

Princes and Cossacks: Putting Ukraine on the Map of Europe

Serhii Plokhyy

The word “Ukraine,” which today is used to define an independent country in the middle of Europe, has medieval origins and was first used by the Kyivan chroniclers of the twelfth century to define the areas of today’s Ukraine bordering on the Pontic steppes. In the second half of the seventeenth century the term “Ukraine” entered the international vocabulary as one of the names of the Cossack polity created in the course of the Khmelnytsky Uprising (1648–57). By that time, European geographers could already locate Ukraine on the maps produced by the French engineer and cartographer Guillaume Levasseur de Beauplan. His, however, was not the first depiction of Ukraine on a European map.¹

The terms “Ukraine” and “Cossacks” appeared on European maps simultaneously in the first decades of the seventeenth century. Both terms were introduced for the first time on a map of Eastern Europe produced by a group of cartographers and engravers assembled by Mykalojus Kristupas Radvila (Mikołaj Krzysztof Radziwiłł) the Orphan, one of the most prominent aristocrats in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The map, titled “Detailed Description of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Other Adjacent Lands,” captured not only major political and territorial, but also social and cultural changes that had taken place in the region in the course of the sixteenth century.

The Radvila map covers the territories of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as they existed before the Union of Lublin (1569) between the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and has a supplement consisting of a separate map of the Dnieper River. By far the most important new development reflected on the Radvila map was the emergence of a border dividing the Grand Duchy almost in half. The new boundary was in some of its

For the background information on the history of Ukraine this essay draws on the relevant chapters of my book *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), on which I worked concurrently with producing the original draft of this paper.

¹ Guillaume Levasseur de Beauplan, *A Description of Ukraine*, trans. Andrew B. Pernal and Dennis F. Essar (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1993).

parts similar to the present-day Ukrainian-Belarusian border, following the Prypiat River and then diverging to the north. The word “Ukraine,” used to describe part of the lands south of the new border, referred to the territory on the right bank of the Dnieper extending from Kyiv in the north to Kaniv in the south. Beyond Kaniv, if one trusted the cartographer, there were wild steppes, marked *Campi deserti citra Boristenem* (Desert plains on this side of the Borysthenes). “Ukraine” thus covered a good part of the region’s steppe frontier, which had become the homeland of the social group subsequently known as the Ukrainian Cossacks.²

The Radvila map provides unique insight into three interrelated processes that shaped the future of the Pontic steppes: the renegotiation of relations between royal crown and the local aristocracy; the economic and cultural colonization of the Dnieper area, and last but not least the emergence of the Ukrainian Cossacks as a powerful military and later political and cultural force.

The Princes

The Radvila map is often attributed to Tomasz Makowski, its principle engraver, but was produced, in fact, by a group of cartographers, which included Maciej Strubicz. Most of the work on the map was done between 1585 and 1603, while the first known edition was published only in 1613 by Hessel Geritsz (Gerard) of Amsterdam.³

The Radvila map in many ways was a continuation of work initiated by King Stefan Batory at the time of the Livonian War, and can be viewed as sign of increased involvement of the aristocracy in the political, religious and

² See a copy of the 1613 edition of the map in the Stanford University Libraries: *MAGNI DVCATVS LITHVANIAE, CAETERARVMQVE REGIONVM ILLI ADIACENTIVM EXACTA DESCRIPTIO. Ill[ustri]ss[im]i ac Excell[enti]ss[im]i Pri[n]cipis et D[omi]ni D[omini] Nicolai Christophori Radziwil, D[ei] G[ratia] Olicae ac in Nieswies Ducis, S[acri] Rom[ani] Imperii Principis in Szylowiec ac Mir Comititis et S[ancti] Sepulchri Hierosolimitani Militis etc. opera, cura et impensis facta ac in lucem edita*, <https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/10366631>; for a 1633 edition of the map, which includes a map of Dnieper River, see <https://searchworks.stanford.edu/view/10366743>.

³ On the history of the production of the map, see H. Bartoszewicz, “Geodeci i kartografowie radziwiłłowscy,” *Geodeta*, no. 2 (2001): 45–49; S. Alexandrowicz, “Rola mecenatu magnackiego w rozwoju kartografii ziem Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów w XVI–I połowie XVII wieku,” in *Europa Orientalis: Studia z dziejów Europy Wschodniej i Państw Bałtyckich* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2010), 235–54; S. Alexandrowicz and A. Treiderowa, “Makowski Tomasz,” in *Polski słownik biograficzny* (Wrocław: Zakład Narod. Im. Ossolińskich, 1974), 19: 248–49; Jarosław Łuczyński. “Przestrzeń Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego na mapie radziwiłłowskiej Tomasza Makowskiego z 1613 r. w świetle treści kartograficznej opisowej,” *Ukraina Lithuanica* 2 (2013): 121–52.

cultural realms dominated earlier by the king. Radvila was assisted in his work by fellow aristocrats, and it has been argued that the information on the Dnieper settlements was supplied to him by his peer, the palatine of Kyiv and prominent Volhynian magnate Prince Kostiantyn Ostrozky. Not unlike the *Kronika polska, litewska, żmódzka i wszystkiej Rusi* by Maciej Strykowski (1582), sponsored by a fellow Lithuanian aristocrat, the bishop of Samogitia (Žemaitija) Merkelis Giedraitis, Radvila's map was not limited in scope to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and included the lands of Rus', lost to Poland as a result of the Union of Lublin (1569). The elites of the Grand Duchy were clearly unhappy with the deal they got in 1569 in Lublin and were eager to renegotiate the political and cultural spaces created by the Union.⁴

All over Europe, the sixteenth century was marked by the strengthening of royal authority, centralization of the state, and regularization of political and social practices. The other side of the coin was increasing aristocratic opposition to this growth. Both tendencies were fully apparent in the preparation and conclusion of the Union of Lublin, which had as its goal not only the unification of the two parts of the Polish-Lithuanian state, but also strengthening of the crown. If King Sigismund Augustus wanted the Union, the aristocratic families of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania opposed it. But many of their concerns had to be put aside because of a growing external threat to the Grand Duchy that could be met only with the help of Poland.

