in the present days). Some aspects were highlighted in the studies by I. Zhytetskyy [2], P. Zaytsev [3], and I. Steshenko, which is confirmed in the work by M. Globenko [1].

It is for these reasons that the present research **aims at** bringing to light Professor Myron Korduba's contribution into geographical *Shevchenkiana*, his own disclosure of the most essential features and specificities of creative approach of Taras Shevchenko as geographer of local history.

The main material

Professor Myron Korduba substantiated his conclusions on Taras Shevchenko's deep interest in Ukrainian regional studies by his own observations; the Ukrainian extraordinary poet and painter's pre-ordered work published in *Picturesque Ukraine*; and the latter's participation in several scientific expeditions to left-bank and right-bank Ukraine in 1844-1846. Even in captivity in faraway Kyrgyz steppes, Taras Shevchenko enriched the world science of regional studies with his own descriptions and drawings made within the frame of military expeditions for the study of the Aral Sea in 1848-1849, and the Karatau Mountains on the Mangyshlak Peninsula in the Pre-Caspian Region in 1851.

What was Myron Korduba's emphasis in his assessment of Taras Shevchenko's regional studies in Ukraine in 1844-1846? To professor's opinion, Shevchenko's first important idea lied in creation of the series of eau-fortes that would render the beauty of Ukrainian lands, and development of the same into a project entitled *Picturesque Ukraine*. They planned to annually publish 10-12 big-format sketches in 3-4 issues and supplement them with explanatory texts. The drawings would render and represent "landscapes, distinctive for their beauty"; historic-cultural heritage; ethnographic sketches; events that "told on people's destinies" within this or that locality [6, 257-258]. In realization of the *Picturesque Ukraine*, Taras Shevchenko invited Yosyp Bodianskyy, Ukrainian

philologist and Slavist, folklorist and writer; Panteleymon Kulish, ethnographer, linguist and editor; Petro Butkov, Professor of History; Andriy Storozhenko, Senator in Warsaw and publicist; Mykhaylo Hrabovskyy, who “scooped all materials for his *Old and Present Ukraine*”. In his letter to Y.Bodianskyy dated 29.06.1844, T. Shevchenko wrote: “I mission putting together historical texts to you, for we need it according to our custom and as chronicles say; and, if you have anything that responds drawing, tell me immediately, and I will draw” [4, 258].

It was in August 1844 that Taras Shevchenko announced in the *Severnaya Pchela (Northern Bee) Magazine* a subscription to the series of eau-fortes expected to be published within the *Picturesque Ukraine*. He had found support with M.A. Dolgorukov, then-recent Governor-General of Little Russia, and P.I. Gesse, Civil Governor of the Chernigov Province, whom he sent in October 1844 a touching letter full of filial love to Ukraine: “...Little Russia had since olden times its own composers, painters and poets. I do not know what they were enthusiastic with that they forgot their own; I believe that if my land was the most miserable and poorest in the world, it nevertheless would seem much more beautiful than Switzerland or all Italies. Those who at least once saw my Kraina told me that they would love to live and die there. So what we can say, this land’s people? We must love and be proud of our most beautiful mother. And I, as member of this greatest family, serve the mother land if not to the good than at least to the glory of the name of Ukraine” [9, 291].

The first issue of the album of eau-fortes within the frame of the *Picturesque Ukraine* went out in November 1844 containing such drawings and reproductions as “In Kiev”, “Vydubych Monastery in Kiev”, “Judicial Counsel”, “Headmen”, “1649 Graces in Chygyryn”, and “Fairy Tale”.

According to Myron Korduba, among all private persons, princess Varvara Repnina had become the most active distributor of the Shevchenko’s work; she also demanded the author’s strength and insistence in realization of

his ideas. Unfortunately, “Ukrainian people’s attitude towards *Picturesque Ukraine* appeared to be almost absolutely indifferent. The same was with invited co-authors: neither Storozhenko, nor Hrabovskyy gave almost nothing...Kulish simply sprang upon him pouring forth reproaches of doing such important things without his (Kulish’s) blessing” [6, 260-261].

Being in difficulties, Taras Shevchenko had to abort the project that was “his first attempt of a big album that would extensively illustrate the culture and everyday life of Ukrainian people” [6, 261-262].

