

Description de l'Ukraine in light of *De Administrando Imperio*: Two Accounts of a Journey along the Dnieper¹

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Omnia subiecta sunt naturae.

People have always been dependent on nature. Even today, its powerful forces care little for the achievements of our civilization. Since the beginning of time, all man could do when faced with the fickleness of the natural world was to humbly endure, observe and follow its rhythm². Rivers are a good example of this phenomenon, their untamed waters a source of wealth, happiness, and often livelihood. One such mighty river of the ancient times was Dnieper. Its significance was praised even by Herodotus, who wrote that apart from the Nile, Dnieper is the largest and most magnificent river, granting people countless benefits and innumerable wealth. Being a geography enthusiast, Herodotus claims that only in the case of these two rivers, i.e. Borysthenes³ and the Nile, he was unable to locate their sources.⁴ Nevertheless, the father of history concludes that

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² To learn about the contemporary view of the interrelation between history and geography, see: A. R. H. BAKER, *Geography and History Bringing the Divide*, Cambridge 2003, particularly 1-37.

³ In Greek the Dnieper was called Borysthenes (Βορυσθένης), the Polish name Dniepr derives from the Sarmatian *Dānu apara*. The river was given many names throughout the centuries: Danapris in Latin (from the Persian "dana" – meaning "river"), Slavuta or Slavutych in Old Slavic, Var in the language of the Huns (*Jordanes, Getica*, 268.), Buri-Chai in Bulgarian and *Özü* in the language of the Crimean Tatars. Currently it is known as Днепр in Russian, Дняпро in Belarusian, Дніпро in Ukrainian, Δειπερος in Greek and Dniepr in Polish.

⁴ Wheeler pointed out that Herodotus could only know the section of Dnieper that led to the barrages. For more, see the already classic work by J. T. WHEELER, *The geography of Herodotus*, London 1854, 147-149. Also compare F. R. B. GODOLPHIN, *Herodotus: On the Scythians*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin New Series 32/ 5 (1973-1974) 129-149. For a broader context see J. M. CORNET, *Le Rhône-Borysthenes: Hérodote géographe de la Celtique*, Revue dromoise 87/458 (1990) 215-227.

Dnieper gives life and hope for a better future to countless masses and its wealth is second only to the Nile.⁵

Apart from its strictly economic importance, the Dnieper has always been a major traffic route, both in the Antiquity, the Middle Ages⁶ as well as the modern period.⁷ This work will deal with two accounts of a journey on the river.⁸ Although their respective authors lived more than 695 years apart, their deliberations regarding Dnieper are more than a little similar, and comparing them might lead to some interesting conclusions.

First, however, we need to present the authors whose works will be analyzed. The first one is the East Roman Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, who lived in the years 905-959.⁹ His work entitled *De administrando imperio*¹⁰ (hereinafter *DAI*), addressed at the Emperor's son – Romanos II.,¹¹ was written under the patronage of Constantine VII. In *DAI* there is a passage describing the journey of the Rus¹² along the Dnieper to the Black Sea, and farther down to Constantinople. The whole section was compiled and edited, most probably from three different sources, by the author of *DAI*.¹³ The fragment that is relevant to this work is believed to have been written by an imperial official from

⁵ Herodotus, *The Histories*, IV, 52-56.

⁶ W. DUCZKO, *Viking Rus. Studies on the Presence of Scandinavians in Eastern Europe*, Leyden 2004, 155-187, and also 248-253.

⁷ Compare with the text by R. E. JONES, *The Dnieper Trade Route in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries: A Note*, *The International History Review* 11/2 (1989) 303-312.

⁸ A very good description of the river's geography was included by Volodymyr Kubijovyč and Ivan Teslia in the online encyclopedia of Ukraine published under the auspices of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies. V. KUBIJOVYČ – I. TESLIA, *Dnieper River*, *Encyclopedia of Ukraine*, date of access: 03.09.2012.

⁹ I do not believe it necessary to include a detailed biographical note on Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos. Interested readers should consult such works as A. KAZHDAN – A. CUTLER, *Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos*, *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* 1, Oxford 1991, 502-502, and more in-depth information can be found in: A. J. TOYNEEE, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus and his World*, Oxford 1973.

¹⁰ For more information on the work itself refer to the classic piece: J. B. BURY, *The treatise De administrando imperio*, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 15/2 (1906) 517-578.

¹¹ See *Constantine Porphyrogenitus, De Administrando Imperio*, ed. Gy. Moravcsik translated by R. J. H. Jenkings, Washington 1967, 11-14. *Constantine Porphyrogenitus, De Administrando Imperio. A Commentary*, ed. R. J. H. Jenkins, Washington 2012, 1-8, as well as introduction to K. BELKE – P. SOUSTAL, *Die De administrando imperio genannte Lehrschrift des Kaisers Konstantinos Porphyrogenetos für seinen Sohn Romanos*, Vienna 1995.

¹² A short description of the genesis of the Rus' state is provided by J. SHEPARD, *The Cambridge History of Russia v. 1 From Early Rus' to 1689*, ed. M. Perrie, Cambridge 2006, 47-73.

