Notes on the Radziwiłł Codex

The Radziwiłł or Königsberg codex is undoubtedly the most recognizable manuscript containing the chronicle text. It is the only illuminated medieval chronicle that survived, and its illustrations (613 in total), by being constantly replicated over the last century, formed that distinct set of imagery which we tend to associate with Kievan Rus'. The codex is usually thought to date to the early 1490s1 and is believed to be a copy of a lost illuminated manuscript of the thirteenth century. The dating of the manuscript is the only thing certain about the earliest history of the codex. As with Homer's birthplace, no less than six cities have competed for the honor of being considered its hometown: Novgorod (Sizov 1905; Arcixovskij: 1944), Suzdal’ (Kondakov 1902), Moscow or Tver’ (Podobedova 1965), Beloozero (Kukuškina 1997), or, more vaguely, “some Great Russian province” (Šaxmatov 1902) were named. However, the documented history of the codex finds it far from the supposed place of origin. It is thus believed that at a certain point, the manuscript had left the ‘Great Russian’ territory, and from the ‘Moscow or Vladimir [on Kljazma] district’ travelled ‘abroad’: first to ‘Belorussia’, then to ‘Lithuania’ where it finally fell into the hands of the Radziwills (Šaxmatov 1902: 2; Kukuškina 1994: 5).

In their reasoning, it would seem, the scholars were guided by their reluctance to lose such a rarity to an ‘alien’ national tradition rather than by the evidence, which consistently pointed in a different direction. A manifest Gothic style evident in the illustrations, as well as traces of the scribe’s ‘West-Russian’ origin eventually forced Aleksej Šaxmatov to reconsider and to suggest a compromise location: Smolensk, which seemed a region Russian enough but, at the same time, prone to some ‘Western’ influences (Šaxmatov 1913). After having reached this ‘realm of competition between West and East’, as one scholar put it, it was only a matter of time before the codex would defect to the other side. In the 1980s,  

1 The dating was suggested by Nikolaj Lixačev on the basis of the paper marks of 1486 and of 1495 (Lixačev 1899: 455-456) and was confirmed by the editors of the last facsimile edition, who identified the same watermarks as of 1487 and of 1491-1491 (Kukuškina 1994: 5-6). Lixačev apparently had little doubt that the codex originated in the Polish-Lithuanian state and he specifically looked for the match among the paper marks current there at the time. Šaxmatov vehemently objected: paper notwithstanding, nothing suggests that the Radziwiłł chronicle emerged in ‘Western Russia’ (Šaxmatov 1902: 5).
Aleksej Černecov suggested that the manuscript was commissioned in some ‘West Russian’ territory (Černecov 1981), while most recently Volhynia, and more specifically, the city of Volodymyr, was considered the manuscript’s probable place of origin (Nikitin 2004).

With these last two hypotheses, the _Radziwiłł codex_, after a century of scholarship, has finally reached its homeland, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. By reexamining the manuscript’s marginalia and the owners’ notes, the present article seeks to reinforce this idea, suggesting, in effect, a different life path for the codex. It seems that before being placed, as part of Bogusław Radziwiłł’s estate, at the Royal library in Königsberg, the manuscript had never left the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

The _Radziwiłł codex_ is now kept at the Library of the Russian Academy of Sciences (ban 34.5.30). The last century before its arrival in Saint Petersburg is relatively well documented. The manuscript was brought there (“was returned to Russia” (Kukuškina 1994: 5)) before 1761 as a military trophy of the Seven Year’s War (1758-1763) during which Russian troops occupied Königsberg. However, the manuscript was available for Russian scholarship half a century earlier. While visiting the Royal library in 1711, Tsar Peter had been so impressed with the codex that he ordered an exact copy (including the illustrations), which was produced in 1713 (Šaxmatov 1902: 10-12) and, before the original became available, served as one of the principal sources for the chronicle text.

