Ten facts about Taras Shevchenko

March 9 and 10 mark the days of Taras Shevchenko. On this occasion, we offer you some facts, known and less known, from the poet’s life.

1. Taras Shevchenko lived 47 years. He was born on March 9, 1814, in Moryntsi village, Kyiv province, and died on March 10, 1861, in Saint-Petersburg from dropsy.

2. To release Shevchenko from serfdom in 1838, Mr. Enhelhart demanded an incredible amount of money at that time – 2500 karbovantsi, which equaled 45 kilograms of pure silver. To collect this sum, a famous artist of that time, Karl Briullov, painted a portrait of Vasyl Zhukovskyi, the tutor of the heir to the throne of the Russian Empire. The portrait was sold on the auction, and thus Briullov and Zhukovskiy were able to raise the necessary funds to buy Shevchenko’s freedom.

3. Throughout his life, Shevchenko spent only 15 years in Ukraine. When he was 14, he left the country with Mr Enhelhart and came back only for visits.

4. Shevchenko was also an exceptional artist. He was enrolled in the Imperial Academy of Arts in Saint Petersburg and studied there under Briullov’s supervision. In November 1845, he received the official title of artist. To date, 835 works of art of Shevchenko-artist have survived, including paintings and graphics of various genres and made with different techniques.

5. There is a description of Shevchenko that was found in the “Formular List of Service of the Orenburg Battalion #1” from the year 1854, where the poet was sent for military service with a strict ban on both writing and drawing. He was a man of an average height (164.46 cm) with dark-blonde hair and dark grey eyes.

6. Shevchenko fell in love many times in his life. Many women of different social status and origin fell for him as well. The poet’s first love was Oksana Kovalenko, a girl from his village, with whom he parted because he had to move to Vilnius with Mr Enhelhart. Then there was the seamstress Dzyunya Husykovska, the
naturalist Amalia Kolberg, princess Varvara Repnina, the wife of a colonel Anna Zakrevska, the wife of the commander of the Novopetrovsk fortification Agatha Uskova. His last love was 19-year-old Lyckera Polusmak, whom the poet wanted to marry in 1860.

7. In the last year of his life, Shevchenko published a “Bukvar” – a book, which was to be used to teach literacy to Ukrainians, both younger and older, in Sundays schools. The book was printed in 10,000 copies at the expense of the poet himself. The central part of the edition was sent to Ukraine.

8. In his work, Shevchenko regularly turns to God – in the “Kobzar” the word “God” is used 1281 times. Also, 25 of the 230 pieces in “Kobzar” are religious.

9. In December 1845, Shevchenko translated ten biblical Psalms, all of which are imbued with the idea of repentance. They were published in the Kobzar in 1860, while the author was still alive.

10. There are 1384 monuments contributed to Taras Shevchenko around the world. Most of them – 1256 – are located in Ukraine. The rest are located in more than 35 countries.