



MAURZYCY AUGUST BENIOWSKI - CONFABULATOR OR DISCOVERER? MAP OF HIS JOURNEY FOUND

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Maurzycy August Beniowski (1741-1786) has been the subject of a wide range of assessments by historians and other researchers. A participant in the Bar Confederation ordered into exile in Kamchatka by Empress Catherine II, as well as a conspirator and co-escapee with other exiles from the peninsula in 1771, thanks to the seizure of the vessel *Saints Peter and Paul*, Beniowski was both an extremely colourful and controversial character for his contemporaries, as for today's researchers, whose disparateness of assessment revolves around personal accounts of the journey given after the return to Europe, as well as an on-board journal written by Beniowski and published posthumously as his *Memoirs*¹. There are some who have produced critical assessments of entries by the author, first and foremost in regard to the route navigated around the Bering Sea, as well as the use of a route along the north coast of Alaska unknown to Europeans at that time, but resulting

¹ Published with a preface and introduction by William Nicholson (Benyovszky 1790a).

in successful arrival in the Aleutian Islands. Also evaluated negatively are parts of the journals describing Beniowski's time in Japan, as well as extracts dealing with Liqueur Island, the so-called "Water Island" in the Ogasawara Archipelago² (Benyowsky 1904). Accusations regarding confabulation were also levelled against the author over his recollections of incidents that supposedly took place on Formosa (Taiwan).

However, the Central Library of Geography and Environmental Protection of Warsaw-based Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization Polish Academy of Sciences hereby details the discovery³ of a map that may allow it to be established more definitively whether the role played by Beniowski was that of fraud or maker of new discoveries.

² Using coordinates on the Beniowski's map, one can assume that it is Aogashima Island.

³ The author identified the map in the course of work to implement the "Repozytorium Cyfrowe Instytutów Naukowych" (Digital Repository of Scientific Institutes) project which is in receipt of funding from one of Poland's EU-supported Operational Programmes.

The title of the discovered document placed within a beautiful *rocaille* cartouche and crowned by the coat of arms of the duc d'Aiguillon⁴ reads: *Carte de la Mer Oriental du Nord entre les Costes de l'Amerique, Occidentale et celles de la Tartarie Orientale, avec les Isle Nouvellemen de couvert dedié á Monseigneur le duc D'aiguillon Paire de France Ministre et Secretaire d'Etat par M. maurice Auguste de Benjowszkÿ 1772*⁵. The Duke, at that time holding the post of French Minister of Foreign Affairs⁶, obtained the map along with other documents from Beniowski, shortly after the latter's time spent in Paris in 1772.

The map plots out the precise route taken by the aforementioned vessel as it made good its escape, with the annotation: *Route Suivie Par La Galliotte Saint Pier En 1771 Commandé Par maurice auguste de Benjowszky Suite de la meme Route*. The route leads from Ust-Bolsheretsk (presented as "Bolscha" on the map), via the Fourth Kuril Strait, Bering Island, and (as it results from reference to the coordinates given on the map) St. Matthew Island (I. Aladar), Nunivak Island (I. Alaksa) and on along the north coast of Alaska between the Aleutian Islands. Beyond that, the vessel is given as travelling to one of the islands of the Ogasawara Archipelago (I. Liqueur), to Japan and Taiwan (Formosa), and ultimately as far as the Portuguese port-town of Macau on the Chinese coast.

The Publisher of the *Memoirs*, William Nicholson used the opportunity provided by the foreword to refer to a map depicting Beniowski's journey from Kamchatka to the Chinese port of Canton, which was to have accompanied Chapter II. It did not do so, since, as Nicholson himself reveals, the map disappeared in unclear circumstances and was never therefore to be found in the London edition. The lack of the said map was bemoaned by Johann Reinhold Forster in his version of the *Memoirs* (Benyovszky 1790b: XV), though not in association with any suspicions as to the veracity of Beniowski's account, but rather in line with the practical requirement that description be set against some visual depiction. For what Forster did (rightly) note was a lack of

precision to the coordinates supplied by Beniowski⁷.