In 1558, after taking control of the Volga trade route by defeating and forcing into submission the two successors of the Golden Horde, the Kazan and Astrakhan khanates, Ivan the Terrible moved his armies westward, trying to gain access to the Baltic Sea. The Livonian War, which Ivan started that year, would last for a quarter century and see Sweden, Denmark, Lithuania, and, eventually, Poland involved in the struggle. In 1563, Muscovite troops crossed the borders of the Grand Duchy, taking the city of Polatsk (now in Belarus) and raiding Vitsebsk, Shkloŭ, and Orsha. This defeat mobilized support for the Union among the lesser Lithuanian nobility. Given Muscovite claims to the lands of Kyivan Rus', which included not only Polatsk but also the rest of the Ukrainian-Belarusian territories of the Grand Duchy, the future looked bleak for the Duchy's ruling elite. Union with the Kingdom of Poland now seemed the only possible solution.

In December 1568, Sigismund Augustus convened two Diets in the city of Lublin—one for the Kingdom, the other for the Grand Duchy—in the hope that their representatives would hammer out conditions for the new union. The negotiations began on a positive note, as the two sides agreed to the joint election of the king, a common Diet, or parliament, and broad auton-

⁴ S. Alexandrowicz, *Rozwój kartografii Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego od XV do połowy XVIII wieku* (Poznań: Wyd. Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. A. Mickiewicza, 1989); "The Radziwiłł Map of the Duchy of Lithuania," *Cartographia Rappersviliiana Polonorum*. Muzeum Polski w Rapperswilu, <http://mapy.muzeum-polskie.org/articles-about-the-collection/the-radziwi-map-of-lithuania.html> (accessed 7 April 2017).

omy for the Grand Duchy. Nonetheless, the magnates would not return the royal lands in their possession—the principal demand of the Executionists. Directed by Mykalojus Radvila (Mikołaj Radziwiłł) the Red, the leader of the Lithuanian Calvinists and the victorious commander of the Lithuanian army in its recent clashes with Muscovite troops, the Lithuanian delegates made no concessions. They packed their bags, assembled their retinues of noble clients, and left the Diet. This move backfired. Unexpectedly for the departing Lithuanians, the Diet of the Kingdom of Poland with the king's blessing began to issue decrees transferring one province of the Grand Duchy after another to the jurisdiction of the Kingdom of Poland.

The Lithuanian magnates who had feared losing their provinces to Muscovy were now losing them to Poland instead. To stop a hostile takeover by their powerful Polish partner, the Lithuanians returned to Lublin to sign an agreement dictated by the Polish delegates. They were too late. In March, the Podlachia palatinate on the Ukrainian-Belarusian-Polish ethnic border went to Poland. Volhynia followed in May, and on 6 June, one day before the resumption of the Polish-Lithuanian talks, the Kyivan and Podolian lands were transferred to Poland as well. The Ukrainian palatinates were incorporated into the Kingdom not as a group but one by one, with no guarantees but those pertaining to the use of the Ruthenian (Middle Ukrainian) language in the courts and administration and the protection of the rights of the Orthodox Church. The Lithuanian aristocrats could only accept the new reality—they stood to lose even more if they continued to resist the Union.⁵

Kostiantyn Ostrozky, by far the most influential of Ukrainian princes, decided the fate of the Union and his land by throwing his support behind the king. The Lublin border, which cut the Grand Duchy in half and separated the future Ukrainian and Belarusian territories, reinforced differences long in the making. Historically, the Kyiv Land and Galicia-Volhynia differed significantly from the Belarusian lands to the north. From the tenth to the fourteenth century, they were core areas of independent or semi-independent principalities, and, if one judges by the Primary Chronicle and its continuations in Kyiv and Galicia-Volhynia, their identities differed from those of the other Rus' lands. The location of the Ukrainian lands on the periphery of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the challenges they faced on the open steppe frontier set them apart from the rest of the Lithuanian world.

At the Lublin Diet, the Ukrainian elites saw little benefit in maintaining the de facto independence of the Grand Duchy, which was ill equipped to resist increasing pressure from the Crimean and Noghay Tatars. The Kingdom of Poland could help the Grand Duchy fight the war with Muscovy, but it was unlikely to assist the Ukrainians in their low-intensity war with the Tatars. A different attitude might be expected if the frontier provinces were to be

⁵ On the Union of Lublin, see Robert Frost, *The Oxford History of Poland-Lithuania*, 1: *The Making of the Polish-Lithuanian Union, 1385–1569* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

incorporated into the Kingdom. Not only did the Volhynian princely families not lose their possessions, they dramatically increased them under Polish tutelage. Kostiantyn Ostrozky, who played a key role in the Lublin Diet, kept his old posts as captain of the town of Volodymyr, head of the Volhynian nobility, and palatine of Kyiv.

