

A LITTLE KNOWN FRENCH BIOGRAPHY OF YURAS' KHMELNYTSKY

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There is a rare book by François de la Croix (1653-1713), entitled: *Mémoires du Sieur de la Croix, cyderant le secrétaire d'ambassade de Constantinople, contenant diverses relations très curieuses de l'Empire Ottoman*, Paris, Claude Barleïn, 1684, 2 vol., 8°. These *Mémoires* had attracted much attention at one time, but by the nineteenth century this interest had subsided. Some doubted la Croix's authorship and ascribed the book to the Marquis de Nointel (1634-1686), the clever, intellectual French Ambassador to Constantinople from 1667, who was very familiar with contemporary Ukrainian affairs.¹ However, this cannot actually be proven. La Croix, for many years the secretary of Marquis de Nointel and an expert in Turkish and, particularly, Turkish-Cossack affairs, was the real author of these *Mémoires*. It is a known fact that, during the negotiations with the Poles at Zhuravno (1676), he was in the Turkish Headquarters. Upon his return to France, he used both the official documents of the Marquis de Nointel and his own material to write this interesting book. Four copies of the manuscript are preserved in the National Library of Paris² and one copy in the Prussian National Library in Berlin.

The chapter which is of particular interest to us is entitled: "Khmelnysky, Prince of the Cossacks."³ It is interesting because, except for some insignificant changes, this same chapter is filed in the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Evidently la Croix first wrote his report on Yuras' Khmelnysky either for Ambassador Nointel or for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and then he used it for his own book. In all probability, la Croix based his information on primary sources, or, perhaps, on his participation in the

¹ For example, Count de la Borde in his book *Athenes aux XV, XVI et XVII siècles*, Paris 1854, Vol. I, p. 169.

² N.A.F. 10839; Fr. 6101-6102; N.A.F. 17-24.

³ Chmielnitski, Prince des Cosaques.

name of Nointel in the confidential negotiations of the Ottoman Court. To the surprise of all, these negotiations brought the son of Bohdan Khmelnytsky back on the political scene.

"After the death of Bohdan Khmelnytsky,* Prince of the Cossacks, who was killed in a battle with the Poles, George, his son, was elevated to his place by the people. He governed them so poorly that, fearing he would become the victim of the Poles⁴ as had his father, he took the cloth and assuming the name of Gidesi retired to the wilderness, accompanied by some Poles. En route, the Tartars attacked the Poles who saved themselves by abandoning their prisoner. The attackers took Khmelnytsky, flogged him, and then made a present of him to the Tartar Khan, who, judging from his physiognomy and his manners that he was not an ordinary man, made every effort to convert him to Mohammedanism. The solicitude and offers of the Prince availed nought and Gidesi continued firm until he was recognized by a slave of the Khan, a renegade Cossack, who had been a household servant during George's infancy. This man⁵ had no difficulty in recognizing him as the son of his old master despite his pseudonym and disguise, and even though he had spent several years in the land of the Tartars, where, at the cost of his religion and by his savoir faire, he had made a considerable fortune and gained the good will of the Prince. For this reason, George did not recognize his old servant. Nicolo or Hali, which was the Turkish name of the renegade Cossack, believed it would bring a special pleasure to his Prince to discover the birth and quality of his new slave, or, rather, Hali feared that the affection which the Khan had begun to show Gidesi would diminish the affection which, until then, the Khan had shown him. Therefore he told the Khan that the slave was called George and that he was the son of Bohdan Khmelnytsky. The latter's name was well-known in the land of the Tartars because of the enmity between the two nations.

"The Khan, who would have preferred this news to have been false in order to make use of Gidesi, had him summoned and, without informing him of the secret which Hali⁶ had told him, said that he was a spy disguised as a priest and that he was thus disguised in order to discover more easily what was taking place and that if he did not confess the truth then they

* In the original French text "Chmilinski," as it was spelled in the French of that time.

