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## THE DANUBE MOUTHS IN MEDIEVAL PORTOLANS

Interpretation of ancient geographical maps is quite a challenge. Sometimes it requires efforts of several generations of explorers, including erudite and professional historians and geographers. Currently, there are few different opinions about ancient maps as sources of valuable scientific information. The author of fundamental work on geomorphology of delta of Danube, Romanian researcher I. G. Petresku was rather skeptical about them: «the maps put together during medieval obscurantism are so fantastic and lack scientific content so much that they do not deserve to be even mentioned at the description of delta of Danube»<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Ukrainian historian I. T. Chernyakov has voiced an opinion that the map “Valahia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania” in the atlas published by G. Merkator in Duisburg, 1589, contains a “plausible sea coast line between Dnestr and Danube”<sup>2</sup>.

As one can see, reflection of the Danube region on the ancient maps has not been studied well enough and remains matter of debate. Nonetheless, meticulous comparison of different types of the medieval maps yields rather promising, in our opinion, results. One of the most interesting topics of medieval cartography is portolans. Portolans are compass maps where coastlines were plotted along constant compass bearings. They had appeared approximately in the middle of XIII century and were the first maps with a rather correct representation of the sea coast line, if compared to peripli or existing geographical maps. The peripli were in circulation since time of the late Roman Empire. They allowed only partial description of the coast with indications of distances between different ports in stages and non-systematic chorographical data. The geographical maps of that time, accordingly to Russian historian J. Kulakovskiy, «...were alien to any principles of a mathematical projection and could degrade into rough and arbitrary schematization of the Earth outlines»<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand, sailors have abandoned portolans only at the end of XVII century, when first more precise surveys of sea coast line began to appear. Today, apart from their scientific importance portolans have a significant commercial value. Unfortunately, often the opportunity to study these unique documents is lost forever due to adverse conditions of their storage or loss.

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<sup>1</sup> Петреску И. Г. Дельта Дуная. М., 1963, р. 46.

<sup>2</sup> И. Т. Черняков. Локализация Никония на средневековых картах. (К. Птолемея, 1477, Г. Меркатора, 1589, И. Хаазе, 1763). // Никоний и античный мир Северного Причерноморья. Одесса, 1997. р. 80-86, р. 81

<sup>3</sup> Кулаковский Ю. Карта Европейской Сарматии по Птолемею. Киев, 1899, с. 2.

An example is loss of three portolan maps listed in the archive of the Alupka State History Museum, USSR, before the World War II. Two of them were portolans of XVI- and one of XVII century. Although destiny of these portolans is unknown, they were verbally described in the article of P. A. Neznamov, 1930<sup>4</sup>. He has studied maps compiled by Jacob Russus in 1515, Bartolomeo De Oliva in 1574, and Francisco Monnus in 1632<sup>5</sup>. In his article P. A. Neznamov has considered primary sources of these portolans. In his opinion, the J. Russus's map is the earliest from the list of seven known maps by this author. Neznamov has assumed that this map was used as an example for the map compiled by Russus in 1520, which is kept now in the Florence State Archive, Italy<sup>6</sup>. In the same time, the Monnus's portolan could go back to his own map compiled in 1613 and kept in Rome.

The territory shown on these three portolans covers Mediterranean-, Black sea and sea of Azov regions at least in part. However, Neznamov describes only geographical names designated on the coasts of Black sea and Sea of Azov from Constantinobli to Trabisonda. The representation of this region in the medieval period is poorly studied by historical geography. Here, we shall describe only a small site of Danube mouth and adjacent territory.

Accordingly to the sources described by P. A. Neznamov, following names are designated in the Danube delta region: stranico, laspea, sorde, salenj, licostromj saljnj, *falconar*, moncastro on the map of Russus, 1515; stanirico, laspera, s:giorgia, solina (?), *liscostoma*, salina, salionara, inocapro on the map of Monnus, 1632<sup>7</sup>.

Let us comment on the data found in these portolans taking into account additional information from the other sources available to us: the Venetian map of Black sea, 1321; the maps of Black sea by Freduce from

<sup>4</sup> Незнамов П. А. Портоланы Алупкинского Государственного Историко-Бытового музея. Ялта, 1930.-9р.

