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From the Dniester to the Bosphorus: Selected Functions of the Landscape in the Eyes of Polish Diplomats to the Ottoman Empire in the First Half of the 17th Century

**Od Dniestru do Bosforu: wybrane funkcje
krajobrazu w oczach polskich dyplomatów
przy Imperium Osmańskim w pierwszej
połowie XVII wieku**

Abstract

This article examines how early modern Polish diplomats perceived and interpreted the landscapes they crossed on their way to Constantinople. Drawing on travel diaries and diplomatic reports, it explores how natural and cultural space functioned not merely as a backdrop but as an active participant in diplomatic experience. The author distinguishes several key roles of the landscape: as a stage for ceremony, where hills, bridges, and borders became tools of symbolic hierarchy and political communication; as a witness to history, where terrain preserved the memory of past battles and deaths, including the 1621 Battle of Khotyn and the site of Hetman Żółkiewski's fall, marked by his monument; as a realm of nature,

alternately admired for its richness and feared for its wildness; and finally as a source of danger, where swollen rivers, treacherous Balkan passes, and even earthquakes threatened travelers.

Keywords: Ottoman Empire, travel diaries, Polish diplomats, Constantinople, landscape, cultural space.

Abstrakt

Artykuł analizuje, w jaki sposób wczesnonowocześni polscy dyplomaci postrzegali i interpretowali krajobrazy, które przemierzali w drodze do Konstantynopola. Opierając się na dziennikach podróży i raportach dyplomatycznych, autor ukazuje, że przestrzeń naturalna i kulturowa nie stanowiła jedynie tła, lecz była aktywnym uczestnikiem doświadczenia dyplomatycznego. Autor wyróżnia kilka kluczowych ról krajobrazu: jako sceny ceremonii, gdzie wzgórza, mosty i granice stawały się narzędziami symbolicznej hierarchii i komunikacji politycznej; jako świadka historii, w którym teren zachowywał pamięć dawnych bitew i śmierci — w tym bitwy chocimskiej z 1621 roku oraz miejsca śmierci hetmana Żółkiewskiego i jego pomnika; jako sfery natury, naprzemiennie podziwianej za jej bogactwo i budzącej lęk ze względu na dzikość; oraz wreszcie jako źródła zagrożenia, gdzie wezbrane rzeki, zdradliwe bałkańskie przełęcze, a nawet trzęsienia ziemi zagrażały podróżnym.

Słowa kluczowe: Imperium Osmańskie, dzienniki podróży, polscy dyplomaci, Konstantynopol, krajobraz, przestrzeń kulturowa.

In the early modern period, a diplomatic journey to Constantinople was not only an exceptional event for most inhabitants of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, but often the only opportunity in their lifetime to encounter a geographical and cultural space different from that of their homeland. This journey – passing through the lands of Podolia, Moldavia, Wallachia, Bulgaria, and Thrace – was, on the one hand, a physical and logistical challenge, and on the other, an encounter with a space marked by exoticism, unease, and fascination.

The aim of this article is to analyze the ways in which the landscape – understood as a dynamic natural and cultural construct – functioned in the accounts of diplomats of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth traveling to Constantinople in the first half of the seventeenth century. The focus is not so much on descriptions of space themselves, but rather on an examination of selected roles it played: as a stage for rituals and symbolic displays of status, as a carrier of historical memory, as a space

of nature, and as a potential source of danger.¹ This approach deliberately omits a deeper discussion of anthropogenic forms such as cities, castles, or smaller rural settlements. The reasons for this limitation include the sheer abundance of material, which could not be adequately addressed within the confines of a short format such as this article, and the fact that these topics have already been explored in other works within the fields of history and literary studies.² This focus also allows for the exploration of a research gap in studies on Sarmatian³ perceptions of nature, which have typically centered on territories in the eastern Mediterranean basin, often overlooking the regions of present-day Romania and Bulgaria.⁴ Likewise, various aspects related to travel and anthropogenic threats have been excluded from consideration.⁵

The source base for this article consists of diaries and diplomatic reports written by diplomats and members of their retinues. To a lesser extent, correspondence has also been used, although due to the different range of topics it addresses, it did not always provide material suitable for the purposes of this study.

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- 1 Urszula Myga-Piątek, *Krajobrazy kulturowe. Aspekty ewolucyjne i typologiczne* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2012), 17–24; Łukasz Smyrski, “Antropologia krajobrazu – na pograniczu dyscyplin,” *Etnografia Polska* 61/1–2 (2017): passim.
 - 2 Michał Kurań, “Obraz ulic w miastach imperium osmańskiego w wybranych relacjach polskich podróżników z drugiej połowy XVI i pierwszej połowy XVII wieku,” *Litteraria Copernicana* 29/1 (2019): 19–40; Roman Krzywy, “Deskrypcja Stambułu w Przeważnej legacji Samuela Twardowskiego wobec topiki laudatio urbis,” *Pamiętnik Literacki* 4 (2011): 41–58; Rafał Zarębski, “Bliski Wschód w XVI-wiecznych pamiętnikach polskich (na przykładzie wybranych kręgów tematycznych),” *Przegląd Orientalistyczny* 3–4 (2015): 187–188.
 - 3 The term “Sarmatians” is used here in a geographical sense to denote the inhabitants of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, regardless of their ethnic origin. It encompasses Poles, Ruthenians, Lithuanians, and other groups participating in the political and communicative space of the state. Just as the term “Briton” includes English, Welsh, and Scottish people, so too does “Sarmatian” in this context refer to all inhabitants of the Commonwealth who shared a political and geographical space.
 - 4 Michał Kuran, “Fauna i flora w staropolskich opisach Orientu (wybrane przykłady),” in *Analecta Literackie i Językowe*, vol. IX, ed. Michał Kuran (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2018), 303–345; Katarzyna Ossowska, “Opisy fauny i flory Ziemi Świętej pochodzące z XVI-wiecznych relacji polskich pielgrzymów,” *ibidem*, 285–303; Zarębski, “Bliski Wschód w XVI-wiecznych pamiętnikach polskich,” 188–189; Marek Prejs, *Egzotyzm w literaturze staropolskiej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1999); Dariusz Dybek, “Przyroda egzotyczna w twórczości pisarzy polskich XVI i XVII wieku,” in *Człowiek wobec natury — humanizm wobec nauk przyrodniczych* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2010).
 - 5 Antoni Mączak, *Życie codzienne w podróżach po Europie w XVI i XVII wieku* (Warszawa: Państwowy instytut wydawniczy, 1978), passim.