¹³ *De Administrando Imperio. A Commentary...*, 18-19.

Constantinople,¹⁴ who made the journey in connection with the diplomatic talks between the Romans and the Rus.¹⁵

The author of the second analyzed work is a French architect, traveler and army man Guillaume le Vasseur de BEAUPLAN, born c. 1600 in France.¹⁶ BEAUPLAN was a military engineer, known for designing fortresses and his knack for cartography. Already in 1616 he was promoted to lieutenant in service of marquis d'Ancre. Sometime around the year 1630 the adventurous Frenchman¹⁷ joined the ranks of the army of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Enlisting in Poland turned out to be a good decision, as at that time King Sigismund III Vasa was planning on improving the defensive potential of Ukraine and recovering the country from ruin caused by ceaseless wars.¹⁸ In order to do that the king required military architects skilled in the western art of fortification. BEAUPLAN fulfilled these requirements perfectly, which is why he was tasked with constructing a series of defensive structures in Ukraine, constantly beset by Cossack rebellions. From his own memoirs we learn that he oversaw the construction and prepared the designs for such strongholds as Kodak,¹⁹ New Koniecpol, or Kremenchuk and that he repaired and modernized the strongholds of Brody and Bar.²⁰ For much of his stay in Poland, BEAUPLAN was bound to the Great Hetman of the Crown Stanisław Koniecpolski.²¹

¹⁴ As evidenced by the fact that the descriptions refer to the topography of the Empire's capital city. Ibidem, 19.

¹⁵ Ibidem, 19. A historical note on the Roman – Byzantine Crimea can be found in *History of Ukraine-Rus' volume 1 From Prehistory to the Eleventh Century*, ed. A. Poppe – F. E. Sysyn, Toronto 1997, 71-72. There is extensive literature available on the subject of treaties between Byzantium and the Rus'; a significant portion of it has been collected in the work: M. RAEV, *The Russian-Byzantine treaty of 971: Theophilos and Sveneld*, *Revue des études byzantines* 64 (2006) 329-340. Another excellent piece that should be mentioned is: A. POPPE, *A Political Background to the Baptism of Rus': Byzantine-Russian Relations between 986-89*, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 30 (1976) 195-244.

¹⁶ An interesting biographical note on Beauplan can be found in: K. BUCZEK, *Beauplan Wilhelm Le Vasseur*, in: *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, z. 1, Warsaw 1935, 384-386. A very well researched list of works dealing with Beauplan was included in the article by D. ESSAR – A. PERNAL, *Un texte égaré de Le Vasseur de Beauplan: Description de la Normandie*, *Annales de Normandie* 53/4 (2003) 317-349, particularly pages 347-349.

¹⁷ He previously travelled to East Indies.

¹⁸ To learn more about the rule of Sigismund III Vasa, see W. LEITSCH, *Das Leben am Hof König Sigismunds III. von Polen*, 1-4, Vienna 2009; H. WISNER, *Zygmunt III Waza*, Warsaw 1984.

¹⁹ On the significance of the stronghold as part of the Polish system of defenses, see the classic work: M. DUBIECKI, *Kudak, twierdza kresowa i jej okolice*, Warsaw 1900, and A. CZOŁOWSKI, *Kudak: przyczynki do założenia i upadku twierdzy*, Wrocław 1926.

²⁰ An interesting description of Bar was provided by A. ROLLE in the classic Polish work: *Zameczki podolskie na kresach multańskich*, z. 3, Warsaw 1880, 109-169. Beauplan mentions the Bar castle only once in his memoirs, writing about how he

During his service under Polish banners BEAUPLAN took part in an expedition to the estuary of the Dnieper in 1639 and a retaliatory expedition against the Cossacks led by Stanisław Koniecpolski. The journey to the ends of the Polish Commonwealth allowed the Frenchman to travel on the Dnieper, which led to the creation of a map of the river, published in 1662.²² During these expeditions BEAUPLAN prepared the first detailed maps of the regions that he visited.²³ In the summer of 1639 he became the architect responsible for rebuilding the fortress in Kodak, which had been destroyed in 1635. The engineer's memoirs and notes regarding Ukraine are dated to this particular period. BEAUPLAN's maps remained in use for centuries due to the decline of the art of cartography in the Republic of Poland. He was the author of several works from the field of astronomy, nautics, and geometry.²⁴ Modern studies on the works and travels of BEAUPLAN are well advanced,²⁵ focusing usually on his cartographic achievements.²⁶

Although BEAUPLAN's map will certainly have its uses for my studies, the main analyzed source will be his memoir entitled: *Déscription de l'Ukraine, qui sont plusieurs provinces du Royaume de Pologne, contenues depuis*

transplanted cherry trees and almond trees to the castle, since it was his permanent residence. BEAUPLAN, 49.

²¹ Together with another architect, Andrzej dell'Aqua, he constructed the magnificent residence of the Koniecpolski family in Pidhirtsi; however, Brody remained the capital city of hetman's lands. L. PODHORODECKI, *Hetman Stanisław Koniecpolski*, Warsaw 2011, 275-278. The Pidhirtsi Castle is located about 17 kilometers from Brody.