The split between the Volhynian princes who helped Sigismund Augustus divide the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, among whom Ostrozky was the most prominent, and the Lithuanian aristocrats did not last for too long, as both camps soon found common ground in developing political and cultural projects that strengthened their independence from royal authority. The cultural awakening took place on both sides of the new Polish-Lithuanian border, fueled by the political aspirations of the princes and directly linked to the religious conflicts of the time. In Lithuania, the Radvila family set an example of linking politics, religion, and culture. The main opponent of the Union of Lublin, Mikalojus Radvila the Red, was also the leader of Polish and Lithuanian Calvinism and the founder of a school for Calvinist youth. His cousin, Mikalojus Radvila the Black, funded the printing of the first complete Polish translation of the Bible, which was issued in the town of Brest on the Ukrainian-Belarusian ethnic border. John Calvin dedicated one of his works to him.

Since the Polish kings remained Catholic, the dissident religion of their aristocratic opponents served to strengthen the latter's intransigence toward royal authority. This was true for both Protestantism and Orthodoxy. The initiative of the Radvila family in associating political opposition with religious dissent was picked up by their Orthodox counterparts. The first to do so was an Orthodox magnate, Hryhorii Khodkevych (in Belarusian, Khadkevich), who, like the two Radvila cousins, had led the Lithuanian army as the Duchy's Grand Hetman—one of the supreme posts in the hierarchy. In 1566, two years after the appearance of the Polish Bible, Khodkevich invited two Moscow refugees, the printers Ivan Fedorov and Petr Mstislavets, to his town of Zabłudów (Zabludau). At Khodkevich's request and with his sponsorship, they published a number of books in Church Slavonic there. Khodkevych died in 1572, causing the printers to stop their work, but his initiative would have consequences.

A few years after Khodkevych's death, Kostiantyn Ostrozky began his own publishing project in Volhynia. In 1574 he moved his residence from the Volhynian town of Dubno to nearby Ostrih. He hired an Italian architect then living in Lviv to build new fortifications, the remains of which can still be seen today in Ostrih. He also employed one of Khodkevych's printers, Ivan Fedorov, who was summoned to Ostrih to take part in the prince's most ambitious cultural undertaking: the publication of the full Church Slavonic text of the Bible. In his new capital Ostrozky assembled a team of scholars who compared Greek and Church Slavonic texts of the Bible, amended the Church Slavonic translations, and published the most authoritative text of Scripture ever produced by Orthodox scholars. The project was truly international in scope, involving participants not only from Lithuania and Poland but also

from Greece, while the copies of the Bible on which they worked originated in places as diverse as Rome and Moscow. The Ostrih Bible was issued in 1581 in a print run estimated at fifteen hundred copies.⁶

The close contacts between Kostiantyn Ostrozky and the Lithuanian aristocrats, as well as their shared interests in supporting cultural projects with broad political ramifications, support the assumption of those scholars who claim that it was indeed Kostiantyn Ostrozky, who helped Prince Mykalojus Kristupas Radvila to produce the map of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. While Radvila harbored no political ambitions that would question his loyalty to the king and the Commonwealth—he converted from Calvinism to Catholicism, and opposed the 1606 Zebrzydowski Rebellion—his map suggests that he had never given up the historical and cultural claims for the lands of the Grand Duchy lost as the result of the Union of Lublin. It was the interest in those territories, especially the ones located along the Dnieper River that united Ostrozky and Radvila.⁷

Ukraine

The Radvila map of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania offers a look at Eastern Europe as seen from the window of a palace of a Lithuanian aristocrat, not a residence of the king or his servants. The mapmakers presented the old Grand Duchy of Lithuania as if it had never been cut in half by King Sigismund Augustus and his supporters at the Lublin Diet of 1569. Although the new borders of the greatly diminished Grand Duchy are marked on the map, they are hardly visible, and the map itself includes the old Lithuanian possessions all the way to the Dnieper estuary. The settlements most prominently marked on the map are not the administrative centers of the royal power, but the seats of the princes, including Radvila's own Olyka, which ended up on the Polish side of the divide after the Union of Lublin, and the town of Ostrih, the seat of the Ostrozkys.

Both Olyka and Ostrih are located in Volhynia, the region that emerges on the map as the main stronghold of the princes. It extends all the way to the Dnieper, covering the region marked on the map as "Volynia ulterior, quae tum Vkraina tum Nis ab aliis vocitatur" (Outer Volhynia, known either as Ukraine or as the Lower [Dnieper]). According to the map, Ukraine, which is only one of three possible names of the region, extends from Kyiv, the seat of Ostrozky as palatine of the region, in the north, to the Ros River and the fortress of Korsun, built by King Stefan Batory in 1581, in the south. It borders

⁶ On Ostrozky and his cultural activities, see Vasyl' Ulianovskyy, *Kniaz' Vasyl' -Kostiantyn Ostroz'ky: Istorychnyi portret u halerei predkiv i nashchadkiv* (Kyiv: Vydavnychyii Dim "Prostir," 2012).