The Landscape as a stage for ceremony

In the writings of members of diplomatic missions, one frequently finds references that reveal the role of the landscape in ceremonial events. Among such occasions were the formal transfer of escort duties over the diplomat's retinue by Moldavian, Wallachian, and Turkish officials, as well as the ceremonial welcome of the ambassador by the local rulers. This was particularly significant in the case of the Moldavian hospodar, who, for historical reasons, was regarded as a vassal of the Polish Crown. During the passage of the ambassador through his territory, the hospodar was expected to personally greet him before they reach Iași and then accompany him during his entry into the capital.

In the first half of the seventeenth century, a hill near the village of Stepanowice (today Ștefănești, near the Romanian–Moldavian border) began to play an important role in this ceremony. After crossing the Prut River, Polish diplomats would typically pause at the top of the hill, from where they awaited the arrival of the hospodar or the next official escort. This scene was described in the greatest detail by Stanisław Oświęcim in 1636:

Having passed the bridge and the river, and having enjoyed a stretch of level ground, we came upon a rather steep and high hill, upon which there lieth a great mound, called Strojniowa [...] From this hill, as we began to descend *per declivitatem*, we expected that the hospodar, mindful of his duty [...] should, according to custom, come forth to meet us *in persona propria*.⁶

The custom to which Oświęcim refers in this instance likely originates from the time of Krzysztof Zbaraski's embassy, during which – while stationed upon this very hill – he beheld Stefan Tomşa⁷ approaching him. It is not known whether Zbaraski and Tomşa met at the summit or whether Zbaraski descended and the two met at the base; what is certain, however, is that in this case the hill granted the Polish side a clear advantage in

6 “Za mostem i rzeką trochę równiny zażywszy, przyszło w górę dość wysoką i przykrą jechać na której jest wysypana mogiła wielka zwana Strojniowa (...) Z tej góry, gdyśmy się *per declivitatem* spuszczać poczęli, spodziewaliśmy się, że hospodar, poczuwając się w powinności swej (...) *in persona propria* według zwyczaju przeciwko nam wyjechać miał”; Stanisław Oświęcim, “Podróż do Turcji” in *Z podróży Oświęcima: Turcya, Francya, Niemcy, Włochy*, ed. Piotr Klemens Kantecki (Lwów: Nakładem Księgarni Gubrynowicza i Schmidta, 1875), 7–8.

7 Samuel Twardowski, *Przeważna legacya*, ed. Roman Krzywy (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich, 2000), 63.

terms of symbolic positioning, such that either course of action served to emphasize the status of the diplomat and, by extension, of the Polish king. By awaiting the hospodar atop the hill, the ambassador symbolically asserted the superiority of his sovereign, to whom the vassal was compelled to ascend – both literally and figuratively. Conversely, by descending to greet the hospodar in the valley below, the diplomat performed a symbolic act of magnanimity and grace. *A contrario*, the hospodar found himself in a disadvantaged position: he was forced either to ride up the hill – thereby accepting a gesture of subordination – or to remain at its foot and wait for the diplomat to descend to him, which risked offending the diplomat and, by implication, the Polish king himself.

It is therefore not surprising that successive ambassadors expected similar conduct from later hospodars – expectations which those rulers, however, had no intention of fulfilling. The conflict in this regard was entirely understandable and revolved around differing interpretations of what, in fact, constituted a proper act of welcome. Tomşa, after all, greeted Zbaraski twice: first near Ştefăneşti (approximately 85 km north of Iaşi), and then again after returning to the capital, when he rode out once more to meet the ambassador as he approached the city. This precedent gave the Polish side grounds to expect a hospodar's welcome at the hill in Ştefăneşti, as evidenced in the already cited passage from Oświęcim's diary, and – though to a lesser extent – in the diary of Miaskowski.⁸ Ultimately, however, no Polish diplomat succeeded in compelling the hospodar to perform the welcome at Ştefăneşti. The farthest that such a reception occurred was in 1643, when Mikołaj Bieganowski was greeted by the hospodar's delegation five miles from the city – approximately 40 kilometers away.⁹

Briefly, when discussing the significance of landscape in diplomatic ceremonies, it is also worth mentioning the aborted meeting between Stanisław Żółkiewski and Iskender Pasha. In 1617, during Polish-Ottoman negotiations, the Prince of Transylvania, Gábor Bethlen—acting as intermediary – proposed a meeting between the hetman and the

8 Miaskowski does not mention waiting for the hospodar; rather, near Ştefăneşti, he was greeted by envoys sent by the hospodar: the great *shavan* (master of artillery) and a courtier; Wojciech Miaskowski, "Diariusz Miaskowskiego," in *Wielka legacja Wojciecha Miaskowskiego do Turcji w 1640 r.*, ed. Adam Przyboś (Warszawa-Kraków: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1985), 46; Oświęcim, "Podróż do Turcji," 7–8.

9 NN's letter to S. Oświęcim, Iaşi, 30.08.1643; Stanisław Oświęcim, *Stanisława Oświęcimska Dyaryusz 1643–1651*, ed. Wiktor Czermak (Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 1907), 20; Michał Wasiucionek, *Ceremoniał jako polityka. Intrydy posłów wielkich Rzeczypospolitej do Jass w latach 1622–1744* (Master's thesis defended at the University of Warsaw in 2011), 89.