⁴ The emphasis put on the Polish role in the destiny of Khmelnytsky and his son is very interesting.

⁵ In the French of the XVII-XVIII century the expression "*renégat*" did not have the present-day derogatory meaning. It meant a Christian who had accepted Mohammedanism.

⁶ The Tartar name of the renegade Cossack who recognized Khmelnytsky.

would force him to confess with the whip. This was the treatment reserved for the *raias* (a name given to subjects of the Turkish empire who are not Mohammedans), and it seemed so cruel to the General, who was not used to such actions, that he could not resist this threat and frankly confessed his true status.

"The Khan, fearing that news of this capture would reach the Porte and cause him trouble, decided to send him to Constantinople. This he did immediately.

"Gidesi or George Khmelnytsky became a State prisoner and on his arrival in Constantinople was taken to the Seven Towers. He passed several years here in the most rigorous austerity and, soon, bored by the loneliness of a monk of the Eastern Church, he attempted to take advantage of the presence of some warships of the Most Christian King which had carried the Seigneur de Nointel, His Ambassador. These vessels, while waiting for the embarkment of his predecessor, had dropped anchor near the Seven Towers in order to help the flight of a number of miserable slaves who were continually coming aboard. Among them was the Chevalier de Beaujeu,⁷ who had been a prisoner in the chateau with Khmelnytsky. The escape of the Chevalier had been more fortunate than that of the Cossack, because he had been assisted by several long-boats of the vessels, which had waited for him at the foot of the wall.

"Since necessity creates industriousness, Gidesi saw no other means of deliverance except in flight. He learned through common knowledge that those vessels, which he had spied from his prison, were open and sure asylums for all because the Turks did not dare to board those vessels as they did several others. But he could not find anything to pierce the wall and he realized, at the same time, the need of an instrument to carry out his project.

"He had been held a prisoner so long that he was not guarded so strictly and was allowed to walk during the day in a small court at the foot of the tower in which he slept at night. A high wall, built on the rocks and circling the fortress, separated it and protected it from the ravages of the sea. As he was thinking of a means of carrying out his project, by chance he discovered a piece of iron behind a clump of wood. This was carelessly left by the masons who had lately been repairing the wall. He feigned sleep and, when no one was looking, he grasped the piece of iron and hid it in his straw bed. With this he raised two iron bars which held the grill of the cell window in place.

"When he made this opening, he did not have any cords to lower himself and there was no one to send him some as was done with the Cheva-

⁷ Is this Beaujeu not the same man whose real name was D'Aclerac, a French agent in Poland in the reign of King Sobieski, who devoted a whole chapter in his memoirs to the Ukraine? *Mémoires du Chevalier de Beaujeu contenant les voyages en Pologne, en Allemagne, en Hongrie* (1679-1683), Paris, Claude Barbin, 1698, in 12°, p. 479. Published in Amsterdam, 1700, 1722.

lier de Beaujeu, so he cut his straw bed into strips. He made them into a type of rope and attached it to one of the bars which was placed across the window opening. He was lowering himself when the rope proved too short and he fell so violently that the noise of the fall awoke a Bostangi, whose bed-chamber opened on this court. Thus, his flight was discovered by the gardener, but the prisoner scaled the wall and fell from the top of it onto the rocks, hurting his head. The shock of the blow, the fear, the darkness and the noise, which he heard on the other side, did not permit him to find a route of escape and he hid in the sea between two rocks.

"The gardener informed the castellan of the flight. The latter opened a small door which led to the sea, placed guards to cut off the crossing and detached others, who sought all night for him in vain with lanterns. They found him only at daybreak, half dead from his wound, his hands lacerated, battered by the waves and frozen by cold.

"They brought him in this state to the chateau where the governor beat him several times, after which he ordered him to be placed in another cell and chained hands and feet. Here he lived from the end of 1670 until 1677, at which time he was taken out by order of Kara Mustapha, Pasha, Grand Vizier, to replace Doroshenko.