Indeed, there is a certain lack of concordance between Beniowski's recollections as committed to paper and the entries on the map. Among other things an entry for June 4th 1771 notes the vessel's position at N65°20' (Benyovszky 1790a), which would suggest sailing to the north of "Isle St. Laurent", while the vessel's route as charted in the document does not even coincide with the vicinity of that island's southern shores. The northernmost latitude reached by the ship is placed at N61° on the map, this being below the N63° - N62° of the St. Lawrence Island depicted. Could it be that this part of the account did not come from Beniowski?

Drawing on earlier research the author of the article is not able to say with certainty if Beniowski's coloured manuscript map of 90 cm x 140 cm was made during the journey, or after the return to Europe. The type of paper on which the different areas and route taken by the flight from Kamchatka are placed, as well as the watermark impressed on it point to its Dutch provenance. The watermark comprises the letters D&C B written in double xX, and located within a shield, as used by the Dutch Blaeu Papermakers' founded by Dirck and Cornelius Blaeu in 1621 (Churchill 1935).

After departing from the coast of China, Beniowski sailed via the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), and might therefore have arrived at the extremely well-appointed port of Batavia (today's Jakarta), in this way being in a position to purchase the paper and from that time on produce an illustration of the different areas covered on the journey. It is certainly not possible that paper of such high quality could have been taken from the office of the fort in Ust-Bolsheretsk and brought on board ship. At that time even the Tipografija Imperatorskoj Akademii Nauk (printing and publishing house of the Russian Imperial Academy of Sciences) in St. Petersburg did not always make use of paper of good quality for its publications.

Another probable version entails Beniowski's making - or commissioning - of the map once already present in France, shortly before his meeting with the Kingdom's Foreign Minister. On account of its quality, Blaeu paper was

⁴ Emanuel-Armand de Vignerot du Plessis de Richelieu, duc d'Aiguillon (1720-1782).

⁵ The article retains the original writing style present on the map.

⁶ The duc d'Aiguillon was the Minister of Foreign Affairs of France in the years 1771-1774.

⁷ *Freilich wäre zu wünschen, dass der Graf lieber eine Karte von seiner Reise geliefert hätte; indess würde das Publikum damit eben nicht viel gewonnen haben, die Längen und Breiten doch nicht richtig angegeben sein würden* (Benyovszky 1790b: XV).

exceptionally popular in Europe, France included. The coordinates included on the map speak for this version of events. In the *Memoirs*, longitude is always given by Beniowski in relation to zero at Bolscha, while on the map – errors notwithstanding – it is from the Ferro Prime Meridian that longitude is measured. If producing his illustration while on board ship, Beniowski would certainly have noted the longitude in exact agreement with what was put in the ship's log. Perhaps there was a first variant of the map produced in line with the longitude of Bolscha, with a second map being made to meet the requirements of the French Minister, with a new zero meridian.

Questions thus arise. If a first version of the map existed, what illustration did it actually offer? Does the map document the journey authentically? Were it to emerge that the work of the author is a reliable depiction of his peregrinations (rather than a compilation deriving from fragments of

maps available to Beniowski and created merely to add weight or authenticity to his fabrications), then that fact would require a reworking of the history of exploration and discovery in the North Pacific. Most probably it will only be possible to answer this question after the author has carried out a series of comparative studies, *i.a.* of the Beniowski manuscript retained at the British Library, as well as following searches in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the French Republic, and the completion of a literature search in Japanese archives. What we do know for sure is that the map was preserved in the archives of the French Foreign Ministry, and it bears a stamp of that institution produced in the 20th century. What is not clear is how that map came to be in the Library in Warsaw, though there are several hypotheses. This is another matter that requires research.

References

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