Ottoman governor of Silistra on Moldavian territory. The proposal was firmly rejected by the Polish side, which recognized in it a subtle exercise in spatial rhetoric. Żółkiewski's arrival would have signified not only the physical crossing of a border but also a symbolic act of submission—an action that could be publicly interpreted as a plea for peace. In this context, the very geography of movement becomes a political text: “who goes to whom” is no longer a matter of logistics but a form of communication about mutual status and relations. Żółkiewski, fully aware of this risk, perceived the proposed meeting place as part of an Ottoman narrative maneuver. In this light, the landscape is not a passive backdrop to negotiation, but an active component of diplomatic ritual – a mechanism of narrative and representational control, capable of strengthening or weakening a negotiator's position without a single word being spoken.¹⁰

The landscape played a significant role in other ceremonial practices of diplomacy, serving not only as a backdrop but also as a tool of symbolic communication. The exchanges of escorts (*przystaw*) and banners accompanying the diplomat's retinue typically took place in the open field upon entering or leaving major urban centers.¹¹ Conducting such ceremonies in open space allowed both sides to fully display their numbers and splendor – an aspect not without importance in the eyes of onlookers. These practices often provided local inhabitants with their only opportunity to see high-ranking state dignitaries – or even the ruler himself. For this reason, the ruler was expected to appear as impressively as possible, in order to present himself worthily to his subjects and thereby enhance his personal prestige. Bridges over rivers appear to have been ideal locations for such ceremonies. By their very nature, they channeled the movement of the retinue and possessed distinct symbolic significance – as physical and metaphorical points of passage, marking political and cultural boundaries.

According to Twardowski, it was on a bridge that Krzysztof Zbaraski was formally bid farewell by Radu Mihnea in 1622.¹² One particularly significant bridge that can be confidently identified as having served a ceremonial function was the bridge in Fokszany (modern-day Focșani in Romania) over the Milcov River, which marked the border between Moldavia and Wallachia. Approaching from the Moldavian side, the

10 Stanisław Żółkiewski's letter to King Sigismund III, Bar, 28.09.1617, Biblioteka Czartoryskich 110, 163.

11 Jakub Zieliński's letter to Stanisław Koniecpolski, Dziurdziów, 02.09.1634, *Korespondencja Stanisława Koniecpolskiego*, ed. Agnieszka Biedrzycka (Kraków: Societas Vistulana, 2005), 249.

12 Twardowski, *Przeważna legacja*, 70.

diplomat would be ceremonially farewelled by the Moldavian escort before crossing the bridge, where he would then be received by the Wallachian escort. This ceremonial transition was enhanced by the picturesque setting, with the majestic Carpathian peaks clearly visible from the vantage point of Focșani.¹³

The Landscape as a Witness to History

The lands stretching between Kamianets-Podilskyi and Constantinople have, throughout their history, witnessed pivotal events and decisive battles. These events, in addition to their impact on the immediate political situation, often left lasting marks on the local landscape, enabling the identification of key locations even centuries later.

One such event from history that became permanently inscribed in the landscape was the Battle of Khotyn in 1621. A year after the battle, Krzysztof Zbaraski visited the battlefield, reading the course of the battle directly from the terrain.

[...] gazing upon Chodkiewicz's accomplishment, he resolved to trace with his eyes the remnants of the war that had taken place the year before. Soldiers were present to point out the key locations. Here stood Jan Weyher, repelling the assault of the janissaries; here were the Cossacks, at times fighting with uncertain outcome, but more often gaining the upper hand; there, Stanisław Lubomirski launched the battle and dealt the Turks a crushing defeat. At sunrise, he also walked through the Ottoman encampments, identifying the sites of combat, observing the piles of bodies, and reflecting upon them in solemn contemplation.¹⁴

Reminders of the clash between the two armies were still clearly visible in 1636, when Stanisław Oświęcim, in addition to well-preserved earth fortifications, also noted bones protruding from the ground, standing

13 Miaskowski, "Diariusz Miaskowskiego," 49; Zbigniew Lubieniecki, "Dyariusz drogi tureckiej" in *Wielka legacja Wojciecha Miaskowskiego do Turcji w 1640 r.*, ed. Adam Przyboś (Warszawa–Kraków: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1985), 116.

14 "... spectato munere Chodkiewicz, vestigia belli, anno proxime elapso gesti, contrectare oculis composuit. Aderant milites, monstrabantque pugnae locos. Hic stetit contra impetum Ianizarorum Ioannem Veyheum: hic Cossacos interdum ambigue, saepius feliciter, praeliatis: inde Stanislaum Lubomirscum pugnam pariter, & cladem Turcarum exorsum. At orta luce, Osmani etiam castra circumivit, spatia certaminum cognoscendo, strues corporum intuendo, mirandoque;" Samuel Kazimierz Kuszewicz, *Narratio legationis Zbaravianae et rerum apud Otthomanos anno 1622 gestarum* (Gdańsk: 1645), 40.

out among the grass.¹⁵ Later diplomats in the first half of the seventeenth century no longer mention visiting the fortifications, but this does not mean they had vanished entirely from the landscape. When the Turkish army occupied Khotyn in 1673 and prepared to defend it against the Polish forces, it largely made use of the old ramparts constructed by the Poles in 1621.¹⁶

The sites of two other significant battles also remained visible in the landscape: the Battle of Sasowy Róg in 1612 and the Battle of Cecora in 1620. Kuszewicz recounts that during the journey, many members of Zbaraski's embassy wished to see the battlefield where Stefan Potocki had fallen. The defeat of 1612 held particular personal significance for the ambassador Wojciech Miaskowski, who had lost many friends and acquaintances there – a fact he recalls when visiting the burial mound beneath which Wallachian boyars and dignitaries, executed following Potocki's defeat, had been interred. Mass graves also marked the route of Hetman Żółkiewski's retreat in 1620, along which the remains of field ramparts at former campgrounds could still be seen, particularly at the bend of the Prut River near Cecora. The encampment of the besieged camp during the retreat seems to have left a powerful impression on the memory of the local population, as the event even entered local toponymy: one of the villages near the ramparts along the Dzieża River was named Tabor or Taborzyskoszcze (Campsite)¹⁷ in commemoration.

Surprisingly, none of the Polish legations mention the monument erected in honor of Stanisław Żółkiewski at the site of the chancellor's death in the Moldavian village of Berezówka (today Berezovca in Moldavia near the Dniester River). According to available sources, the stone obelisk was erected as early as 1621 at the expense of the chancellor's wife, Regina of the Herbut family, and their son, Jan Żółkiewski. As suggested by the inscription visible on a sketch depicting the monument in 1843, it was probably restored by Grzegorz Antoni Ogiński at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It remained in relatively good condition until 1868, when it was toppled by a treasure hunter. The monument was later rebuilt in 1912 and restored again in 2003.¹⁸

15 Oświęcim, "Podróż do Turcji," 5; Zbaraski's visit to the battlefield was also described by Twardowski in his poem. Twardowski, *Przeważna legacya*, 63.