As is evident from the special stamp with the date 1671 attached to the book’s upper cover, the Royal library in Königsberg came into possession of the codex from Prince Bogusław Radziwiłł. A relative of the Hohenzollerns on his mother’s side, Bogusław Radziwiłł spent his last years as the Governor General of Prussia and died in 1668 in Königsberg. Apparently, after his death, his book collection was donated to the library of the Elector of Brandenburg and Prussia.

In the literature, it is sometimes erroneously claimed that Boguslaw Radziwiłł inherited the manuscript from his father, Janusz Radziwiłł, to which allegedly the note on the codex’s last page testifies. In full, this Latin note was transcribed and published for the first time by Aleksej Šaxmatov whose comments are the source of some confusion (Šaxmatov 1902: 1). The note, indeed, states that the book was given as a gift to Prince Janusz Radziwiłł, the Palatine of Wilno and the Great Hetman of Lithuania, by his courtier Stanisław Zienowicz, the Prefect of Vilkia forests. However, Boguslaw’s father never held the titles listed (his highest office was that of the Castellan of Wilno) and also died in 1620, when Stanisław Zienowicz was only 10. It is obvious that the Janusz the note refers to is not Boguslaw’s father but rather his famous cousin, Janusz Radziwiłł (1612-1655).

Although lacking a date, Stanisław Zienowicz’s autograph bears enough chronological attributes to place it within a relatively short period of time. Janusz Radziwiłł was granted

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2 This mark is sometimes called Boguslaw’s _ex libris_ (Lur’e 1989: 4), which might not be technically correct. It sports the familial coat of arms of the Radziwiłłs (the so called ‘Trumpe _s’), but its date – 1671 – and also the legend (bibliotheca a celissimo principe, domno Boguslao Radzivilio bibliothecae, que Regiomonti est, electorali legato donata) indicate that stamps like this were produced when Boguslaw’s collection was merged with the library of the electors.
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the office of the Palatine of Wilno in 1653 and became the Great Hetman of Lithuania on June 17, 1654 (Lulewicz, Rachuba 1994: 233). That means that the chronicle was not a ‘fami-

miliar relic’ of the Radziwiłłs passed down the generations, as sometimes we read, but was

acquired by Janusz Radziwiłł shortly before his death. The note also refutes a hypothesis

that Janusz Radziwiłł may have borrowed the manuscript from the library of the Suprasl


Unlike his cousin Janusz, Bogusław Radziwiłł was not known for his special inter-

est in Cyrillic books. Most probably, the chronicle came into his possession simply as a

part of his wife’s dowry. After Janusz’s death, Bogusław was appointed the guardian of his
daughter and heir, Anna Maria, and married her in 1665 thus becoming the beneficiary of

his cousin’s fortune.

Not much is known about the manuscript’s previous owner, Stanisław Zienowicz

(1610-1672). He came from a prominent in the Grand Duchy family of the Despot-Zeno-

wiczes, closely tied to the Radziwiłłs.4 Stanisław’s father Jerzy-Jan held the office of Castel-

lan of Vitebsk, but all of Stanisław’s offices were in Lithuania proper: since 1646 he was the

Prefect of Vilkia forests. In 1653 he became the judge’s assistant (podsudek) and later the

judge of the land court (podkomorii) in Wilkomir. He ended up holding a senatorial rank

of the Castellan of Novogródek. Unfortunately, these bits of information do not hint at

how Stanisław Zienowicz might have acquired the manuscript or how long he had owned

it before presenting it to his patron.

The manuscript’s previous ownership is reflected in a series of entries made on the

back of the upper cover (now fol. ii) and also on fol. 1. They were reproduced several times
(Šaxmatov 1902: 2; Lur’e 1989: 4; Kukuškina 1994: 6) and were interpreted as owners’

notes for memory. Of these, only the first three (from the back of the cover) are the actual

notes, while those on the fol. 1 are, in fact, mere probes of the pen.5 The notes reflect the

rather humble status of their authors and ordinary events of their lives: sowing rye, addi-

tion to livestock, a marriage during Lent. Yet they give us three dates: 1590, 1603, and 1606;
two names: Parfen Pyrčkin and Kryštof Cyplia; and one locality: the Grodno county.