<sup>5</sup> A map with a title «Ego Jacopus russus composui hanc cartam julla nobili civitate messana anno D-no 1515 die primo juli amen» depicts Medeteranian, Black sea and sea of Azov; a map with a title «Bartholome oliues malloquin nel castillo del Salvador en Messina A-no 1574» depicts western part of Mediteranian up to Eastern coast of Greece; a map with a title «Cartam Mediterraneam jam ab antiquis erroribus purgatam nune cum locorum gradibus veriisque ventorum viis manu propria descripta lo Francus Monus patefacit Janue Anno a Virginis partu XXXII supra milesimum sexcentesimo» depicts Perinea peninsula, northern coast of Africa, Mediterranean- Black sea and sea of Azov (author: Giovanni Francesco Monno di Monaco Liguria).

<sup>6</sup> As suggested by P. A. Neznamov, this portolan was used as a template for a map by Georgio Calapoda, 1552, which later was copied by Nordenschild for his «Peripl's»; and for a map by Voltius, 1593.

<sup>7</sup> P. A. Neznamov reproduces a list of toponyms from two portolans mentioned above, by Monnus and by Russus, while there is no data from the portolan of Oliva. In italic depicted names highlighted by Neznamov. Apparently, he has kept an author style.

Ancona, 1497; the Italian map of Black sea from XVI century (see Fig. 1, 2 and 3, correspondingly); lists of toponyms from the map of Piero Falchetta, attributed to the end of XIV century, and Atlante Catalano, 1375<sup>8</sup>.

The fragment of Venetian portolan (Fig. 1) shows only two names in the mouth of Danube: straniqui and sn georgy. The name straniqui is located opposite to an elongated sea gulf, which probably corresponds to modern lake Razelm. The name sn georgy is designated at the chanel next to this gulf. The area of the coast between these two channels is marked in dark color what, probably, indicates that it is not suitable for mooring. The reason for this could be river deposits or presence of vast marshlands in this area, which made approach to the coast dangerous.

On the portolan of Freduce following points are depicted in the direction from the south to the north: auichio, laspera, Sangiorgio, Solina, LICOSTOMO, island fidonixi, Saline, Falconare, MONCASTRO (Fig. 2).

The name Sangiorgio is designated on the left coast of the far southern mouth, which is symbolically depicted as a break in a coastal line. To the south from Sangiorgio there are laspera, then auichio; the name Solina is located on the next to the north river branch from Sangiorgio. This branch is depicted by the same break in the coastline and opens into a protruded gulf.

There is an oval dark spot in this gulf, which probably indicates river deposits. It is not clear for the moment, if it was an underwater deposits or a sandy spits. The island fedoxini is depicted on a small distance from the coast in the northeast direction from the point Solina. The main riverbed of Danube is shown as a stream running into a gulf. This gulf protrudes deeply inland but narrows in the middle. The name LICOSTOMO is located on the right bank of the stream, while Saline, and then, Falconare on the left one. The name MONCASTRO is depicted on the right bank of the stream corresponding to the modern river Dnestr. As one can see, this portolan reflects only three mouths of Danube.

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<sup>8</sup> Фадеева Т.М., Шапошников А.К. Княжество Феодоро и его князья. Симферополь: Бизнес-Информ, 2005, с. 68. Венецианская карта Черного моря 1321 г. (The names of the points are missing from a Venetian portolan of 1321 because of small size of available fragment). Fragment de la carte marine de Freduce d'Ancone tiree de la bibliotheque de Wolfenbutel (1497). The map of Black sea MARE PONTICUM SIVE PONTUS EVXINVS. The map has been attributed to XVI century, Genoa, (currently the map is on display in The Odessa Museum of Regional History). A list of toponyms from the map by Piero Falchetta, end of XIV century, and Atlante Catalano, 1375 has been adopted from the version published in internet on site: <http://geoweb.venezia.sbn.it/geoweb/HSL/10057/10057toponimi.html>; abbreviation AC stays for Atlante Catalano. Correlation of the toponyms from this list with toponyms of Falchetta is done by the author of the web site (see below).