16 Damian Orłowski, *Chocim 1673* (Warszawa: Bellona, 2007), 79, 105–106.

17 Miaskowski, "Dziariusz Miaskowskiego," 46–47; Lubieniecki, "Dziariusz drogi tureckiej," 109; Oświęcim, "Podróż do Turcji," 7.

18 This monument was mentioned, among others, by the Moldavian chronicler Miron Costin, writing in the late 17th century; Miron Costin, *Latopis Ziemi Mołdawskiej i inne utwory historyczne*, ed. Ilona Czamańska (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe

The omission of the monument to the tragically deceased Chancellor Żółkiewski by Polish diplomats may be explained by the considerable distance separating the obelisk from the customary route taken by diplomats. Berezówka lies approximately 100 kilometers west of Khotyn and around 90 kilometers west of the Prut River, along which Polish embassies typically traveled, whereas the other sites they mentioned were either directly on their route or only a short distance from it. It is also possible that diplomats who had known Żółkiewski personally did not hold the fallen hetman in as much esteem as later generations, who viewed him through the lens of his military achievements and his heroic death on the battlefield.¹⁹

Graves, fortifications, and bones protruding from the ground were among the most recognizable remnants of recent events. It was much more difficult for Poles to identify the locations of battles more distant in time. In such cases, they often resorted to generalizations, associating a given battle with a broader region rather than a precise location. This was the case, for example, with King John Albert's defeat in Bukovina (1497), which was linked to the entire Bukovina forest; with the defeat at Varna (1444), associated with the general vicinity of the city; and with the battlefield where Selim I clashed with his father Bayezid near Tekirdağ or Kariştıran (1511), which was linked to the towns of Czorluj (likely present-day Çiftlikköy) and Missyny (likely present-day Misinli), that is, the broader Kariştıran area (modern-day Büyükkariştıran in Turkey).²⁰

None of the diplomats traveling through the region in the seventeenth century, however, mention encountering any material remnants of these events; the past existed primarily within the sphere of historical memory. The situation was different in the 16th century, when Maciej Strykowski, *en route* to Constantinople in 1574, recorded that he had

UAM, 1998), 135; Marek Janicki, "Pochówki i pamięć poległych (XIV-XVII w.)," *Napis Seria 7* (2001): 75–76; Michał Baliński, *Studia historyczne Michała Balińskiego* (Wilno: 1856), 280. The original Latin inscription placed on the obelisk was also published by Baliński in the same work. As we can see in the 1843 drawing, there is an inscription – CNGA OGINSKI HWL – no longer preserved today, which most likely stands for *Curavit Nobilis Gregorius Antonius Ogiński, Hetman Wielki Litewski* ("Restored by the Noble Grzegorz Antoni Ogiński, Grand Hetman of Lithuania").

19 The motif of hostility toward Stanisław Żółkiewski may be particularly relevant in the case of Krzysztof Zbaraski, who remained in conflict with the hetman for the greater part of the final decade of Żółkiewski's life. *Korespondencja Krzysztofa księcia Zbaraskiego koniuszego koronnego 1612–1627*, ed. Anna Filipczak-Kocur (Opole: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2015), 33–44.

20 Twardowski, *Przeważna legacja*, 75; Oświęcim, "Podróż do Turcji," 14; Miaskowski, "Diariusz Miaskowskiego," 74.

seen the battlefield near Tekirdağ (Kariştıran), located a day's journey from Adrianople. Despite the passage of time, he noted that clear traces of the bloody clash were still visible.²¹

Diplomats also occasionally observed landscapes deliberately altered by human hands to commemorate significant events and thereby engage in a form of memory politics. Both Oświęcim and Miaskowski, in the vicinity of Focşani, describe a large mound erected to commemorate the wedding of the son of Wallachian hospodar Radu Mihnea – Alexandru Coconul – to Roxana Scarlatou.²² Twardowski and Kuszewicz, who accompanied Zbaraski, mention colossal statues or columns commissioned by Sultan Osman along the road near the Sea of Marmara, erected when, confident in victory, he set out for war against Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.²³ Deliberate reshaping of the landscape for commemorative purposes also includes the previously discussed burial mounds of fallen soldiers and the monument to Stanisław Żółkiewski, whose commemorative functions have been insightfully analyzed in an article by Marek Janicki.²⁴

The Landscape as a Realm of Untamed Nature

While traveling to Constantinople, diplomats and their retinues encountered not only anthropogenic landscapes but also environments

21 In his account, Strykowski does not mention the names of specific localities where the battle was said to have taken place. However, with a certain assumption, it is possible to more precisely locate the area he describes. If we assume that in his narrative Adrianople was mistakenly identified with present-day Lüleburgaz – which, given the topographical similarities and the fact that he composed his chronicle several years after the journey, seems plausible – then the region he describes would most likely correspond to the vicinity of present-day Büyükkarıştıran. The distance between Adrianople (Edirne) and Büyükkarıştıran is approximately 100 kilometers, while from Lüleburgaz to the same location it is just over 20 kilometers, which aligns far better with Strykowski's reference to a "day's journey." Based on this assumption, the accounts of all Polish diplomats appear to be consistent. Maciej Strykowski, *Kronika Polska, Litewska, Żmódzka y w szysztkiej Rusi* (Królewiec: 1582), 726.

22 Oświęcim, "Podróż do Turcji," 17; Miaskowski, "Diariusz Miaskowskiego," 49.

23 The sources are not in agreement on this point. Twardowski writes that Osman ordered the construction of the columns upon returning from his campaign against Poland, while Kuszewicz claims they were commissioned as he was setting out for the war. With only these two accounts available, I am more inclined to trust Kuszewicz's version, as I see little reason why the sultan would have wished to commemorate a war he ultimately lost: Twardowski, *Przeważna legacya*, 75; Kuszewicz, *Narratio legationis Zbaravianae*, 40.

24 Janicki, "Pochówki i pamięć poległych," 67–75.

shaped purely by nature. When the sources are examined from this perspective, two distinct zones emerge in which descriptions of the natural landscape appear most concentrated. The first extends from the town of Focșani to the Balkan Mountains; the second encompasses the stretch between Adrianople (modern-day Edirne) and Constantinople.