⁷ For a detailed biography of Radvila, see T. Kempa, *Mikołaj Krzysztof Radziwiłł Sierotka* (Warsaw: Wydawn. Naukowe Semper, 2000).

on the steppes, called “*Campi deserti*” (Desert plains), which are depicted with numerous horsemen, suggesting a battleground more than an inhabited desert. It seems to be a fast-growing area, dotted with numerous castles and settlements that had not appeared on earlier maps. (See figure 55 in gallery of images following page 206.)

The reference to “Ukraine” as “*Volhynia Ulterior*” speaks volumes about the views and ambitions of the Ostrozky and other Volhynian princes, the likely advisors for the makers of the Radvila map. This usage reflected the perception of “Ukraine” on the right bank of the Dnieper as the territories annexed to the Volhynian Land, while stressing the role that the Volhynian princes had played in the colonization of those territories. The lands marked on the Radvila map as “Ukraine,” “*Volhynia Ulterior*,” and “*Nis*” indeed had become the playground of the Volhynian princes in the second half of the sixteenth century.

The Lublin Diet prohibited the princes from fielding their own armies in wartime. But because of the constant danger of Tatar attacks on the steppe frontier, the Commonwealth’s standing army could not do without the military muscle of the princes. Ostrozky alone could muster an army of twenty thousand soldiers and cavalymen—ten times the size of the king’s army in the borderlands. At various times in his career, Ostrozky was a contender for both the Polish and the Muscovite thrones. The lesser nobles were in no position to defy the powerful magnate, on whom they depended economically and politically. Thus, Ostrozky continued to preside over an extensive network of noble clients who did his bidding in the local and Commonwealth Diets. Not only the local nobility but even the king and the Diet did not dare to challenge the authority of this uncrowned king of Rus’.

The Ostrozkys were the richest Ukrainian princes who maintained and increased their wealth and influence after the Union of Lublin, but they were not alone. Another highly influential Volhynian princely family was the Vyshnevetskys. Prince Mykhailo Vyshnevetsky branched out of his Volhynian possessions, which were quite insignificant in comparison to Ostrozky’s, into the lands east of the Dnieper. Those lands were either uncolonized or had been abandoned by settlers in the times of Mongol rule and were now open to attack by the Noghay and Crimean Tatars. The Vyshnevetsky family expanded into the steppe lands, creating new settlements, establishing towns, and funding monasteries. The possessions of the Vyshnevetskys in Left-Bank (eastern) Ukraine soon began to rival those of the Ostrozkys in Volhynia. These two princely families were the largest landowners in Ukraine.

In the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Ukrainian steppes underwent a major political, economic, and cultural transformation. For the first time since the days of Kyivan Rus’, the line of frontier settlement stopped retreating toward the Prypiat marshes and the Carpathian Mountains and began advancing toward the east and south. Linguistic research indicates that two major groups of Ukrainian dialects, Polisian and Carpatho-Volhynian, began to converge from the north and west, respectively, shifting east and

south to create a third group of steppe dialects that now cover Ukrainian territory from Zhytomyr and Kyiv in the northwest to Zaporizhia, Luhansk, and Donetsk in the east, extending as far southeast as Krasnodar and Stavropol in today's Russia. This movement and mixing of dialects reflected the movement of the population at large.

The major obstacle to the movement of the sedentary population in the Pontic steppes were the slave-seeking expeditions of the Crimean Tatars and Noghays, the subjects of the Ottomans. The Ottoman Empire, whose Islamic laws allowed the enslavement of non-Muslims only and encouraged the emancipation of slaves, was always in need of free labor. The Noghays and the Crimean Tatars responded to the demand, expanding their slave-seeking expeditions to the lands north of the Pontic steppes and often going much deeper into Ukraine and southern Muscovy than the frontier areas. The slave trade supplemented the earnings that the Noghays obtained from animal husbandry and the Crimeans from both husbandry and settled forms of agriculture. Bad harvests generally translated into more raids to the north and more slaves shipped back to the Crimea.

All five routes that the Tatars followed to the settled areas went through Ukraine. Two of them east of the Dniester led to western Podolia and then to Galicia; two on the other side of the Boh (Southern Buh) River led to western Podolia and Volhynia, and then again to Galicia; and the last passed through what would become the Sloboda Ukraine region around Kharkiv to southern Muscovy. If the Ukrainian lands of the sixteenth century were incorporated into the Baltic trade because of the demand for cereals, their connection to the Mediterranean trade was due largely to Tatar raiding for slaves. Ukrainians became the main targets and victims of the Ottoman Empire's slave-dependent economy.

Michalon the Lithuanian, a mid-sixteenth-century Ruthenian author who visited the Crimea, described the scope of the slave trade by quoting from his conversation with a local Jew: "One Jew there in Tavria beside its only gate, which stands at the head of the customs office, seeing that our people were constantly being shipped there as captives in numbers too large to count, asked us whether our lands also teemed with people, and whence such innumerable mortals had come." Estimates of the numbers of Ukrainians and Russians brought to the Crimean slave markets in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries vary from one and a half to three million. Children and adolescents brought the highest prices.⁸

The colonization of the steppe areas, marked by numerous settlements on Radvila's map, was spearheaded by the Volhynian princes and assisted by changes introduced in the region in the aftermath of the Union of Lublin. The Polish crown's creation of a small but mobile standing army, funded from

⁸ Kateryna Melnyk, trans., "Mikhalon Litvin o nrvakh tatar, litovtsev i moskvitian," in *Memuary otnosiashchiesia k istorii Iuzhnoi Rusi*, 8: XVI v. (Kyiv: Tip. G. T. Korchak-Novitskogo, 1890), 19.