On the Genoa portolan we can find names stranicho, laspera, sanzorzi, solina, *licostoma*, island fidinissi, *chiela*, saline, falconaire, *mocastro* (Fig. 3).

The name *stranicho* does not protrude out of a southern border of the delta of Danube. At the same time, the stream next to it runs into a gulf.

A similar picture is reflected by Venetian portolan, 1321. In our opinion, that confirms the identification of the gulf as lake Razelm. Next, second to the north stream is designated as laspera, third – sanzori, fourth – solina. The stream solina runs into a deep gulf, where an oval spot is marked in the similar way as done by Freduce. The island fidinissi is depicted just opposite to this mouth, while Freduce positions it slightly more to the north, closer to LICOSTOMO. The name *licostoma* on this map is depicted in red, as well as *chiela*; they both are located on the opposite coasts of elongated gulf, which narrows in its middle part. The fifth, most northern stream runs into this gulf, as was also depicted by Freduce. The name *chiela* is written directly over the line representing this stream. Saline is depicted a little bit further on the left bank of this stream, then falconare - approximately in the middle of the coast line between this sleeve and a gulf representing modern Dnestr estuary (similar to Freduce's map). The point *mocastro* is depicted in red on the right bank of the latter. As one can see, this portolan contains five branches of Danube. The branches are shown in following order. The main riverbed is represented by the far northern branch (*licostoma*). The line reflecting this branch is slightly brighter than others. Another stream branches off it to the south and later splits into two parts. The southern stream then splits on stranicho (the first stream from the south, also see above) and laspera (the second); the northern part splits on sanzorzi (the third) and solina (the fourth).

Falchetta presents following toponyms: straujcho (AC: strauicho), laspera (AC: laspera), sanzorzo (AC: san zorzo), solina (AC: selina), lichostoma (AC: lichostoma), II fedonissi<sup>9</sup>, farconayre (AC: farconayre), *mau[r]o cast[r]o* (AC: mauro castro).

In order to make analysis more convenient, we have placed information from the portolans we have mentioned above in the table following chronological order (Table 1.). We tried to keep an authentic script.

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<sup>9</sup> II – this sign have been used for small islands and internal names in the list (here the Snake island).

Table 1. Comparison of the names from different portolan maps

Venice, 1321	Piero Falchetta, end of XIV century	Freduce, 1497	Russus, 1515	Genoa, XVI century (?)	Monnus, 1632
straniqui	straujcho (AC: strauicho)	Auichio	stranico	stranicho	stanirico
	laspera (AC: laspera)	Laspera	laspea	laspera	laspera
sn georgy	sanzorzo (AC: san zorzo)	Sangiorgi	sorde	sanzorzi	s:giorgia
	solina (AC: selina)	Solina	salenj	solina	solina
	lichostoma (AC: lichostoma)	LICOSTOMO	<i>licostro mj</i>	<i>licostoma</i>	<i>liscostoma</i>
	II fedonissi	Fidonixi		fidinissi	
				<i>chiela</i>	
		Saline	saljnj	saline	salina
	farconayre (AC: farconayre)	Falconare	falconar	falconaire	salionara
	<i>mau[r]o cast[r]o</i> (AC: mauro castro)	MONCASTR O	moncastr o	<i>mocastro</i>	Inocapro

As follows from the Table 1., most names depicted on discussed portolans are in a good agreement. Exceptions are fedonissi (fidonixi, fidinissi), and *chiela*. However, it is necessary to mention that fedonissi is the Snake (Serpents') island and Neznamov may not consider it as a part of the coastal line. The point *chiela* seems to be an exception, and will be discussed below.

It is difficult to tell, why there is no name Saline before farconayre in the list of names from Falchetta's map. Perhaps, it did not exist yet by the time of the map compilation, but have appeared on the border of XIV and XV centuries.

Let us try to determine now modern counterparts of the points depicted on discussed portolans.