²² The most comprehensive life sketch of Beauplan was presented by Cz. CHWANIEC, *Une carte militaire polonaise au XVIII^e siècle (Les origines de la carte de l'Ukraine dressé par Guillaume le Vasseur de Beauplan)*, *Revue Internationale d'Histoire Militaire* 3 (1952) 546-562. During the expedition of 1639, Beauplan took measurements determining the geographical latitude of the mouth of Dnieper. His calculations placed the Dnieper Estuary at the latitude of 46°50', i.e. with a margin of error of only 15', which made it possible to correct the location of the axis of the Mediterranean Sea. The previous latitude was erroneously calculated by Ptolemaeus in the Antiquity, and all the way until the 17th century nobody had been aware of the mistake.

²³ For more on the history of Polish cartography, see M. SIRKO, *Zarys historii kartografii*, Lublin 1999, 159-191; K. BUCZEK, *Dzieje kartografii polskiej od XV do XVIII wieku. Zarys analityczno-syntetyczny*, Wrocław – Warsaw – Cracow 1963.

²⁴ Guillaume Le Vasseur BEAUPLAN, *Les principes de la géométrie militaire*, Rouen 1662.

²⁵ Б. БАРВІНСЬКИЙ, «Україна» Боплана, *Стара Україна* 1 (1924); В. Л. ЛЬСКОРОНСКИЙ, *Гильом-Левассер де Боплан и его историко-географические труды относительно Южной России*, Киев 1901; Z. WÓJCIK, *Wstęp*, in: Eryka Lassoty i Wilhelma Beaupliana opisy Ukrainy, Warsaw 1972; K. BUCZEK, *Ze studiów nad mapami Beauplana*, *Wiadomości służby geograficznej* VII/2 (1933); idem, „Beauplaniana“, *Wiadomości służby geograficznej* VIII/1 (1934).

²⁶ Z. WÓJCIK, *Dzikie pola w ogniu O Kozaczyźnie w dawnej Rzeczypospolitej*, Warsaw 1968, 125-137; P. I. СОССА, *Історія картографування території України. Від найдавніших часів до 1920*, Киев 2000.

*les confins de la Moscovie jusques aux limites de la Transilvanie: ensemble leurs moeurs, façons de vivre et de faire la guerre. Par le Sieur de Beauplan.*²⁷ It is a diary, in which the author describes his observations made during many travels around Ukraine. It was first printed in France in 1651.²⁸ Several translations and new editions have appeared to this day.²⁹ Confronting BEAUPLAN's piece with *DAI* may lead to interesting reflections.³⁰ The edition of Constantine Porphyrogenetos' work used in my text is the one prepared by Gy. MORAVCSIK.³¹ I will analyze fragments of both works dealing with the journey on the Dnieper and all the obstacles encountered.³² The comparison of these two sources will allow to identify the similarities between both accounts and answer the question of what do these similarities stem from.³³

The work of Constantine Porphyrogenetos will serve as the main source; BEAUPLAN's account will be commented upon in relation to it. Selecting this research method limited the necessary analysis to only those

²⁷ The most recent translation of the work can be found in: A. PERNAL – D. ESSAR, *A Description of Ukraine Guillaume Le Vasseur, Sieur de Beauplan*, vol. 1-2, Harvard 1993. Additionally, the authors were able to determine the accurate date of Beauplan's death. He passed away in January 1675 in the town of Rouen. It is worth noting that the first translation of *Description de l'Ukraine* appeared as early as 1704 – the work was translated into English. *A Collection of voyages and travels...* Printed for Awnsham and J. Churchill, London 1704. The footnotes in this work refer to the French edition published by Essar and Pernal in Ottawa. *De Guillaume Le Vasseur de Beauplan, La Description d'Ukraine*, ed. D. F. Essar – A. B. Pernal, Ottawa 1990. Hereinafter quoted as Beauplan.

²⁸ Guillaume le Vasseur de BEAUPLAN, *Description d'Ukraine qui sont plusieurs Provinces du Royaume de Pologne*, Rouen 1650. It is worth remembering that Johannes Meursius published the first edition of *DAI* in 1611. It does not seem likely for Beauplan to have read this work; nevertheless, the possibility cannot be ruled out entirely.

²⁹ *Eryka Lassoty i Wilhelma Beauplana opisy Ukrainy*, translated by Z. Stasiewska – S. Meller; ed., introduction and commentary by Ż. Wójcik; map by J. Łopatto, Warsaw 1972; Guillaume le Vasseur de BEAUPLAN, *Description of Ukraine*, translated and edited by A. B. Pernal and D. F. Essar, Cambridge, MA 1993. On the subject of other editions and translations of the work, see: D. F. Essar – A. B. Pernal, *Beauplan's Description d'Ukraine: A Bibliography of Editions and Translations*, *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 6/4 (1982) 485-499.