Šaxmatov believed these entries to be the earliest evidence of the manuscript’s migra-

tion to ‘Western Russia.’ He contrasted them with the earlier set of the reader’s marginal

notes, which, in his view, prove that as late as the 1520s the codex had not yet left the place

3 The suggestion was based on the receipt (dated April 24, 1654) issued by Janusz Radziwiłł
to the effect that he borrowed two books, “the chronicle and irmologion”, from the monastery’s


note was faked in order to cover up the theft (which seems unlikely), ‘the chronicle’ referred to in

the receipt must have been a different one.

4 On the Despot-Zienowicz ies (1610-1672) see: Niesiecki 1845: 170-174; Ptaszycki 1878;

Ptaszycki 1894.

5 Two of them replicate the beginnings of some of ficial documents, while the third one

paraphrases the entry by Kryštof Cyplia from the first set.
of its origin in central Muscovy (Šaxmatov 1902: 2). He claimed that neither the language of marginalia nor their author’s hand shows the slightest traces of ‘West Russian origin’ (Šaxmatov 1902: 2, 7–8). The chronological computation in one of the notes led Šaxmatov to infer that its author was writing in 1528.

It turns out that Šaxmatov erred in all points.

There are a total of twelve marginal notes in the manuscript, all left by the same reader. Contrary to Šaxmatov’s assertion, the hand is clearly Ruthenian cursive revealing some traces of the scribe’s Gothic training (see fig. 1 and 2).

Their content is quite variegated: the reader was simply flagging, without any system in mind, anything that for some reason seemed noteworthy. On fol. 88, he marked the first mention of Lithuanians with the note: В литве. On the right margin of fol. 90 he marked the account of metropolitan Ilarion’s election with the note: В митрополите [Деся]пете. The report on Prince Jaroslav’s death he flagged as: Д е на Григо́лав (fol. 93v); the account on nomadic Cumans’ attack as: В татарскиꙗ лъсты (fol. 134v); the report on the building of the Dormition Cathedral in Vladimir-on-Kljazma as: В москов[ки] Володими́р (fol. 204); the sacking of Kiev in 1169 as: первое вꙁѧ Киѐскоꙗ (fol. 205v); the description of the Novgorod citizens’ arrogance as: свобо̀да ного̀родскаꙗ (fol. 210); the account on the ancient origin of the ‘veče’ custom as: зги дѧлъбытъ къ доброто (fol. 220v). To the list of the princes’ armies coming from different cities he added: вєде Володими́ръ стар[ши] и ний Лꙋцкъ (fol. 231); to the mention of the city of Polock: зги в Полоц[ку] (fol. 239).

Taken separately, these brief notes are mostly territory neutral. One, however, instantly targets its author’s geographical point of view, as well as his political affiliation from the note on fol. 204. For him, the city of Vladimir-on-Kljazma is ‘Muscovite’ (Московский), that is it belongs to ‘Москва’ as the Russian state was habitually called by the Ruthenians – in contrast with the other one of the same name in the Grand Duchy (Volodymyr-Volynsk). This note was intended to alert future readers so they could discriminate between the two cities. From the note on fol. 231 – вєде Володими́ръ стар[ши] и ний Лꙋцкъ – we can deduce the author’s keen interest in things Volhynian, and even his peculiar ‘Volodymyr patriotism’: he thought he found in the chronicle text (listing Volodymyr before Luck: и галицкаꙗ помо̀ . и володимирьскаꙗ . и лоуцкаꙗ [PSRL 38: 150]) an argument for the primacy of Volodymyr. By the late fifteenth century, the fortunes of this once principal city of Volhynia were in decline, while Luck was emerging as the center of the province, of which our author apparently disapproved.