the profits of the royal domains, helped repel Tatar raids and promote the continuing movement of population into the steppe. Another major incentive for the colonization of the steppe borderlands came from their inclusion in the Baltic trade. With increasing demand for grain on the European markets, Ukraine began to earn its future reputation as the breadbasket of Europe. This was the first time that Ukrainian grain had appeared in these markets since the days of Herodotus. Unexpectedly, colonization was also aided by the introduction of Polish laws and regulations intended to prevent the influx of people into the borderlands, not to increase it. The European demand for grain turned cereal cultivation into a profitable business, leading to the revival of serfdom. A number of Polish laws introduced in Ukraine by the Third Lithuanian Statute of 1588 deprived peasants of the right to own land or move from one manorial estate to another. But the peasants—or, at least, significant numbers of them—refused to obey those laws. They simply fled to the steppe borderlands of Ukraine, where princes and nobles were establishing duty-free settlements that allowed the new arrivals not to perform *corvée* labor or pay duties for a substantial period of time. In exchange, they had to settle the land and develop it. As serfdom took stronger hold in the central provinces of the Kingdom and the Grand Duchy, more peasants fled to the east and south. Once their duty-free years expired, some stayed, while others moved deeper into the steppe, where they joined the Cossacks, the new borderland segment of the population growing in numbers and importance.⁹

The Cossacks

The Cossacks are not shown as inhabitants of Ukraine and do not appear on the main Radvila map of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Ukraine seems to be reserved for the Volhynian princes alone. The Cossack settlements located along the Dnieper between Kyiv and Cherkasy, including the town of Trakhtemyriv, known to the Polish chroniclers of the time as the Cossack headquarters, are not marked on the map as belonging to, or settled by the Cossacks. The Cossacks do, however, receive considerable attention on the map of the Dnieper, which depicts the riverbed south of Cherkasy and is richer in specially inserted inscriptions than the main map.

The insert at the very bottom of the Dnieper map explains why the mapmakers decided to produce it. They allegedly did so for three reasons. The first was geographic: the Dnieper is presented as one of the two largest European rivers, the second being the Danube; the Volga is excluded as an Asian river. The second reason was historical: Grand Duke Vytautas, say the mapmakers, used to control the Dnieper estuary in days of old. The third reason was mil-

⁹ On the economic preconditions of steppe colonization in seventeenth-century Ukraine, see chap. 11, "Socio-Economic Developments," in Paul Robert Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine: The Land and Its People*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 144–58.

itary and political: the Dnieper region, rich in natural resources, served as a point of origin for Tatar attacks on Volhynia and was home to the Cossacks, who disrupted Tatar slave-hunting expeditions. The Dnieper is shown on the map as Borysthenes, and there are numerous other references to the ancient Greeks; the Tatars, for example, are called Scythians. But despite repeated allusions to ancient times, the mapmakers' attention to Cossacks and Tatars indicates their current rather than historical concerns.

The origins and activities of the Cossacks are described in a text box that appears on the right bank of the Dnieper. It reads as follows:

The Cossacks are a martial people, mixed with private [individuals], either deprived of nobility or avoiding corvée labor.... They live near the Rapids or cataracts on Dnieper islands fitted with roofs against storms of any kind. They are subject to the command of the chief of the Polish army. They choose their chief from among themselves and easily relieve him of his functions if he proves unsuccessful in subsequent affairs; sometimes they kill him. If they suffer from lack of pay, they customarily make sneak attacks on neighboring towns, and, having razed them, return weighed down with booty, as when, under Pidkova's command, they plundered and razed the Turkish sultan's town of Tighina in Moldavia. If one of their raids proves less than successful, they plunder their homelands so greedily that sometimes their fierce attacks are repelled, and they are defeated.¹⁰

Judging by the location of the text box with information on the origins and activities of the Cossacks, they occupied lands on the right bank of the Dnieper and settled islands along the river from the estuary of the Vorskla (on the left bank) to the rapids and the Tomakivka (Tomakówka) settlement beyond the rapids. But the Cossacks are not depicted as the first or only actors in the region. One of the text boxes tells of the construction of a castle on the

¹⁰ "Kozacj est genus militum ex honore privatis expulsis labore[m]q[ue] evitantibus conflatum. Hi armis levibus antea utebantur, unde et Velites dicti sunt, arcubus videlicet frameis, bombardis levioribus: nunc autem tormenta muralia et omne genus, armorum antea illis inusitatum, usui est. Hi itaq[ue] vitam d Porohas sive Cataracta in insulis Borysthenis, sub casis quibusuis tempestatibus expositi, degunt, in obedientia atq[ue] suprema [supremo] exercituum Poloniae praefecti continentur. Ducum [Ducem] inter se eligunt, electum facile deponunt, infeliciter autem illi rebus succedentibus nonnunquam trucidant tum vero inopia annonae laborant, clam civitates vicinis invadere et illis depopulatis praeda onusti reverti Solent, ut Duce Podkowa Tehiniam Moldaviae kosinscio kozlonum. Turcarum Imperatoris civitates depraedati ac depopulati sunt. Si vero ad exteros eundi occasio sese illis non obtulerit ita paternis inhiant possessionibus ut non nunquam feroces eorum impetus cum detrimento reprimantur." Cf. Jarosław Łuczyński, "Przestrzeń Wielkiego Księstwa Litewskiego na mapie radziwiłłowskiej Tomasza Makowskiego z 1613 r. w świetle treści kartograficznej opisywanej," *Zapiski Historyczne: Kwartalnik poświęcony historii Pomorza* 78, 1 (2013): 141–42.