Stranicho. Our attention was captured by the fact that the name proslaniza is designated below stranicho on the Genoa portolan, while it is absent from the list in other sources we describe here. The Genoa portolan

depicts proslaniza below the most southern Danube branch, which runs into a long sea gulf. In our opinion, the name proslaniza resembles the name of the modern settlement Prislava (Preslavets), which is located between Tulcha and Machmudia on the southern branch of the Danube Sfântu Gheorghe. It is remarkable that stream Dunaetz gets separated from Sfântu Gheorghe branch down-stream of Prislava and runs into lake Razelm. Accordingly to the data of palaeogeographical reconstructions of the Danube delta<sup>10</sup>, this territory once was an extensive sea gulf where river-sea ridges were gradually formed. Thus, the delta was "put forward" towards the east and this process continues till now. The lake Razelm was more open to the sea than it is now. Therefore, we can consider that at the time when the Genoa portolan was put together there was two more channels between proslaniza and sanzorzi: stranicho and laspera. At present time, probably, they are covered by alluvial (river) deposits of the Danube delta. It is possible that Dunaetz is represented on the Genoa portolan as one of the two first from the south streams.

The name laspera (*ital. "severe"*), probably, was connected with difficult for navigation conditions. We assume, that such difficulties could be caused by formation of the river-sea ridges of island Dranov.

The point Sanzorzi should be correlated with a modern Sfântu Gheorghe branch of the Danube delta and a town Sfântu-Gheorghe, Tulcea, on the left coast of the Sfântu Gheorghe mouth in Romania.

Solina (salenj), which follows Sanzorzi is Sulina branch and modern town Sulina on the right bank of the Sulina branch.

The name liscostomo (*ital. «mouth of the wolf»*), apparently corresponds to the modern town Vilkovo (Vylkove, Vâlcov) in Ukraine. It is located in the place where Chilia branch divides on Belgorod, Ochakov and Starostabmbulskiy channels. The inhabitants of the modern Vilkovo consider that this division, or "vilka", "razvilka" (*rus. "fork" or "plug", "crotch"*), gave the name to the settlement. Accordingly to the study of the name origins of the Ukrainian settlements performed by A. P. Koval, town Vilkovo was named by Don- and Zaporozhian Cossacks, who came to this area in 1746-1775<sup>11</sup>. A first name of the settlement was Lipovanskoe. It was founded by Russian Orthodox Old Believers persecuted by official Russian Orthodox Church in 1708. They named themselves "lipovans". In our opinion, this word sounds similar to the name licostomo, and we assume that the name "Vilkovo" has evolved from "Volkovo" (*rus. "... of the wolf"*). From this point of view, name Vilkovo has much older etymological origin. Indeed,

<sup>10</sup> See Петреску И. Г... p. 59.

<sup>11</sup> Коваль А. П. Знайомі незнайомці. Походження назв поселень України. – К.: Либідь, 2001. – p. 32.

forming river spits could give this mouth the look similar to the mouth of wolf. A gulf deeply protruding inland and narrowing in the middle (also, see above), depicted on the Genoa map and on the portolan of Freduce, really resembles open jaws with canines (spits).

The point Chiela depicted on Genoa portolan, which is attributed to the end of XVI century, undoubtedly, corresponds to Chilia Veke (Old Chilia) on the right bank of the Chilia branch. Because Chilia is not shown on the map of Russus, 1515, but is present on Genoa map attributed to the end of XVI century, we assume that it has appeared approximately in the middle of XVI century.

Saline is depicted on the portolan of Freduce located on the left coast of the far northern sleeve of Danube. Accordingly to the paleogeographical reconstruction of I. G. Petresku, mouth of the far northern channel apparently corresponds to a modern Zhebrijanskiy bay. Therefore the point Saline, in our opinion, was located in vicinity of a modern settlement Primorskoe located on the territory of the Ukrainian Danube Biosphere Reserve.

The name Falconare is located in the country between rivers Danube and Dnestr. Here we propose two versions for interpretation of this name. In our opinion, the most probable explanation is direct interpretation of the name Falconare as a "falcon" [place]. This interpretation is supported by unique, rich ornithology of the Danube delta region. The second version, which cannot be excluded, is location of Falconare in a place resembling a "horn" or a "turn" and existence a lighthouse at that place - far conayre (by Falchetta). In the past, such a place could be a section of the sea coast between lakes Sasyk and Shagany. We believe that the lake Shagany was a more convenient bay for mooring than the lake Sasyk.