The overall impression one gets from these annotations is of a person whose geography is that of the Grand Duchy: of the five cities mentioned four are ‘Lithuanian’ (Kiev, Volodymyr, Luck, Polock), while the only one outside the Grand Duchy is marked as foreign. The author was primarily concerned with church affairs (he flagged three accounts, more than on any other subject). And he was probably a native of Volodymyr.

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To these, one other, on fol. 2v, missed by descriptions of the manuscript, should be added: “Ізмі вспо̀ві[к]и [...] і посѐлі по [кот]рій ваніць.” Its hand seems different from the rest in the set yet undoubtedly Ruthenian.
Fig. 1
Notes on fol. 90, 93v, 134v, 204, 205v
Fig. 2
Notes on fol. 210, 220v, 231, 239
Our author’s cultural milieu, however, is most manifestly revealed in the note on fol. 207v. Its content is not particularly remarkable in dealing with the Cumans’ attack on the town Polonne, which once belonged to the Tithes Church of Kiev. The account is (somewhat erroneously) flagged as: ΟΠολόνοι Μιτροπολίτης Γόρος. Rather, it is the attached drawing of the palm with the index finger extended that is noteworthy. The drawing was not recognized as anything noteworthy and is vaguely referred to in the descriptions of the Radziwill codex as ‘palm with extended index finger’ (Šaxmatov 1902: 7; Lur’e 1989: 4; Kukuškina 1994: 6) or even as a ‘drawing of a blessing hand.’ In fact, we found two such drawings in the manuscript. Another one, unnoticed by scholars, is on fol. 200+v. Part of it was cut while binding the book, yet it is clearly distinguishable (see fig. 3).

The significance of these drawings was not recognized by scholars of the codex because they are alien to the normal repertoire of Cyrillic manuscripts. However, they are very common in Medieval manuscripts in the West. Called variously – ‘pointing hands,’ ‘fists,’ ‘indexes,’ and most recently, ‘manicules’ – they are a regular feature of scribal practice, as well as readers’ habits. As William H. Sherman points out, they were particularly common in the

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7 It marks the story of translation of the famous relic, the icon of the Virgin, and its installation in Vladimir.
manuscripts produced and annotated in Italy during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and continued well after the invention of printing. During the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries, throughout the West manicules were among the most widely used symbols in the readers’ arsenal (Shermann 2005: 19-48; Shermann 2009: 25-52).

I know of only two other Cyrillic manuscripts with historical texts that have drawings of manicules in them; both come from the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The first is the so-called Xronograf of Vilnius, a compilation on the universal history from the Creation through the first century AD, of the early sixteenth century (Library of Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, No 109/147). One of its readers, most probably still in the sixteenth century, apparently took special pride in his ability to draw manicules, having left, in effect, dozens and dozens of them, of various forms and shapes (see fig. 4).8

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8 I am grateful to Katerina Kyrychenko (Institute of Ukrainian History, Kiev), who is currently preparing a study on the manicules of the so called Xronograf of Vilnius, for providing me with a photocopy of the manuscript.
The other one is the famous Xlebnikov copy of the Hypatian Chronicle, of the mid-sixteenth century, made most probably in Kiev (National Russian Library, f.iv.230). Here, one of the readers used manicules to indicate the correct order of the text (garbled by the scribe) that he had established (see fig. 5).

It is clear that the two manicules in the Radziwill codex could only have been drawn by a person who went through Western formal schooling or, at least, was at home with the habits of reading current in the Latin West.

And he, it would appear, was one of the very first readers of the Radziwill chronicle. Šaxmatov, and following him many others, believed that marginal notes were entered in 1528. His reasoning was as follows. The account of Prince Volodimer Monomax sending his son to the throne of Volodymyr-on-Volhynia (in the entry for 1119, fol. 157v) is flagged by the following note: "Володимирської цркві 368 років", i.e., "the church in Volodymyr is 368 years old" (fig. 6).