island of Khortytsia by Prince Dmytro Vyshnevetsky in 1556. (See figure 56.) The only clearly defined Cossack settlement on the map is that of Tomakivka, which “was once a fortified town, as attested by its remains, and is now an island on the Dnieper rejoicing in the same name, on which the Lower [Dnieper] Cossacks live securely, as if in a well-reinforced fortress.” Tomakivka, like other settlements on the right bank, is marked with a cross, indicating that it is a Christian settlement. (With reference to the town of Cherkasy, the map-makers explain that, despite unsubstantiated claims that its inhabitants were descendants of the Cimmerians of Homer’s day, or professed Islam, it is in fact settled by Ruthenians of the Greek faith.) The map clearly puts the Cossacks on the Christian side of the divide, marking Tatar settlements on the left bank with crescents.

This description of the Cossacks fits in general terms a much more detailed discussion of the Cossack history and way of life provided by the Polish historian Joachim Bielski in *Kronika Polska*, a history of the Polish Kingdom written largely by his father, Marcin Bielski, and published for the first time in Cracow in 1597. There the Cossacks are represented as fishermen, trappers, and warriors who live on the Dnieper islands beyond the rapids. Bielski mentions Prince Vyshnevetsky and his settlement on the Khortytsia Island, and provides a detailed description of the Cossack campaigns against the Ottomans and the Tatars, including the one led to Moldavia by Ivan Pidkova. Like the makers of the Radvila map, Bielski refers in the description of the Cossacks to the Greek authors (he mentions the Byzantine chronicler of the twelfth century Joannes Zonaras) but is silent on the ethnic origins of the Cossacks or their religious affiliation.¹¹

How does the map’s representation of the Cossacks relate to what we know today about the early history of the Cossacks and their way of life? The first Cossacks indeed lived on and off the rivers, relying not only on fishing, but also on banditry, preying on merchants who ventured without sufficient guards. In 1492, the Ukrainian Cossacks made their first appearance on the international arena in such an attack on merchants. According to a complaint sent that year to the grand duke of Lithuania by the Crimean khan, subjects of the duke from the cities of Kyiv and Cherkasy had captured and pillaged a Tatar ship in what appears to have been the lower reaches of the Dnieper. The duke ordered his borderland (the term he used was “Ukrainian”) officials to investigate the Cossacks who might have been involved in the raid. He also ordered that the perpetrators be executed and that their belongings, which apparently had to include the stolen merchandise, be given to a representative of the khan.

The khan’s complaints to the grand duke were actually of little avail. The Lithuanian borderland officials, who happened to be the members of the Volhynian princely families, were trying to stop Cossack raids with one

¹¹ Kazimierz J. Turowski, ed., *Kronika Polska Marcina Bielskiego* (Sanok, 1856), 3: 1346–58, 1358–61, 1430–35.

hand while using the Cossacks to defend the frontier from the Tatars with the other. In 1553 the grand duke sent the captain of Cherkasy and Kaniv, Prince Dmytro Vyshnevetsky, beyond the Dnieper rapids to build a fortress in order to stop Cossack expeditions from proceeding farther down the river. Vyshnevetsky used his Cossack servants to accomplish the task. Not surprisingly, the Crimean khan saw the Cossack fortress as an encroachment on his realm, and four years later he sent an army to expel Vyshnevetsky from his redoubt. In folk tradition, Prince Vyshnevetsky became a popular hero as the first Cossack hetman—the title that the Polish army reserved for its supreme commanders—and a fearless fighter against the Tatars and Ottomans. He also made it into the Radvila map, whose inscription provides information on the construction of the Vyshnevetsky castle on the island of Khortytsia.

By the mid-sixteenth century, the lands south of Kyiv were full of new or revived settlements, many of which were depicted on the Radvila map, including those of Cherkasy, Kaniv, Korsun, Trekhtymyriiv, Moshny, and Olshanka. “And the Kyiv region, fortunate and thriving, is also rich in population, for on the Borysthenes and other rivers that flow into it there are plenty of populous towns and many villages,” wrote Michalon the Lithuanian. He also explained the origins of the settlers: “Some are hiding from paternal authority, or from slavery, or from service, or from [punishment for] crimes, or from debts, or from something else; others are attracted to it, especially in the spring, by richer game and more plentiful places. And, having tried their luck in its fortresses, they never come back from there.” Judging by Michalon’s description, the Cossacks were supplementing their gains from hunting and fishing with robbery. He wrote that some poor and dirty Cossack huts were “full of expensive silks, precious stones, sables and other furs, and spices.” There, he found “silk cheaper than in Vilnius, and pepper cheaper than salt.” These were delicacies and luxury items that merchants had been transporting from the Ottoman Empire to Muscovy or the Kingdom of Poland.¹²

The Cossacks became the direct responsibility of Kostiantyn Oztrozky, the most powerful Volhynian prince, in 1559, when he was appointed the palatine of Kyiv. His jurisdiction expanded to Kaniv and Cherkasy, and his responsibilities included the Cossacks, who continued to cause problems at home and on the international arena. In 1577 a Cossack detachment led by a certain Ivan Pidkova captured the city of Iași, the capital of the Ottoman protectorate of Moldavia. Pidkova was later seized with the help of one of the royal borderland governors, Janusz Zbaraski (Zbarazky), and executed on the orders of King Stefan Batory. Under Batory, the first efforts to recruit the Cossacks into military service began, not so much to use them as a fighting force as to remove them from the lands beyond the rapids and establish some form of control over that unruly crowd. The Livonian War increased the demand for fighting men on the Lithuanian border with Muscovy, and a number of

¹² Mikhalon Litvin, *O nraoakh tatar, litovtsev i moskvitian* (Moscow: Izd-vo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1994), 52–53.