³⁰ In his commentary to *DAI* Obolensky noted the existence of Beauplan's account when describing the barrages. *CDAI*, 40-42. Obolensky also points the reader's attention to Beauplan's description of boats and compares them to the ones used by the Rus. *CDAI*, 36-37.

³¹ *Constantine Porphyrogenitus, De Administrando Imperio*, ed. Gy. Moravcsik, translated by R. J. H. Jenkins, Washington 1967. The footnotes specify the chapter from *DAI* and the page number referring to the Greek text in the edition by Moravcsik; the commentary to *DAI* is hereinafter quoted as *CDAI*.

³² Readers are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the extensive commentary to this section of *DAI* by Obolensky. *Constantine Porphyrogenitus, De Administrando Imperio. A Commentary*, ed. R. J. H. Jenkins, Washington 2012, 16-61.

³³ I assume that Beauplan was not familiar with and did not make use of the work of Constantine VII.

parts of the French engineer's text that are similar in content to the work of Constantine VII; however, at certain points I will allow myself to launch into digressions concerning BEAUPLAN's travel journal. A secondary source will be a map of Ukraine prepared by BEAUPLAN, though it is not the map that he refers to in his *Déscription de l'Ukraine*, but one of his later maps which has survived to this day.³⁴

The first common item in both descriptions is the city of Kiev.³⁵ Although the authors began their narratives in different locations, the present day capital city of Ukraine plays a prominent role in both accounts.³⁶ *DAI* states that the Rus began their journey at Novgorod, the seat of Prince Sviatoslav; however, the travelers would come from other places as well, such as: Smolensk, Teliutza, Chernigov or Vyshegrad, to gather in Kiev and form a single group.

The Cossacks and Ukrainian fishermen began the journey downstream from Kiev, next to a small island called Romanovka.³⁷ One interesting fact noted by the French architect was that the place was very convenient as a departure point, because the current of the river downstream was unobstructed by any islands, which meant that the travelers would not have to fear an ambush.³⁸ Up the river from Romanovka there were numerous small tributaries of the Dnieper and lakes filled with an exceptional amount of fish.³⁹ It is possible that these were the same lakes described by Constantine VII as the place to which the Slavs would deliver boats⁴⁰ before the Rus set out on their journey.⁴¹ They were located

³⁴ I am using the version of the map edited by J. Łopatto, which can be found in the Polish edition of Beauplan's work. The map, which the French traveler referred to in his memoirs, did not survive to this day, but it most probably did not differ significantly from the one that we have available.

³⁵ Beauplan mentions that in the past, when Kiev was at the height of its power, the Bosphorus Strait was blocked and impassable. In terms of the city's history this is incorrect, but archaeological findings seem to confirm that the Black Sea might have once been a freshwater lake. More on this theory in: W. RYAN – W. PITMAN, *Noah's Flood: The New Scientific Discoveries About The Event That Changed History*, Clearwater 2000. On the subject of historical significance of the city, see B. SHULGIN, *Kiev, Mother of Russians Towns*, *The Slavonic and East European Review* 19/53-54 (1939-1940) 62-82. On the subject of political significance of the rulers of Kiev on the Rus', see J. SHEPARD, *Some Problems of Russo-Byzantine Relations, c. 860-c. 1050*, *The Slavonic and East European Review* 52/126 (1974) 19-20.

³⁶ *DAI*, IX, 56; BEAUPLAN, 46-47.

³⁷ BEAUPLAN, 50.

³⁸ In the times of Beauplan the Cossacks would gather for the road near the town of Cherkasy, located upstream from the island of Romanovka; however, when the Frenchman made his trip the town was already destroyed (Beauplan took part in the burning of Cherkasy during a military expedition at the side of the Polish Hetman).

³⁹ BEAUPLAN, 49-50. Possibly, the author was describing the confluence of the Samotkani and the Dnieper rivers.

⁴⁰ A short note on the boats of the Rus can be found in: E. PILTZ, *Varangian*

about 250 km from Kiev and 190 km from Vitichev, and the current in this section of the river was not strong, which only increased the attractiveness of the area.

The Rus would start their journey at the beginning of June and their first destination was the city of Vitichev⁴² located about 60 kilometers from Kiev.⁴³ Both the Rus and the Cossacks gathered their fleets downstream from Kiev, although they both chose different locations. Vitichev was probably the last keep of the Rus, after which the territory of the Pechenegs began. The Cossacks chose Cherkasy, located some 40 kilometers farther,⁴⁴ which also offered a fortified position.⁴⁵

The Rus gathered their trade fleet⁴⁶ in Vitichev because it was a place well suited for a couple of days stopover, while waiting for the rest of the boats. The vicinity of the city made this stop quite a pleasant one. The layout of the river was also important – in this area the Dnieper was still very wide and its current not that strong, which made sailing to the barrages relatively peaceful and safe.

In the opinion of BEAUPLAN the river's layout was a crucial factor in selecting the staging point. To the Cossacks, Romanovka was a perfect location, because, as the author states:

Companies for Long Distance Trade – Aspects of Interchange between Scandinavia, Rus' and Byzantium in the 11th-12th centuries, in: *Byzantium and Islam in Scandinavia Acts of a Symposium at Uppsala University June 15-16 1996*, ed. E. Piltz, Jonsered 1998, 103.