The first of these regions astonished the Sarmatians primarily with its richness. They observed with wonder the abundance of wild animals and admired the beautiful, fertile fields. During Miaskowski's journey through Wallachia in 1640, to the surprise of the entire retinue, one of the escorting officers ordered his outfit to ride across the fields in a line to flush out and capture the game hiding there. Zbigniew Lubieniecki, who accompanied Miaskowski, recorded the moment with delight:

And so it was that in a single day I beheld nigh thirty hares. In these lands, they do breed most shamefully in abundance, though in the fields there be neither groves nor thickets. Yet likewise, the partridges do abound most shamefully; whilst riding but half a mile through the fields, the hounds did flush forth several dozens of pairs. Bustards, cranes, and wild geese are also in great number, though in the fields there be neither groves nor lakes.²⁵

The terrain itself was also appreciated. The Poles valued the flatness of Wallachia, which not only made travel easier but may also have reminded them of the familiar landscapes of their homeland – though it is worth noting that no direct comparison to Poland is ever made. Oświęcim describes Wallachia with the adjectives “flat and merry,” Miaskowski calls it “beautiful,” and Twardowski likewise praises the region for its open, flat terrain.²⁶

The greatest attention throughout the journey was devoted, however, to the ecosystem of the Danube. Marek Prejs explains this phenomenon by pointing to the Danube's significance as a civilizational boundary, separating the Sarmatian world from the Turkish one – a symbolic threshold whose crossing invited heightened emphasis.²⁷ Lubieniecki focused primarily on the abundance of bird species and the richness of the local fauna. Kuszewicz, on the other hand, emphasized the vegetation and

25 “I tak jednego dnia blisko 30 zajęcy widziałem. Jest w tych to krajach haniebnie sieła ich, choć w polach gajów, chrustów nie masz. Ale i kuropatw haniebnie sieła; do kilkudziesiąt par jadąc polem wyżłowię w półmiliu spłoszyli. Dropi, żurawi, gęsi dzikich wiele jest, choć w polu gajów, jezior nie masz.” Lubieniecki, “Dyariusz drogi tureckiej,” 119.

26 Miaskowski, “Diariusz Miaskowskiego,” 51; Oświęcim, “Podróż do Turcji,” 18; Twardowski, *Przeważna legacya*, 68.

27 Prejs, *Egzotyzyzm w literaturze staropolskiej*, 52–54.

terrain, describing the landscape as “the most beautiful.”²⁸ Twardowski combined both perspectives, thereby producing a more complete and evocative account:

Hence, climbing higher, we behold upon the plain

The Danube—swift yet broad in its sovereign
flow, Europe’s foremost river; born among
the Helvetians, It fades at last within the dusky Pontic deep.
Rich islands follow after, where on gracious turf
Graze geese and cranes all white-plum’d in array;
The swans’ cry and lament wake echoes in the shade
When rosy-fingered Dawn arises from her bed.
Along the currents Nereids weave their playful dances,
Then, weary, cool their limbs beneath the myrtle’s gloom;
Thick ivy twines the banks on either side, and here
The choicest melons glow with golden, honey’d rind.
Fisher-folk in their number throng the waters everywhere:
Some at the weirs take mighty sturgeon, some with stout lines
Draw monstrous catfish up, while with light-cast seines
Others ensnare sterlets and red mullet fleck’d with gold.²⁹

The boundary of the first region was marked by the Balkan Mountains, which – unlike the previous landscapes – were not held in high regard by the Sarmatians. Miaskowski described them as “unpleasant,” while Oświęcim referred to them as “high ... very unpleasant and difficult for travelers.” Lubieniecki likewise emphasized their height, complaining of the harsh, rocky roads.³⁰ The most extensive description of the mountains was once again offered by Twardowski, though it does not differ significantly from the others:

28 Lubieniecki, “Dyariusz drogi tureckiej,” 124; Kuszewicz, *Narratio legationis Zbaravia-nae*, 54–55.

29 “Stąd w górę się podniósłszy, obaczmy w równinie/ Dunaj, jako bystrze i szeroka pły-nie:/ Rzekę przednią Europy. Która w horyzoncie/ Począwszy się Helwetów, w czarnym znika Poncie;/ Po niej żyzne ostrowy, gdzie po wdzięcznej trawie./ Gęsi, i białopióre pasą się żurawie;/ Krzyk i lament łabęci echo w cieniu sporzy./ Z łożnice gdy różanej przyjdzie wstawać zorzy./ Po nurtach nereidy z sobą harce zwodzą,/ A w cieniu spracowane myrtami się chłodzą;/ Brzegi bluszcz bujne snuje, z tej i owej strony,/ Smakiem najdoskonalsze żółcą się melony./ Ciekawych pełno pływa rybołówów wszędy./ Ci po jazach jesiotry, ci na sielne wędy/ Biorą wyży ogromne, ci w lekkie sageny/ Czeczugi, i złożone imają barweny.” Twardowski, *Przeważna legacya*, 71.

30 Miaskowski, “Dyariusz Miaskowskiego,” 53; Oświęcim, “Podróż do Turcji,” 47–48; Lubieniecki, “Dyariusz drogi tureckiej,” 131.

Then, as we enter here, the shadows of tall peaks
 Do straightway blot the sun's all-gilded rays;
 On rocky cliffs there booms a thunderous roar,
 While winds, choked in the gulfs,
 Break forth with force and shatter trees with might.
 Dark paths lie through wastes and thickets wild,
 Where mouflons, deer, and nimble goats
 Cling to the heights and hang on ledges sheer.
 Here clouds in congress gather close and low,
 And in cold caverns harpies bark and shriek.³¹

The mountains are clearly portrayed in a negative light – as great masses that block out the sun and release suffocating winds so strong they break the trees in their path. The roads are desolate, inhabited only by horned beasts, and the image of dread is completed by mythological harpies lurking in caves.

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the Balkans mark the end of the first major region eagerly described by the diplomats. The road beyond – through the lands of present-day Bulgaria – is generally devoid of reflections on the landscape, particularly with regard to nature, which apparently did not strike the Sarmatians as worthy of mention. This changes, however, when the diplomats pass (depending on the route taken) through Adrianople (modern-day Edirne in Turkey) or Kirk Kilise (modern-day Kırklareli in Turkey). At that point, the landscape must have changed so markedly that the Poles, intrigued by its unfamiliarity, resumed describing it once more.