I believe – Šaxmatov wrote – that it might have occurred to the reader that the story deals with Vladimir of Suzdal’ and with Andrej Jurevič, the founder of the city’s ca-
This church was finished in 1160; adding 368 to this year, we obtain that the marginal note was entered in 1528 (Saxmatov 1902: 7).

This is a strange piece of logic. Why an annotator, having just read the phrase: “The same year Volodimir sent his other son, Andrew, to rule in Volodymyr” (Того ль Володимир снѧ своє дрогаго. Андрѧя. князѧ к Володимиру правѧ [PSRL 38: 104]) would imagine that the story is about a different Andrew, the son of Jurij, who lived half a century later and did not yet enter the chronicle story? And why would the reader imagine that the city in question is not Volodymyr-on-Volhynia (mentioned in the same entry earlier), but the one on the Kljazma, of which he is not even aware yet? Indeed, the reader stumbles upon the mention of this second Vladimir only on fol. 204, almost fifty folios down, and marks his discovery with a note.

Sخматوف, of course, proceeded from his general belief that the annotator was Russian and must have referred to Russian realities. Yet he also struggled with the technical difficulty. The year when the Dormition Cathedral in Volodymyr-on-Volhynia was built is not known, and thus the chronological computation in the note yields no meaningful date. On the contrary, the date of the Dormition Cathedral in Vladimir-on-Kljazma is well attested, conveniently suggesting 1160 as the benchmark.

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Normally, chronological calculations like this refer to the annals to which they happen to be attached. If our annotator placed his note at 1119, that means that he believed (for some reason or another) that 368 years to his times have passed since this particular year. This yields 1487 as the date when he read the codex and left his annotations. This is surprisingly early but not impossible: Liжачев found the match for the codex’s earliest water mark in the document dated 1486 (Liжачев 1899: 455-456). That the illuminated (and, presumably, intended for some special occasion or patron) manuscript was subjected to such a treatment so early, should not be a surprise. Many a scholar would admit that whatever the inceptive designs for the book might have been, the *Radziwill codex* was left unfinished and unbound.

9 The only source which provides a hint at the chronology of the cathedral in Volodymyr-on-Volhynia is the late, sixteenth-century, *Nikon Chronicle*. In the entry for 1160, it reports that Prince Mстislav Izjaslavич ‘finished wall paintings in the church in Volodimer-on-Volhynia’ and also decorated it with the precious vessels (PSRL 9: 229). The editor of the *Nikon Chronicle* got it wrong, however: in his sources, the account (under the year 1161) referred to the decoration of the Dormition Cathedral in Vladimir-on-Kljazma finished the previous year (cf. for instance: PSRL 25: 71; PSRL 7: 75-76).

10 This dating would elucidate the meaning of the note on fol. 205v – первое вꙁѧє Киеⷮвує (‘the first sacking of Kiev’). It was entered under the impression of the event still fresh in the author’s memory: the catastrophic sack of Kiev by the army of the Crimean Khan Mengli Gиреь in 1482. It was a disaster on a scale unprecedented: the castle and the city were burned, the Palatine of Kiev Ivan Xодкевич (Chodkiewicz?), together with his family, was taken captive, as was the Archimandrite of the Caves Monastery, and the event made a strong impact on the contemporaries’ mind as the biggest calamity ever visited on the ancient city (for details see: Pelensky 1980).
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Already toward the end of the work, it would seem, the codex was found to be a failure and discarded. During this time, the manuscript was treated rather casually and different people meddled with it, for example, adding pictures or amending the existing ones.

These intrusions were also made by persons of ‘Western’ persuasions. On the low margin of fol. 228 someone entered a drawing of his geomantic divination efforts (Černecov 1977: 301-307; Černecov 1981: 284); while a picture of the sun on fol. 124v copies the illustration found in the famous Nuremberg Chronicle (published in 1495) (see fig. 7).