⁴¹ *DAI*, IX, 56-58.

⁴² This was the last possible mustering point before the lands that were directly under pressure from the Pechenegs. *History of Ukraine-Rus' volume 1 From Prehistory to the Eleventh Century...*, 315.

⁴³ *CDAI*, 37-38. The Rus were obliged to visit Kiev and purchase a certificate from the Prince allowing them to travel to Constantinople. J. SHEPARD, *Some Problems...*, 19-20.

⁴⁴ The Romanovka island was a gathering point for fishermen. Cossacks mustered their fleet near the fortified town of Cherkasy, but said town was still in ruins during the Frenchman's journey, having been destroyed during a Cossack rebellion.

⁴⁵ The border between the territories of the Cossacks and the Tatars was ever-changing; already at Cherkasy it was possible to meet a raiding party of the nomads.

⁴⁶ For more on trade routes, see *History of Ukraine-Rus' volume 1 From Prehistory to the Eleventh Century...*, 212-232. The boats of the Rus carried slaves to the markets of Constantinople as well as beeswax required for the manufacture of candles. They brought back expensive and luxury goods, fine silks, fruit, olive oil and wine, which was particularly valued by the Rus. See T. S. NOONAN – R. K. KOVALEV, *Wine and Oil for All the Rus'! The Importation of Byzantine Wine and Olive Oil to Kievan Rus'*, in: *The Expansion of Orthodox Europe Byzantium, the Balkans and Russia*, ed. J. Shepard, Aldershot 2007, 185-221. On the subject of wine abuse by the Rus, 205-206. On the subject of Byzantine-Scandinavian trade, see: E. PILTZ, *Varangian Companies for Long Distance Trade...*, 85-106.

It serves as a staging point for fishermen from Kiev and other places. Farther downstream the river flows steadily, its current uninterrupted by other islands. This is why the Tatars dare to cross it in this area, unafraid of surprises, especially upstream from the island. ⁴⁷

The presence of this small island (Romanovka) together with the steady current and wide layout of the river farther downstream guaranteed an ideal stopping point and the last convenient place to cross from one bank to the other.⁴⁸ Due to its location, this area upstream of the Tarensky Rog, which the French engineer believed to be a perfect site for a city, was best suited for a comfortable rest before the difficult crossing of the barrages.⁴⁹ The Rus chose to make a stop earlier, but their goal was the same: gathering the whole fleet, resting and making preparations before the most difficult stage of the journey.

As we can see, there were two crucial factors when choosing the place for a stop: the natural conditions and the vicinity of a friendly city or keep, i.e. Vitichev for the Rus and Cherkasy for the Cossacks. Both groups decided on a safe and hospitable place, where it was possible to relax and wait for the rest of the fleet to appear. Another important aspect was the relatively short distance to the barrages. Having recovered their strength the travelers would be ready to face the hardest part of the road.

Cossacks had their staging post one to two days' sailing from the first barrage, the Rus required more than two days of steady sailing. No difficulties awaited the sailors until they reached the first barrage, which the Rus called Ἐσσοῦπιη,⁵⁰ meaning "Do not sleep!", and the Cossacks referred to it as the Kudak or Koydak barrage⁵¹ – the same name that was given to the castle reconstructed by Beauplan.⁵² Both authors paused their narratives at this point and went into a digression about the nature of the rocky barrages.

⁴⁷ BEAUPLAN, 50.

⁴⁸ Beauplan emphasized that this was a perfect crossing point. The Tatars in particular seemed to favor the area downriver of Romanovka – the location was so good, in fact, that they didn't have to fear any ambush themselves. BEAUPLAN, 50.

⁴⁹ BEAUPLAN, 50.

⁵⁰ The names of the barrages were described in detail in: *CMD*, 38-52. See also D. OBOLENSKY, *The Byzantine Sources on the Scandinavians in Eastern Europe*, in: *Varangian Problems*, ed. K. Hannestad, 149-165.

⁵¹ The Kodak fortress was intended to prevent Cossack expeditions to Crimea and the Black Sea.

⁵² BEAUPLAN, 51. The author mentions that the fortress he built was a thorn in the side of the Cossack leader known as Sulima, who eventually captured Kodak while returning from an expedition to the Black Sea in August 1635. Cossack raids on Turkish lands were a matter of contention between the Polish Commonwealth and the sultanate; the construction of a fortress in Kodak was supposed to keep the belligerent residents of Ukraine in check. The most infamous Cossack raid in this period was the burning of Varna in 1620.