Cossack units were formed in the 1570s, one of them numbering as many as five hundred men.

The reorganization of the Cossacks from militias in the service of local border officials into military units under the command of army officers inaugurated a new era in the history of Cossackdom. For the first time, the term “registered Cossacks” came into use. Cossacks taken into military service and thus included in the “register” were exempted from paying taxes and not subject to the jurisdiction of local officials. They also received a salary. There was, of course, no shortage of those wanting to be registered, but the Polish crown recruited only limited numbers, and salary was paid and privileges recognized only during active service. But those who were not included in the register to begin with, or were excluded from it at the end of a given war or military campaign, refused to give up their status, giving rise to endless disputes between Cossacks and border officials. The creation of the register solved one problem for the government, only to breed another.

In 1590, the Commonwealth Diet decreed the creation of a force of one thousand registered Cossacks to protect the Ukrainian borderlands from the Tatars and the Tatars from the unregistered Cossacks. Although the king issued the requisite ordinance, little came of it. By 1591, Ukraine was engulfed by the first Cossack uprising. The Cossacks, who until then had been harassing Ottoman possessions—the Crimean Khanate, the Principality of Moldavia (an Ottoman dependency), and the Black Sea coast—now turned their energies inward. They were rebelling not against the state but against their own “godfathers”—the Volhynian princes, in particular Prince Janusz Ostrogski (Ostrozky) and his father, Kostiantyn. Janusz was the captain of Bila Tserkva, a castle and a Cossack stronghold south of Kyiv, while Kostiantyn, the palatine of Kyiv, “supervised” his son’s activities. The Ostrozkys, father and son, had full control of the region. No one from the local nobility dared to defy the powerful princes, who were busy extending their possessions by taking over the lands of the petty nobility.

One of the noble victims of the Ostrozkys, Kryshtof Kosynsky (Krzysztof Kosiński), turned out to be a Cossack chieftain as well. When Janusz Ostrozky seized his land, which he held on the basis of a royal grant, Kosynsky did not waste time on a futile complaint to the king but gathered his Cossacks and attacked the Bila Tserkva castle, the headquarters of the younger Ostrozky. An attack by one noble on the holdings of another to resolve a conflict over land was nothing unusual for the Commonwealth. It was unheard of, however, for a petty noble to assault a prince, and the Ostrozkys were caught by surprise. Soon the Cossacks were in control of another major fortress, this time on the left bank of the Dnieper—the city of Pereiaslav, whose princes had once ruled lands as far away as Moscow. Emboldened by these victories, Kosynsky marched westward to Volhynia, where he was finally defeated by a private army assembled by the Ostrozkys. Kosynsky suffered another defeat near Cherkasy, this time at the hands of another scion of Volhynia, Prince Oleksandr Vyshnevetsky.

The princes managed to put down the revolt without asking for help from the royal authorities. Ironically, the godfathers of the Cossacks punished their unruly children with the help of other Cossacks who were in their private service. By far the best known of Ostrozky's Cossack chieftains was Severyn Nalyvaiko. He came to Ostrih as a youth together with his brother, Demian, who became a member of Ostrozky's learned circle and a published author. Severyn, for his part, served the prince with his saber. He led the Ostrozky Cossacks into battle against Kosynsky's army and then gathered dispersed Cossacks in the steppes of Podolia to lead them as far away as possible from the Ostrozkys' possessions. The destination to which Nalyvaiko took them was the Ottoman vassal state of Moldavia. Once the Cossacks returned from their Moldavian expedition, Ostrozky tried to use them to pillage the estates of his opponents in the struggle over the church union. Nalyvaiko's Cossacks were spotted attacking the estates of the two Orthodox bishops who had traveled to Rome to petition for union with the Catholic Church. Attacks on other estates took the Cossacks to places as distant from the Ukrainian steppes as the lands of today's Belarus.

There was, however, a limit to what the Ostrozkys could control by manipulating the Cossack rebellion. The Cossacks elected their own commander, whom they followed into battle, but once the expedition was over, they were free to remove or even execute him if he acted against their interests. Then there were major divisions among the Cossacks themselves, which were not limited to registered versus unregistered men. The registered Cossacks were recruited from the landowning Cossack class, whose members resided in towns and settlements between Kyiv and Cherkasy. They had a chance to obtain special rights associated with royal service. But there was also another group, the Zaporozhian Cossacks, who had a fortified settlement called the Sich (after the wooden palisade that protected it) on the islands beyond the rapids. They were beyond the reach of royal officials, caused most of the trouble with the Crimean Tatars, and, in turbulent times, served as a magnet for the dissatisfied townsmen and peasants who fled to the steppes.