The point MONCASTRO does not require identification. It is modern Belgorod-Dnestrovskiy (Akkerman) in Ukraine. It is located on the right coast of river Dnestr, in the mouth of Dnestr estuary.

We have shown here that close comparison of the data reflected in portolans allows us to widen our knowledge of medieval Danube mouth and adjoining territories. Our attempt to identify ancient names with modern reality gave us opportunity to assume an origin of some toponyms in Danube mouth.

The analysis we have performed sheds some light on the problem of studying of other types of medieval cartographical sources, such as medieval geographical maps, and allows us to find a way for their meaningful interpretation.

As an example is map of G. Merkator, 1589, mentioned above, and its precursor issued in 1554. The coast line depicted on this map as well as reflection of some toponyms seems rather strange to us. Apart from well-

known property of medieval maps to combine existing and obsolete elements from the past, we would like to highlight one more source of inconsistency. This is a multiple depiction of the same point without checking its real location, when the name of the point has varied with time. For example, the point MONCASTRO on the Merkator's map is wrongly located in the middle of the sea coast between Dnestr and Danube. In the same time, in the area symbolically designating Dnestr estuary corresponding to MONCASTRO points Bialgrod and Ophiusa are depicted. Because maps of Merkator served as an example for other cartographers, similar mistakes were replicated for a long time, up to XVIII century. So, in the map of Z. I. Haaze issued in Nuremberg in 1763, and also analyzed by I. T. Chernjakov, MONCASTRO and Falconara are designated as the same point, what is, in our opinion, an absolute nonsense. Therefore, we agree with opinion of I. T. Chernjakov that «only ... portolans ... of Venice and Genoa of XIII-XVI centuries» could be a reliable source for «really new cartographical data about ... area ... between Dnestr and Danube».

### Odessa

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### Anexe foto



Fig. 1. A fragment of the Venetian map of Black Sea, 1321.  
1 – Straniqui ; 2 – Sn Georgy



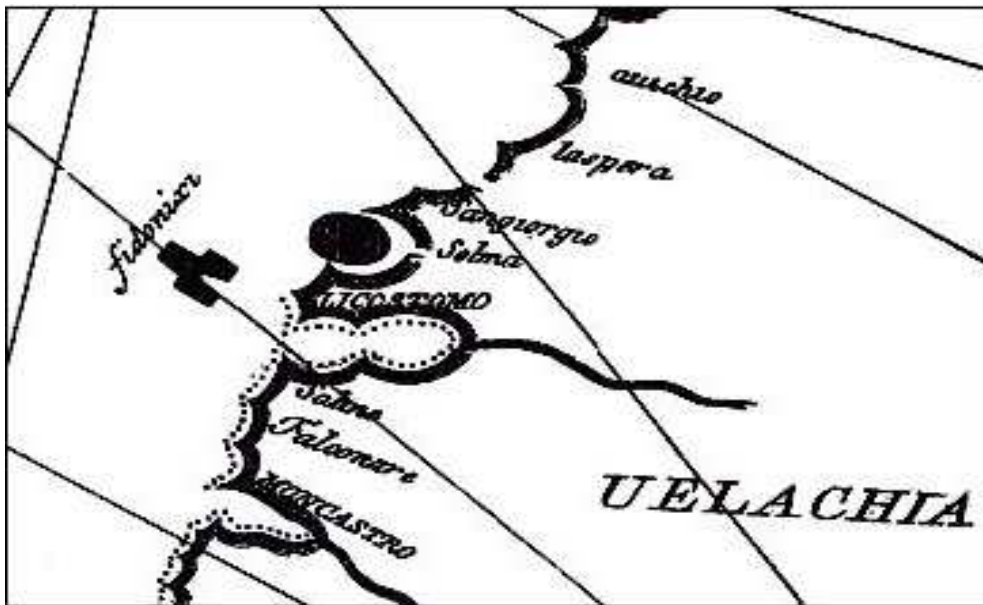


Fig. 2. A fragment of a Black sea map by Freduce from Ancona, 1497.



Fig. 3. A fragment of the map of Black sea MARE PONTICUM SIVE PONTUS EVXINVS. Genoa, XVI century.