Constantine Porphyrogenetos gives a detailed description of this first barrage as exemplary.⁵³ Essoupi barrage is narrow, with rocks in the middle as tall as islands, and the river crashing below. This made it impassable by boat and forced the Rus to get out of their *monoxyla*,⁵⁴ leave the goods on their boats and carefully move along the river bank on foot.⁵⁵ BEAUPLAN characterized barrages (*porohy*)⁵⁶ as chains of rocks jutting out above the waterline, and the Ukrainian word for barrages, in his opinion, derives from the language of the Rus.⁵⁷

To explain what “porohy” are, one has to begin by stating that it is a Rus word meaning “a rock”. The “porohy” are, in essence, chains comprised of such rocks, spanning the river; some are submerged, others slightly break the surface of the river, and others still jut out above the waterline 8-10 feet in height. Yet all are large as houses and pressed so closely together that they seem to be a dam or a causeway blocking the course of the river, which after passing through the barrages falls down 5-6 feet, or even 6-7 feet at some places, all depending on how swollen the river is. In the Spring, due to the thawing of the snow, all barrages are submerged, apart from the seventh “poroh” called Nienasytecki, which at that time is the only major obstacle to sailing.⁵⁸

It is worth noting that in the opinion of the French engineer the only obstacle that awaited the sailors in early spring was the seventh barrage, as the rest were under water due to thaw waters swelling the river.⁵⁹ This stands in opposition to Constantine’s account, who stated that even the first barrage was an impassable obstacle forcing the Rus to leave their boats. However, the Rus did not reach the barrages together with thaw

⁵³ An interesting description of sailing conditions was provided by S. Franklin and J. Shepard, who emphasized that the barrages were extremely difficult to cross and formed a natural border between two completely different worlds. S. FRANKLIN – J. SHEPARD, *The Emergence of Rus 750-1200*, London 1996, 92.

⁵⁴ Some notes on the construction of Russian and Cossack boats were presented by: ZINKIEWICZ, *Торговий транспорт. I. Структура товарообігу в економіці Середньовічної Балтики*, in: Mare Integrans. Studia nad dziejami wybrzeży Morza Bałtyckiego, t. 1. Starożytność i średniowiecze, ed. M. Bogacki – M. Franz – Z. Pilarczyk, Toruń 2009, 187-206.

⁵⁵ *DAI*, IX, 58.

⁵⁶ The French cartographer counted 13 “porohy”. BEAUPLAN, 52. The author must have included the smaller barrages, which actually did not pose much risk to river sailing. The existence of small barrages is a cause of much confusion and makes it difficult to accurately determine the number of these rocky obstructions – today, their number is estimated at nine. *CDAI*, 40.

⁵⁷ Most probably from the Old Slavic *porogi*.

⁵⁸ BEAUPLAN, 52. All translations made by me, Ł.R.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*. The present belief is that the barrages were a significant obstacle no matter the season. S. FRANKLIN – J. SHEPARD, *The Emergence of Rus 750-1200*, 92. It is difficult to explain why Beauplan considered only the seventh barrage to be an actual difficulty during the thaw season. Perhaps he had been told as much by his guides.

waters but at a much later time, in June.⁶⁰ As such, the barrage was more difficult to cross, which is why the two accounts differ in this regard. The Cossacks set out earlier to avoid problems related to braving the barrages⁶¹ – we should bear in mind that the Cossack *chaikas* were heavier and bigger than the *monoxyla*,⁶² which made their passage significantly harder.

As far as the names of the barrages are concerned we find no similarities, with one exception. The name Gelandir was meant to signify the voice of the barrages, probably inspired by the sound of the turbulent waters flowing through it.⁶³ BEAUPLAN's map shows us the Polish name "Dzwoniec",⁶⁴ given probably due to the great noise made by the waters. This name survives to this day in the form of *Zvonets*. The names of the remaining barrages changed since the times of Constantine Porphyrogenetos and were not in use anymore during BEAUPLAN's journey.

After passing through the small barrage (Naprezi-Stroukoun), which is the seventh obstacle described in Constantine's work, and the last of the barrages, the Rus reached the ford of Krarion, which was ideally suited for crossing the river.⁶⁵ It was precisely at this point, as wide as the Constantinople hippodrome and about a bow-shot in length, that the Pechenegs set ambushes for the Rus.⁶⁶ The fate of Sviatoslav Igorevich, who is believed to have died here at the hands of the Pechenegs in 972,⁶⁷

⁶⁰ DAI, IX, 58.

⁶¹ The Rus would set out at the end of winter, but they gathered from all over the land, which is why the fleet was only ready in June.

⁶² See ZINKIEWICZ, *Op.cit.*, 187-189. The phenomenon of *monoxyla* was described by L. HAVLÍKOVÁ, *Slavic Ships in the 5th-12th Centuries Byzantine Historiography*, *Byzantinoslavica* 52 (1991) 89-104; M. ΓΡΗΓΟΡΙΟΥ-ΙΩΑΝΝΙΔΟΥ, *Τα "μονόξυλα", οι Σλάβοι και οι Βούλγαροι στο χίνημα του Αρτεμίου-Αναστασίου Β' (719)*, *Byzantiaka* 19 (1999) 167-185. See also CDAI, 23-25. *Monoxyla* should not be confused with Cossack *chaikas*; most historians agree that these were Russian *odnoderevki*, although some of the boats used to travel to Constantinople might have been reminiscent of Viking rowboats.