Taras Shevchenko’s active participation in the work of the Archaeographic Committee (Temporary Committee for Reconsideration of Elder Acts) organized in Kiev on the initiative of D.G. Bibikov, the then-recent Governor-General, was his second immersion into geographical regional studies in 1845-1846. Commissioned by the Committee, T. Shevchenko visited the Left-Bank Ukraine. In Hustyn Monastery, he “painted Ukraine...Ukrainian landscapes either known for their history or distinctive for their beauty; the life of Ukrainian people; and, recollections of his own life and goings” [9, 223]. In Poltava, he drew I. Kotliarevskyy’s house and the Vozdvyzhenskyy Monastery; in the village of Shediyeve, Kobelyaky District – the *Landscape with Old Stone Women* and two drawings entitled *On the Orel*; in the village of Vasylivka – the drawing known as *In Vasylivka*; in the village of Andrushy in Pereyaslavshchyna – two landscape sketches. When in the suburbs of Myrgorod, between the rivers of Khorol and Psel, he discovered over 40 ramparts (fortified settlements), sentry graves, and put down their local geographical names. On 10-20 August 1845 he completed *In Vyunytsia*, the landscape sketch.

1846 was similarly intense and resultant with regard to geographical regional studies. In March and April, when visiting the family of A.I. Lyzogub and I.I. Lyzogub in their estate, he had accomplished *Near Sednev*, *In Sednev* and *Chumaks Among the Graves*; in April-September, when in Kiev – *Ascold’s*

Grave, Fort of Vasylkiv in Kiev, Vyshgorod, Kytayiv Solitude. Trinity Church, and Kiev Garden [9, 115].

In June-July 1846, during the excavations of the Perepyat Grave in the village of Fastiv, Taras Shevchenko had sketched the *Landscape, A Peasant in a Straw Hat, Village Peasant Houses, Waiting for Porridge, A Group of Peasants and Other Sketches, A Young Man with Tobacco Pipe, Peasant's Head and a Lad with a Rake*. In mid-October, in Pochaiv, he sketched *Suburbs Viewed from the Terrace of the Pochaiv Cathedral, Pochaiv Cathedral as Viewed from the East, Pochaiv Cathedral. The Interior* [6, 268]. According to Myron Korduba, Taras Shevchenko, when visiting Volyn, had made “a fresh and plastic description of the farmstead in the wood near Dubno, while his sketches of the villages of Sekun, Vedrbky, Korets and Zvyagel with their churches and manor ruins, and folk songs wrote down by him were the result of intense geographical local historian's work on the far northern west of Ukraine [6, 271-272].

As is commonly known, on 17 April 1847 (5 April under the Julian calendar), Taras Shevchenko was arrested on the Dnepr ferriage in Kiev and soon exiled as soldier to Orenburg until August 1857.

While in exile, Shevchenko managed to take part in two scientific expeditions, namely, the so-called Raim Expedition for the detailed study of the Aral Sea (11.05.1848 – 10.11.1849), and the Karatau Expedition (May – September 1851) for geological study of the Karatau and Aktau mountains. In both of those, Taras Shevchenko was a “sketcher” who portrayed surrounding landscapes and “transferred hydrographical images onto a map”.

Myron Korduba noted that “landscapes sketched by Shevchenko during the expedition in the Fort Novopetrovsk were distinctive for some specific melancholy and precisely characterized the sorrow nature of those wretched deserted eastern localities. Also, the landscapes rendered the artist's soul in its deepest sorrow, while his artistic talent ascended to its true level. There he had

made his best sketches of Ak-Mish-Tau, Tuk-Karagay, Aulia-Tau, Chir-Kali-Tau, Turkmen cemetery, Monk Rock, etc [6, 276].

Conclusions

Summarizing Taras Shevchenko's activity in geographical regional studies, Myron Korduba accentuates upon as follows:

- 1) When studying nature and local people Taras Shevchenko preferred “a good pencil-drawn sketch from nature” rather than long and detailed description. To his opinion, such sketches were more valuable and could give more than simple description of certain localities.
- 2) Illustrating the nature of this or that kray, Shevchenko tried to render natural phenomena specific for certain locality, e.g., mirage, sand storm in a desert, or fire in the steppe. These oriental landscapes sketched by the painter are still missing [6, 279].
- 3) Beside landscapes, “most characteristic for given land”, Shevchenko had multi-sidedly rendered Ukrainian culture and everyday life, or the people's everyday life in the place where he created, that is, in his several-hundred sketches and drawings, the artist rendered ethnographic images – “whose local history's value is utmost”. As cited by Myron Korduba from Taras Shevchenko's “Unhappy”, “...Scarcity of people on a sketched landscape makes an unloved impression” [6, 279].
- 4) Talented artist and ingenious poet, Taras Shevchenko could reach the first-line peaks in geographical regional studies “with only few strokes and words”. He rendered the beauty of the given locality with no overload of too many details.

As summarized by Myron Korduba, Shevchenko's paintings are of essential importance and weight for Ukrainian and world sciences of local lore.

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