

“SIBERIAN STONES FOR EVERY LETTER OF THE ALPHABET” IN THE ABC-POSTCARDS BY ELISABETH BOEHM

Ludmila A. Budrina

Associate Professor, Department of Arts History and Museology, Ural Federal University,
ludmilabudrina@gmail.com,

Sergey E. Vinokurov

Head of Decorative Arts Department, Ekaterinburg Museum of Fine Arts
serg.vinokuroff@gmail.com

Postcards set courtesy provided by collectors Monika and Herb Obodda, now it is in collection of Gail & Jim Spann.

Design of pages 68–75:
Dmitriy A. Kilpio.

Photo on pages 69, 71, 73, 75:
Michael B. Leybov.

1. The title page of the "ABC" set of postcards.
2. Screensaver of the "ABC" set of postcards.
3. One of the pages describing the "ABC" set of postcards.



4. Elisabeth (Elizaveta Merkuryevna) Boehm (1843–1914).

on page 68: **Amethyst**. 17 × 12 cm. Chala mine, Spachievo ore field, Mineralni Bani Municipality, Haskovo Province, Bulgaria. Collection and photo: Albert Russ.
on page 69: **Diopase**. 13 × 9.5 cm. Altyn-Tyube, Kazakhstan. Collection: B.A. Yatskevich.
on page 70: Pearl faceted (artist Victor Tuzlukov). Tahiti French Polynesia. 1.8 cm. Collection: Gail and Jim Spann. Photo: Tom Spann.
on page 71: Precious **opal** ('Yowah nut'). 6 × 4 cm. Koroit, Queensland, Australia. Specimen: Robert Sielecki, Ausrox.
on page 73: **Phenakite** crystal. 3 cm. Ural Emerald Mines, Urals. Specimen by Vladimir A. Pelepenko.
on page 75: Cluster of **quartz** (ancient name is yuga) crystals (11 × 26 × 12 cm, Dauphine, France) from Dmitriy I. Mendeleev collection, Museum of the Mineralogy Department, St. Petersburg State University No. 590/2689 (published with permission of Galina F. Anastasenko).

¹ Chapkina-Ruga S. Russian style of Elisabeth Boehm. Album. – Moscow: Zakharov, 2007, pp. 10–11.

² Tretyakov V.P. New postcards. The "ABC" set of postcards of Elisabeth Boehm // "Zhuk", the magazine of postcards amateurs, No. 01 (28), 2014, p. 11.

³ Catalog of postcards of the publishing house N.N. Martyanov, New York, USA, 1945–1976 // "Zhuk", the magazine of postcards amateurs. No. 2 (27), 2011, pp. 46–48.

⁴ Sreznevsky V.I., Fidler V. Letters of the Slovenian language. SPb., 1877.

⁵ Alphabet: [issue 1] drawings: Elisabeth Boehm; text compiled by E. Boehm, F. Batyushkov, and E.N. Opochinin; headpieces and vignettes by N. Ivanov. Paris: I. S. Lapin Publishing House, 1913, 18 p.

career, Boehm illustrated fifteen books, including works by Ivan Turgenev, Leo Tolstoy, Ivan Krylov, Vsevolod Garshin, Nikolai Leskov, and collections of Russian folk fairytales¹. In her illustrations, the main characters were children, often dressed in the clothes of knights, boyars, and peasants. These sentimental images inevitably excited a lively emotional interest of the public.

The growing popularity of E.M. Boehm greatly benefitted from the capabilities of lithography, which developed in Russia in the 19th century and made it possible to reproduce not only silhouette images, but also watercolors with a high resolution. The wide distribution of Boehm's illustrations at the beginning of the 20th century led to numerous imitations.

One of the last brilliant work of this artist was the design of the "ABC Book". This project was initiated by the order of the I.S. Lapin's Russian-French publishing house in Paris, which was widely known for his extensive publishing activities. Lapin's company produced both artistic postcards and luxurious books, which also included "ABC" by E.M. Boehm.

Envisioned as a series of five issues (only four issues were published), the "ABC" was put in production in December 1913. Chromolithographed alphabet pages were glued onto expensive paper, with each image accompanied by witty commentary.

The limited edition as well as the military and revolutionary upheavals could have left this book in oblivion, collectors note. However, already in the 1920s, the "ABC" ("Azбука") was printed in the form of postcard sets in Prague. The address side of each postcard included names in several languages². Another edition of the "ABC" postcards refers to the post-war period. In late 1940s, the postcards were printed in New York by the initiative of N.N. Martyanov (1894–1984), the first-wave emigrant and the publisher of desk and tear-off calendars, and Russian literature, which were in great demand among Russian emigrants in the United States³.

The source of inspiration for the artist, apparently, was the 1877 publication of the facsimile edition of the "Letters of the Slovenian Language". The reference to this source was included in the first edition of Lapin's "ABC". This alphabet scroll from the collection of the Imperial Public Library was most likely used as a calligraphy reference book⁴. This publication introduced Elisabeth to the whimsical graphics of the 17th century hand-written characters.

The general layout of all the "ABC" pages included the letter character with many variants of its graphic interpretation, the main plot (related to the page title or topic) and several auxiliary plots: historical objects or artefacts of peasant life, ancient Russian coins – "drawings for each of the letters were adhering, whenever possible, to the spirit of that epoch or tale"⁵.

Another element of the page design – the headpiece – is of special interest to us. Here, "Siberian stones were selected for every letter of the alphabet"⁵. A small image of a mineral, apparently influenced by the illustrations from mineralogical handbooks and atlases, was accompanied by a stylized caption. The choice of minerals and their names is interesting in its variety. Thus, some of the images presented well-known minerals and rocks, which included gems – emerald, pearls, turquoise, rubies, sapphire – which are often found in the descriptions of the Tsar Treasures of the Armoury Chamber of the Moscow Kremlin.



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амѣтистъ



Диоппазъ
diopase