⁶³ DAI, IX, 58. D. OBOLENSKY, *The Byzantine Sources...*, 160. Russian names for the barrages are unquestionably Nordic in origin, though only one of these is mentioned in Scandinavian sources. The inscription on a runestone found in Pilgrårds on Gotland mentions the Aifor barrage, which is most certainly the Aeifor *poroh* described by Constantine VII. W. KRAUSE, *En vikingafärd genom Dnjeprforsarna*, *Gotländskt arkiv* 24 (1952) 7-13.

⁶⁴ Which in Polish means "large bell".

⁶⁵ DAI, IX, 60; CDAI, 52.

⁶⁶ DAI, IX, 60.

⁶⁷ Leo the Deacon only notes the fact that the army of Sviatoslav Igorevich fell into an ambush set by the Pechenegs while returning to the Rus'. *Leo Diaconus*, IX. 12. Nestor, on the other hand, specifies that the Pechenegs blocked the crossing through the barrages, making it impossible for the Prince to return home. It is very likely that the ambush for the exhausted and malnourished Rus was set pre-

confirms the accuracy of Constantine's text. The ford seemed to be perfect for crossing the river, which was also noted by BEAUPLAN, who marked it very accurately on his map as the second largest Tatar crossing point, and described it in detail in his memoir:

*I saw Poles loosing their arrows across the river, and the arrows fell more than a hundred paces beyond the other bank. This is the largest and most convenient crossing point for the Tatars, as the river here is no more than 150 paces wide, but the banks are easily accessible and the surrounding area is free of forests, which is why the Tatars do not fear an ambush. The ford is called Kiczkas.*⁶⁸

Undoubtedly, the ford described by both authors is the exact same place, especially that just after its description they both mention the island of St. Gregory.⁶⁹ In the opinion of Constantine, the Krarion ford was a good place to prepare an ambush for the Rus travelling by boat. The narrowness of the river and the inability to hide from the enemy, or to escape beyond the reach of arrows to the middle of the river, made the Rus an easy target for the Pechenegs. On the other hand, BEAUPLAN claimed that this was not only a convenient crossing place, but also a safe one.⁷⁰ The same features that made the ford of Krarion a death trap for the Rus allowed the Tartars to cross the river without fear of an ambush. The waters of the Dnieper could be crossed quickly, and the easily accessible banks allowed for a swift retreat from the riverside.

After braving the barrages and the ford or Krarion the Rus made their way to the island of St. Gregory. Constantine Porphyrogenetos claims that once this destination was reached the journey through the barrages – which was one of the most difficult parts on the road to Constantinople – was at an end.⁷¹ The Rus, rejoicing in their success, would land on the shore to observe their religious rituals.⁷² There was a huge oak tree on the island, at which they would sacrifice a rooster (or not, depending on the outcome of the drawing⁷³) and hold a feast.⁷⁴ This was the last stage of crossing the barrages, so the travelers could find some

cisely at the ford of Krarion, as the location was best suited for such an attack. *The Primary Chronicle*, XXIX.

⁶⁸ BEAUPLAN, 53.

⁶⁹ *DAI*, IX, 60. In Beauplan's work the island was named Khortytsia. BEAUPLAN, 53; *CDAI*, 54-55.

⁷⁰ BEAUPLAN, 53.

⁷¹ *DAI*, IX, 60-62.

⁷² *CDAI*, 55-56.

⁷³ Trusting to fate was a common practice among the Varangians, which isn't to say that fate could not be "swayed" in certain situations. Case in point – Harald drawing lots together with Maniakes. *Snorin Sturluson, King Harald's Saga*, London 2005, 49-50 (IV).

⁷⁴ *DAI*, IX, 60.

rest here before the remainder of the journey. BEAUPLAN's account also mentions the island of St. Gregory, although in his time it was already called Khortytsia.⁷⁵ Despite the fact that the French engineer did not land on the island, he provides the readers with a detailed description based on his talks with befriended Cossacks.

*They say that the island is quite big, both in terms of its height and its hills, and that it is almost completely surrounded by chasms, which makes it well-nigh inaccessible. It is 2 miles long and half a mile wide, narrowing and dropping to the west. It doesn't get flooded, is filled with oak trees and could easily be inhabited to serve as a watch post against the Tartars.*⁷⁶

As we can see the island of St. Gregory was famous for its great oak trees not only in the Byzantine times. Even the Cossacks describing the island to the French engineer mentioned the ancient trees. To this day the island's flora and fauna make it stand out from the landscape of the Dnieper. It's worth mentioning that during BEAUPLAN's life Khortytsia was already inhabited – a Cossack Sich had been founded there at the end of the 16th century. The Frenchman was also misled, as the island is not inaccessible altogether, but only from the northern side (where the rocks reach as high as 30 meters above the waterline), however its southern end, although accessible, is often flooded by the Dnieper.⁷⁷

The French engineer and cartographer also mentions a feast organized after passing through the barrages. However, it did not take place on Khortytsia, but on an island located directly after the last barrage, called Kaszewarnica⁷⁸ in the times of BEAUPLAN. The shores of this island were easier to access from the north, which is why the Cossacks chose to land there.