We would probably never learn who commissioned the Radziwiłł codex and for what purpose. Several hypotheses offered so far lack sufficient merit. Unfortunately, we know next to nothing about historical imagination of the time, and so the impulses behind the commissioning of an illuminated chronicle with the Old Rus’ text will remain obscure. The production of the Radziwiłł codex might have been an isolated incident or a part of some wider movement of reviving interest in ancient history and recovering it from the oblivion. If issues like these are a matter of divination, other things are more certain, however. All indications suggest that the Radziwiłł codex was produced in Volhynia and circulated only within the space of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, as apparently did the previous exemplar

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Geomancy was not known in Muscovy. On the contrary, texts describing this practice are attested in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Turilov, Černecov 1985).

Konstantinas Jablonskis has suggested that the book listed as ‘Kievan Chronicle’ in the inventory of the Albrecht Gaštold’s library entered into the Lithuanian Metrics (1510), could refer to the Radziwiłł codex. He conjectured that the chronicle may have belonged to his father, Martin Gaštold, who was palatine of Kiev in 1471-1481 (Jablonskis 1961: 21-25). However, other scholars would maintain that the ‘Kievan Chronicle’ of the inventory must have been a copy of the Hypatian Chronicle (Jasas 1971: 34; Gudmantas 2003: 5). I am grateful to Kateryna Kyrychenko for pointing me to this literature and helping with translation.
which is now lost. Indeed, there is a strong possibility that the Radziwiłł codex is a replica
of an illuminated manuscript that emerged in the late thirteenth century in the same royal
Volhynian scriptorium where the illuminated codex with the chronicle of George Hamar-
tolos (the so-called Trinity Hamartolos, RGB, f. 173 [MDA], Fund., N° 100) was also created.

Abbreviations

PSRL 7: Polnoe sobranie russkix letopisej, vii. Letopis’ po Voskresenskomu spisku,
Sankt-Peterburg 1856.

PSRL 9: Polnoe sobranie russkix letopisej, ix. Letopisnyj sbornik, imenuemyj Patri-
arnšegu ili Nikonovskoj letopisju, Sankt-Peterburg 1862.

PSRL 25: Polnoe sobranie russkix letopisej, xxv. Moskovskij letopisnyj svod konca xveka,
Moskva-Leningrad 1949.

PSRL 38: Polnoe sobranie russkix letopisej, xxxviii. Radzivilovskaja letopis’, Le-
ningrad 1989.

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Kondakov 1902: N. Kondakov, Zametka o miniatyurax Kenigsbergskogo spiska načal-
noj letopisi, in: Radzivilovskaja, ili Kenigsbergskaja letopis’, ii. Staťi o
tekste i miniatyurax rukopisi, Sankt-Peterburg 1902, pp. 115-127.

13 Some striking correspondences between the Radziwill codex’s and Trinity Hamartolos’s
illustrations suggest that both tapped on the same set of iconographic models current in a single
scriptorium. On this see my forthcoming study (Tolochko forthcoming).


Lixačev 1899: N. Lixačev, Paleograficėske značenie bumažnych vosdyvaných znakov, 1, Sankt-Peterburg 1899.


Tolochko forthcoming: A. Tolochko, “Ne prestupati predela bratnia” (Ob istočnikax miniatur Radzivilovskoj letopisi).


Abstract

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*Notes on the Radziwill Codex*

The *Radziwill Codex* is the only surviving Medieval Cyrillic manuscript with the chronicle text. Views as to its date and the place of origin varied in literature, yet there is a strong tendency to place it within the context of the nationally defined “Great Russian” cultural tradition. By examining the marginal notes entered by one of the very first manuscript’s reader, the article challenges the accepted wisdom. It appears that the codex was created before 1487, most possibly in Volhynia, and circulated only within the space of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. There is a strong possibility that the *Radziwill Codex* is a replica of now lost original that emerged in the late thirteenth century in the same royal Volhynian scriptorium where the illuminated codex with the chronicle of George Hamartolos (the so-called *Trinity Hamartolos*) was also created.

Keywords

Radziwill Code; Medieval Cyrillic Manuscripts; Volhynia.