Nalyvaiko, charged by Ostrozky with managing the Cossack ruffraff, soon found himself in an uneasy alliance with the unruly Zaporozhians. By 1596 he was no longer doing Ostrozky's bidding but acting on his own, leading a revolt greater than the one initiated by Kosynsky. The early 1590s saw a number of years of bad harvest, which caused famine. Starvation drove more peasants out of the noble estates and into Cossack ranks. This time the princely retinues were insufficient to suppress the uprising; the royal army was called in, headed by the commander of the Polish armed forces. In May 1596, the Polish army surrounded the Cossack encampment on the left bank of the Dnieper. The "old" or town Cossacks turned against the "new" ones and surrendered Nalyvaiko to the Poles in exchange for an amnesty. The princely

servant turned Cossack rebel was executed in Warsaw, becoming a martyr for the Cossack and Orthodox causes in the eyes of the Cossack chroniclers.¹³

In the 1590s, the Cossacks entered into the foreign-policy calculations not only of the Commonwealth and the Ottoman Empire but also of Central and West European powers. In 1594 Erich von Lassota, an emissary of the Holy Roman emperor, Rudolf II, visited the Zaporozhian Cossacks with a proposal to join his master's war against the Ottomans. The same year Aleksandar Komulović (Alessandro Comuleo) delivered letters to the Cossacks from Pope Clement VIII urging them to join the European powers in the war against the Ottomans. Little came of those missions, apart from Komulović's letters and Lassota's diary, which described the democratic order that prevailed in the Zaporozhian Host and enriched our knowledge about the early history of the Cossacks.¹⁴

Some scholars suggested the possibility of Lassota or one of the members of his mission supplying Radvila and his cartographers with information on the Dnieper and the Cossacks. While this supposition seems to be farfetched, there is little doubt that with regard to the religious affiliation of the Cossacks, the makers of the Radvila map, Lassota, and Komulović shared the same position. They turned a blind eye to the division between the Orthodox Cossacks and Catholic nobles, exacerbated by the battles over the Union of Brest (1596). They treated the Cossacks as part of the common Christian bulwark against the Islamic threat coming from the Ottomans and their Crimean and Noghay subjects.

At the turn of the seventeenth century, Cossackdom was a relatively new political, cultural, and military phenomenon. Miraculously, it found its way onto a map that presented a princely view of Eastern Europe, oriented as much backward as forward. How did it happen? The answer lies in the political and economic interests of the Volhynian princes, who were busy expanding their possessions in the Dnieper region after the Union of Lublin. The princes and the Cossacks emerged as both partners and rivals in the colonization of the steppe lands, defined on the Radvila map as "Volhynia Ulterior," "Ukraine," or the "Lower Dnieper" area. The close relations of the two groups are reflected in the map references to Vyshnevetsky's expedition

¹³ On the early history of the Ukrainian Cossacks, see Mykhailo Hrushevsky, *History of Ukraine-Rus', 7: The Cossack Age to 1625*, trans. Bohdan Struminski, ed. Frank E. Sysyn and Serhii Plokhly (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1999); Serhii Plokhly, *The Cossacks and Religion in Early Modern Ukraine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁴ On Lassota and his diary, see *Habsburgs and Zaporozhian Cossacks: The Diary of Erich Lassota von Steblau, 1594*, trans. Orest Subtelny, ed. Lubomyr R. Wynar (Littleton, CO: Ukrainian Academic Press, 1975). On Komulović and his encounters with Ostrozky and the Cossacks, see Lubomyr R. Wynar, *Ukrainian Kozaks and the Vatican in 1654* (New York: Svoboda, 1965). For the English translation of the papal letters to the Cossacks, see *Habsburgs and Zaporozhian Cossacks*, 120–23.

to Khortytsia, while their conflict finds reflection in the mention of Pidkova's campaign against Moldavia and occasional Cossack attacks on their own homeland, which may be understood as indirect references to the revolts of Kryshtof Kosynsky and Severyn Nalyvaiko against the Ostrozky princes.

The Cossacks are presented on the map as warriors protecting the borderlands of the Commonwealth and claimed as members of the Polish state and the Christian world. The latter claim reflects not so much the religious and ideological loyalties of the Cossacks as it does the hopes that the outside world invested in them in the face of growing confrontation with the Ottomans and their subject Crimean Tatars. The Ottoman threat increased dramatically in the 1590s, as did the activities and revolts of the Cossacks, making them attractive allies in the eyes of European rulers involved in military confrontations with the Ottomans during the rise of Ahmed I (r. 1590–1617). As Lassota and Komulović tried to recruit the Cossacks into the service of the Catholic rulers, the Catholic bishop of Kyiv, Józef Wereszczyński, penned a treatise arguing for the formation of Cossack regiments in the lands south of Ukraine to protect the Kingdom of Poland from Tatar attacks (1596). The rapid transformation of the Cossacks from Cimmerian or Muslim Circassians into Christian warriors, which took place in the imagination of European rulers and diplomats of the 1590s, found its visual reflection on the Radvila map created at the turn of the seventeenth century.



Figure 55. Fragment of Radvila map with the depiction of Volhynia and the area on the right bank of Dnieper referred to as "Vkraina." Joan Bleau, *Le Theatre Du Mondou Novel Atlas* (Amsterdam, 1649).



Figure 56. Fragment of Radvila map depicting part of the Dnieper River with Khortytsia Island and the Cossack settlement of Tomakivka." Joan Bleau, *Le Theatre Du Mondou Novel Atlas* (Amsterdam, 1649).