A common observation concerned changes in the terrain, which became increasingly rocky, as well as shifts in vegetation: the appearance of cypress trees, orange trees, and chestnuts. It is difficult to determine whether the rocky ground was perceived as a virtue or a flaw. The reception of cypresses, however, was clearly positive, as Miaskowski emphasized the presence of one such tree in a caravanserai. The most enthusiastic praise for the landscape came from Samuel Twardowski, who painted for the reader an image of an earthly Arcadia, where even in winter flowers continue to bloom, and a pleasant fragrance fills the air. At the same time, even he acknowledged the landscape's shortcomings, accusing the Turks of squandering the land's potential – a land which,

31 "Tedy tu jako wciągniem, gór ogromnych cienie/ słoneczne nam zarazem zawałą promienie./ Po skałach huk, wiatry się po przepaściach duszą,/ skąd się hurmem wykradą, drzewa silnie kruszą./ Drogi ciemne zaległy pustynie i łązy,/ po których mufrońni, danieli i kozy/ wieszają się. Tu z sobą chmury się zlegają,/ tu po zimnych harpije kawernach szczekają." Twardowski, *Przeważna legacya*, 73.

instead of yielding rice and olives, produced only weeds. In the context of contemporary thought, which linked climate and fertility with moral order, this was more than a mere economic critique. Paradise, according to medieval tradition, was a space both fertile and orderly, whereas hell appeared as a realm of extremes – of frost and fire, chaos and barrenness. Thus, a land that could be paradise but bears only weeds is here presented as tainted by human mismanagement, or even morally degraded.³²

In their observations, the Poles also noted a greater concentration of certain bird species – most notably storks and turtle doves. Upon reaching the Sea of Marmara, the Polish diplomats also had the opportunity to see marine animals, although it appears they were not particularly interested in them. Lubieniecki makes only a passing mention of dolphins he observed, Twardowski notes merely a turtle, and Miaskowski, although he refers to sea fish, is unable to name a single species.³³ Stanisław Oświęcim, in particular, seemed to appreciate the Mediterranean landscape. He praised the beautiful location of Küçükçekmece near Constantinople: “on one side it is washed by the sea, offering a far-reaching prospect; on the other, a great lake, into which water flows from that same sea; and on a third side, a high hill adorned with trees bearing various fruits.”³⁴

The Landscape as a Source of Danger

Any journey in the pre-industrial era was inherently fraught with risks to the life and health of travelers. These dangers can be divided into two categories: those of anthropogenic origin and those arising from nature. In this chapter, we shall focus on the latter – particularly those dangers stemming from the landscape itself.³⁵

The first major category of natural hazards faced by travelers was rivers. On the journey to Constantinople, diplomats had to cross two large rivers – the Dniester and the Danube – as well as an indeterminate

32 Yuri M. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind. A Semiotic Theory of Culture* (London–New York: I. B. Tauris, 1990), 173–175, 179.

33 Twardowski, *Przeważna legacya*, 75; Miaskowski, “Diariusz Miaskowskiego,” 55–56; Lubieniecki, “Dyariusz drogi tureckiej,” 132; Prejs, *Egzotyzm w literaturze staropolskiej*, 64–65.

34 “z jednej strony oblewa go morze, na które daleki jest prospekt, z drugiej strony jezioro wielkie, w które z tegoż morza woda wpada, z trzecie góra wysoka, drzewami różnych owoców przyozdobiona.” Oświęcim, “Podróż do Turcji,” 53–54.

35 On the subject of anthropogenic threats, see: Mączak, *Życie codzienne w podróżach*, 175–195.

number of smaller ones.³⁶ Polish diplomats generally tried to plan their travels to avoid the peak of the spring thaw and heavy rains, which in some cases significantly delayed the start of their missions.³⁷ Following periods of intense rainfall or snowmelt, even normally small streams could become formidable obstacles.

Such was the case with the Seret River, which Miaskowski's delegation was forced to cross in early March 1640. Swollen by meltwater, the river necessitated a hybrid crossing: wagons were ferried across on barges, while the animals were led through a ford which, despite extensive searching, still reached halfway up the horses' flanks. Zbigniew Lubieniecki was particularly fortunate during this crossing, barely managing – thanks to the help of a ferryman – to save his carriage from slipping off the barge.³⁸ A different method was employed when crossing the Pravov River in Wallachia. Observing its depth and swift current, the Wallachian escort ordered his cavalry to position themselves in a line upstream of the ford, in order to break the current and slow the flow. According to Miaskowski, this tactic had some effect – though even so, the current managed to sweep away several wagons.³⁹

The most problematic and dangerous part of the journey was the route through the Balkan mountain range, which the Poles traversed between Provadia and Haidos (modern-day Aytos in Bulgaria). Oświęcim describes two possible ways of crossing the mountain massif: the first led through unspecified passes – most likely corresponding in large part to the modern Route 73 – while the second followed the course of the “Iciera” River (probably today's Luda Kamchiya, aligning with the modern Route 208). The latter route was considered somewhat easier, though still challenging due to the river's swift current, which had to be crossed no fewer than seventeen times, as well as due to steep, rocky ascents. Moreover, this route was not always accessible: during spring thaws or heavy rains, the swelling of the river made passage impossible, forcing diplomats to take the more difficult road through the mountain passes.⁴⁰

Crossing the Balkans required careful preparation in advance. Before setting out on the mountain road, all wagons were thoroughly repaired,

36 Miaskowski, “Diariusz Miaskowskiego,” 45; *idem*, *Relacja Miaskowskiego*, 81.

37 Krzysztof Kochanowski's letter to King Sigismund III, Constantinople, 22.06.1602, *Documente privitoare la Istoria Romanilor. Suplementul II, Vol. II*, ed. Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki (București: Sococu și Teclu, 1895), 141.

38 Lubieniecki, “Dyariusz drogi tureckiej,” 115–116.

39 Miaskowski, “Diariusz Miaskowskiego,” 50.

40 Oświęcim, “Podróż do Turcji,” 47–48.

and in Provadia, special buffalo were hired for the task of hauling the carriages up and down the rocky slopes. Miaskowski describes the use of ropes and chains for this purpose – likely in much the same manner as one would transport artillery. The effort demanded the involvement of the entire retinue and, in some instances, even the personal assistance of the diplomat himself. Zbigniew Lubieniecki experienced firsthand the dangers of such a crossing: while securing his carriage, he was pinned against the rocks and suffered severe bruising to his back.⁴¹ Complaints about the Balkan passage also came from Aleksander Trzebiński, who made the crossing in the winter of 1634. In a brief letter to his superior, he described the road as “very bad, cold, and snowy.”⁴² One can only imagine how greatly the harsh winter conditions intensified the hardships of what was already a demanding journey.