*At a distance of a cannon shot (from the last barrage) one can see a rocky island, which the Cossacks call Kaszewarnica, which means "millet boiling", as if the men naming it wanted to express their joy at having safely crossed the barrages. It is on this island that they hold a feast celebrating this fact, with millet being their food of choice during such journeys.*⁷⁹

It is evident that the custom of celebrating the passing of the barrages did not disappear along with the Rus, and was still observed during BEAUPLAN's life. This ritual feast, however, took place on a different island, most probably on Little Khortytsia, which was the first conveniently located island after the barrage. It should, of course, come as no surprise that

⁷⁵ BEAUPLAN, 53.

⁷⁶ BEAUPLAN, 53.

⁷⁷ The author himself wrote that he never travelled farther and his knowledge about those areas comes from the accounts of others, which are not necessarily reliable nor accurate. BEAUPLAN, 53.

⁷⁸ The name of the island means: "place of boiling groats". BEAUPLAN, 53.

⁷⁹ BEAUPLAN, 53.

the Rus chose not to stop at Little Khortytsia but rather sailed all the way to Khortytsia. We should remember that there was a dangerous ford between Kaszewarnica and Khortytsia, where the Rus expected to encounter ambushes prepared by the Pechenegs. Only after leaving this last threat behind them could the Rus conclude that the barrages had been crossed safely and begin their celebrations.

After passing the ford of Krarion and observing the rituals on the island of St. Gregory, the Rus, as claimed by Constantine VII, could expect to encounter no more Pecheneg ambushes until they reached the Selinas river.⁸⁰ BEAUPLAN, on the other hand, marked two more bottlenecks before the Krivoy Rog catchment area, which could serve as good ambush points and were not mentioned by Constantine Porphyrogenetos.⁸¹ Four days of sailing on the relatively wide and peaceful Danube took the flotilla to the Dnieper and Boh liman, at the mouth of which stood the island of St. Atherios,⁸² known today as the island of Berezan. This was an important resting point.⁸³ After sailing the Danube some of the *monoxyla* required repairs, and the men needed additional rest before the voyage on the sea.⁸⁴ It was precisely on Berezan that the necessary repairs were conducted. The peace treaty of 944/45 signed between the Empire and the Rus prohibited the Rus from spending the winter on the island, which probably means that the Rus were still allowed to use Berezan as a stopover during their expeditions to Constantinople, but had to leave before winter came.⁸⁵ The island was of too great strategic value to the Byzantine Empire and its lands to allow the Rus to inhabit it during winter, as it could lead to colonization of the area by the Rus. BEAUPLAN also points to the importance of this island, which he correctly names Berezan in his *Déscription de l'Ukraine*, but marks on his maps as Tandra:

About one mile to the southeast of Ochakiv there is a good landing place called Berezan. It is at least 2000 paces wide at its entry, and accessible only by boat, but the gulf itself is deep enough for galleys, which could sail 2 miles farther up the river that forms this natural harbor. The river is called Anczakrak (most probably the river known today as Sasyk).⁸⁶

In the times of BEAUPLAN the Cossacks would make use of the advantageous location of Berezan.⁸⁷ The island bay was safe, because the

⁸⁰ DAI, IX, 60. CDAI, 56.

⁸¹ BEAUPLAN, 56.

⁸² CDAI, 56.

⁸³ DAI, IX, 60-62.

⁸⁴ DAI, IX, 60.

⁸⁵ *The Primary Chronicle*, XVIII.

⁸⁶ BEAUPLAN, 57.

⁸⁷ BEAUPLAN, 57.

draught of the Turkish ships was too deep which made it impossible for them to go where the *chaikas* were moored.⁸⁸ The description of this island is the last item that the two works have in common, the last similarity between these accounts of the journey on the Dnieper.

A comparison of two sources that were created more than 700 years apart might seem to be only an interesting experiment, which would not add much to the study of the contents. However, after a comparative analysis we arrive at surprising results. It turns out that in spite of different times and different situations certain behaviors remain unchanged. The Pechenegs were replaced by the Tatars, the Rus by the Cossacks, but the patterns of their behavior did not undergo any major changes. They were dependent on the elements, subject to the whims of the wild, untamed river – the Dnieper. Both the Rus and the Cossacks feasted after braving the barrages,⁸⁹ were wary of ambushes at the same fords and employed similar means of taming nature. The many similarities between the studied descriptions allow us to make some conservative assumptions about the functioning of Byzantine diplomacy. The description included in *DAI* was likely taken from official reports, illustrating the diligence with which information was gathered and analyzed at the court of Constantinople. Thanks to studies like this one we can prove that the sources used by Constantine Porphyrogenetos were reliable; the descriptions of the journey from the Varangians to the Greeks are consistent with the description given by Wilhelm BEAUPLAN, who travelled much of this route in person.

⁸⁸ BEAUPLAN, 57.

⁸⁹ *CDAI*, 56. As noted by Obolensky, even in the 20th century the local sailors would still celebrate the passing of the barrages with a cry of “davay horilku”, which means “bring the vodka”.