The final – and perhaps most unpredictable yet potentially most dangerous – type of threat Polish diplomats could encounter in the landscape south of Khotyn were earthquakes, which occasionally struck the region. One such event affected the embassy of Wojciech Miaskowski during its journey to Constantinople in 1640. On March 19, the delegation stopped in the village of Rybnik/Rymnik (present-day Râmnicu Sărat in Romania), situated halfway between Focșani and Buzău. While they were encamped there, the earth shook three times. Zbigniew Lubieniecki, a member of the embassy, described the event as follows:

In the morning *eadem die*, an hour before daybreak once, and again at midnight, the earth did quake throughout the whole town; and a third time, toward midday. As it shook by night – mine host with whom I lodged, being an old man, and many other elders, men of good credit, and some from our own company, did affirm they felt it; and the wagoners, who slept beneath the open sky beside the carts, did so clutch them for the trembling of the earth. As for the shaking by day, it was in some places only. In the lodging of Mr Kossakowski, our companion, he himself lay in bed unaware, but the hostess, who sat upon the ground near the hearth, did suddenly leap up and exclaim: ‘Do ye not feel it?’ Only then did the others look to the earth and perceive that verily it was so. He marveled, and his servants likewise, for it endured for a quarter hour. As for myself, I felt it not by night, for I slept right soundly, having sat up late with the company.

41 Miaskowski, “Diariusz Miaskowskiego,” 73; Lubieniecki, “Dyariusz drogi tureckiej,” 158–159; Kuszewicz, *Narratio legationis Zbaravianae*, 57–58. On the methods of transporting artillery, see: Walther Litzelmann, *Vortrab zu der Arckalay - Büchsenmeisterbuch*, 1580–1582, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm 909, ff. 161v–162.

42 Aleksander Trzebiński’s letter to Stanisław Koniecpolski, Kararagat, 06.02.1634; *Korespondencja Stanisława Koniecpolskiego*, 210.

By day I marked it not either, for, as I reckon, the ground shook not in the place where I sat.”⁴³

Some members of the diplomat’s retinue reported experiencing as many as three seismic tremors in a single day, though the ambassador himself, Miaskowski, mentioned only one, which he felt in the evening around 8 p.m.⁴⁴ These differing accounts suggest that the embassy encountered a localized earthquake of moderate magnitude while in Râmnicu Sărat. The nature of the event – extended over time and varying in perceived intensity – corresponds to a well-documented seismic pattern: a main energy impulse preceded or followed by a series of micro-tremors. Given the descriptions of coachmen clinging to their wagons as the ground shook, and the report of the earth trembling for as long as a quarter of an hour, the intensity of the phenomenon can be estimated at level III, and in some areas even level V, on the Mercalli intensity scale.

Polish diplomats occasionally recorded far more dangerous earthquakes. Particularly striking is the account given by Maciej Strykowski, a participant in Jędrzej Taranowski’s embassy to Constantinople in 1574–1575.⁴⁵ Despite the passage of more than half a century, Strykowski vividly recalls traces of the catastrophic earthquake of 1509. Contemporary seismological studies estimate this quake – known as the so-called “Little Apocalypse” (*küçük kıyamet* in Turkish) – at approximately 7.2 on the Richter scale or VIII–IX on the Mercalli scale, with its epicenter likely located in the Sea of Marmara region. The scale of destruction and the death toll, estimated in the tens of thousands, make it one of the most devastating earthquakes in the history of Ottoman Constantinople. In contrast with such a powerful event, the tremors felt in Râmnicu Sărat

43 “Rano *eadem die* na godzinę przede dniem raz, a drugi w pół nocy ziemia trzęsła się po wszystkim miasteczku i w dzień ku południowi trzeci raz. Co w nocy się trzęsła, gospodarz mój, com u niego stał, już stary i wiele innych starych ludzi godnych wiary i z kompaniję naszej niektórzy powiedali, że czuli, a woźnice, co na dworze spali podle wozów, aż się wozów chwyтали dla trzęsienia ziemię. Co w dzień się trzęsła, to miejscami. W gospodzie pana Kossakowskiego, towarzysza naszego, sam leżał w łóżku nie postrzegłszy, ale gospodyni co siedziała na ziemi u pieca, porwie się i rzecze jej: “Czy nie czujecie?” Oni dopiero pojrzą na ziemię, ale jest *in rei veritate*. Dziwował się i z czeladzią, a trwało to przez ćwierć godziny. Ja tego sam nie czułem w nocy, bom spałem bardzo dobrze, siedziawszy z wieczora długo w noc z kompaniją. W dzień nie postrzegłem, bom nie widział, nie trzęsła się znać na tym miejscu, gdzie siedział.” Lubieniecki, “Dyariusz drogi tureckiej,” 118.

44 Miaskowski, “Diariusz Miaskowskiego,” 50.

45 Strykowski, *Kronika Polska, Litewska, Żmudzka*, 719.

in 1640 seem far less intense, though they nonetheless reflect the clear seismic activity characteristic of the Danubian and Balkan regions.⁴⁶

Conclusion

As indicated in the title, this article addresses only selected functions that the landscape served during the journeys of Poles to the Bosphorus, and it certainly does not exhaust this vast and multifaceted subject. Having examined the role of landscape in ceremonies, we may observe that it typically combined both practical and symbolic functions, capable of significantly enriching the ceremonial with new layers of meaning and opening the way for status-related performances among its participants – as was the case with the hill in Ștefănești.

Having examined the section devoted to the question of history, we may conclude that the relationship between history and landscape operated in both directions. In the period immediately following a given event – when its traces were still visible in the terrain – the landscape served a commemorative and educational function. This is evident in the case of Krzysztof Zbaraski, who reconstructed the course of the Battle of Khotyn by reading the landscape, or in the burial mounds marking the retreat route of Stanisław Żółkiewski from Moldavia in 1620. Over time, however, as the landscape ceased to vividly reflect the course of past events, the relationship between history and landscape reversed: now it was historical knowledge that prompted travelers to seek out places of significance within the landscape. In the early modern period, the landscape not only happened to preserve traces of history but was also deliberately shaped by human hands and perceived as a space of memory – serving to construct a particular vision of the past, advantageous from the perspective of the state, a noble family, or the ruling dynasty.⁴⁷

46 Nicholas Ambraseys, *Earthquakes in the Mediterranean and Middle East: A Multidisciplinary Study of Seismicity up to 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 422–432.

47 It is worth quoting here a passage from the will of Stanisław Żółkiewski from the year 1618, in which the author explicitly states the intended purpose of the burial mound he desired: “A jeżeliby w Wołoszech albo gdzie za granicą śmierć Pan Bóg przysłał, tamże pogrześć grzeszne ciało moje, a na temże miejscu mogiłę wysoką usuć; nie dla ambicyjej jakiej tak mieć chcę, ale żeby grób był kopcem Rzeczypospolitej granic, żeby się potomny wiek wzbudzał do pomnożenia i rozszerzenia granic państw Rzeczypospolitej”; [“And should it be that in Wallachia or elsewhere beyond the border the Lord God sends me death, let my sinful body be buried there, and upon that very spot let a high mound be raised; not out of any ambition do I wish this, but that the grave might serve

Focusing on the more natural aspects of the landscape, several general observations can be made. The first is the Poles' aversion to mountains, which they were unable to describe with any superlatives, and their clear preference for flat terrain – most evident in their appreciation of Wallachia. Depending on individual tastes, they could also be genuinely captivated by the flora and fauna they encountered, valuing above all its abundance. More mixed impressions emerge from their observations of the Mediterranean landscape, which some Poles found enchanting, while others gave it little attention. What unites these reflections, however, is a consistent marginalization of the sea – an element that seemed both unfamiliar and largely unappealing to them.

Based on the final section of this article, devoted to the dangers associated with travel, it becomes clear that even in the absence of anthropogenic threats, traversing routes considered in the 17th century to be major lines of communication involved numerous challenges and risks. Two key segments of the journey to Constantinople posed particular threats to the lives and health of travelers. The first was the crossing of rivers without bridges, which required hazardous fording – often in unfavorable weather conditions. The second critical stage of the journey was the passage through the Balkans, where the difficult and rocky terrain forced the diplomatic retinue to undertake prior preparations, resulting in additional expense. In addition, Polish diplomats had to contend with the unfamiliar phenomenon of earthquakes – unknown in their homeland – which, at irregular intervals, struck the territories south of the Dniester.

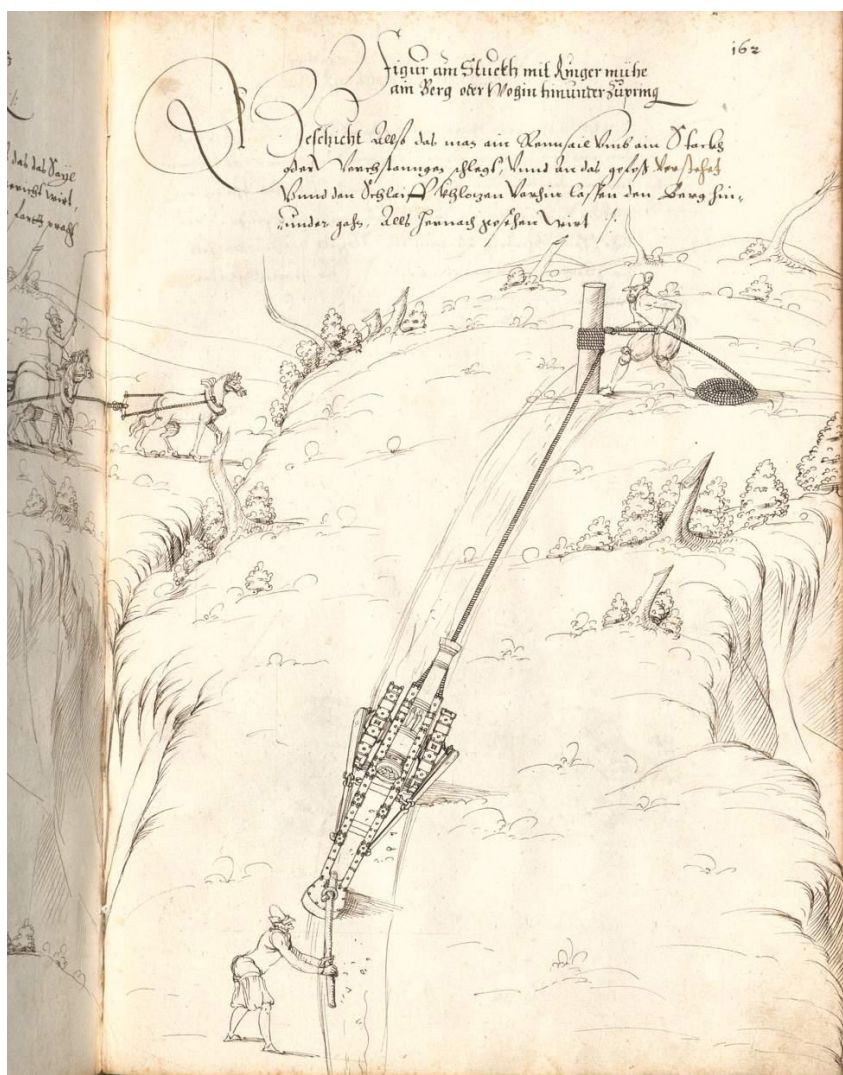
as a marker of the Commonwealth's borders, that future generations might be stirred to enlarge and expand the frontiers of the Commonwealth"]; "Testament B," in *Pisma Stanisława Żółkiewskiego kanclerza koronnego i hetmana*, ed. August Bielowski (Lwów: Ossolineum, 1861), 290.



The Monument to Stanisław Żółkiewski in the village of Berezovca, as it stood in 1843. M. Baliński, *Studia historyczne Michała Balińskiego* (Wilno: 1856), 227.



Walther Litzelmann, Vortrab zu der Arckalay – Büchsenmeisterbuch, 1580–1582, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm 909, f. 161v.



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