"What a caprice of fortune! George, General of the Cossacks, had left his honors, his property and his country to lead the private and quiet life of a monk and had only found a disastrous slavery, iron and chains. He had endured this for ten years until this same fortune, tired of seeing him suffer, elevated him suddenly from the filth to the purple and, when he had least expected it, re-established him in the same office, which he had fled with so much trouble.

"In effect, Khmelnytsky confessed to the Patriarch that he expected death—which he had often hoped for—and that he believed that they had removed his chains by the Grand Vizier's order to take him to the rack. It was for this reason that he had received the news of his elevation and the honors bestowed upon him by the Porte with indifference. He even had some qualms at the decision to renounce his monk's habit and his lowly state, which he had grown accustomed to through the years, for (the office of) Prince, in which he foresaw new troubles. It was necessary, nevertheless, to accede to the urgings of the Patriarch and the interpreter, who told him that he could not disobey the orders of the Grand Seigneur without exposing the Greek Church to some insult.

"He was forced to put on secular clothes, which Mauro Cordato had procured, and they took him to the Kihaja⁸ of the Grand Vizier, who received him in a very agreeable fashion. He wanted to know of the events of his life and he told him that Heaven had taken care to preserve him and had destined him for something great, since, after having experienced

⁸ An executive secretary.

so many dangers, he was raised a second time and against his will to the office which he had abandoned. Henceforward, he must by his services and his faithfulness be prepared to recognize the goodness of the Porte and he must make every effort to lead an ungrateful people back to obedience.

"This discourse was accompanied by the gift of an accoutered horse, on which he returned to the lodgings which they had arranged for him. They added one hundred gold sequins for his expenses and a note of five ecus a day for his subsistence. After resting several days — which time was used to set up his outfit — he was presented to the Grand Vizier. The latter exhorted him to be faithful to the Porte and gave him a gold brocaded caftan lined with sable, four vests, two of satin and two of cloth, an accoutered horse and two hundred sequins. This minister augmented his daily pay by half and ordered a seal cut for him, which contained his name and his title: Hetman of the Cossacks. Thus, Khmelnytsky, who two days before had been chained, reduced to a morsel of bread, abandoned by the entire world, and had slept on a straw bed in a very dark cell without any hope of leaving, now, after this audience, lived in a beautiful palace, was honored, visited, and regaled by the Turks and all the leading Greeks, who during his disgrace had turned a deaf ear to his complaints and his entreaties. This made him reflect on the inconstancy of fortune and it bolstered his resolution to abandon his title only with his life.

"Khmelnytsky wrote a letter to the Cossacks in which he declared that he was prepared to go to the Ukraine. This letter or rather the manifesto of it — the original text is not extant — was signed and sealed by Khmelnytsky and sent throughout the Ukraine. The Ukrainian population received these letters with scorn. They said that the letter was a forgery, that the real General of this name had taken the monk's habit and had been killed in the land of the Tartars, or had been enslaved, and that this was a trap that the Porte had spread for them. . . ."

We shall interrupt la Croix's biography of Yuras' Khmelnytsky here to point out details which la Croix might have learned only from Khmelnytsky himself. It is entirely possible that Nointel's secretary, under orders from his superior, participated in the negotiations of the Porte and the Greek Patriarch, which brought Yuras' Khmelnytsky once more on the Ukrainian political scene. This is apparent from Yuras' Khmelnytsky's letter of August 17, 1677 sent to the French King Louis XIV from Constantinople.⁹ Here is the letter:

⁹ The archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Turquie, Cor. Pol., 1677. An unknown person wrote this letter in French, but it bears the personal signature of Yuras' Khmelnytsky.

"Your Majesty,

I am honored to inform Your Majesty through Your Ambassador¹⁰ of the munificent reception arranged for me in this capitol and of the extraordinary honors shown me. Your Majesty will see from the treaty, which I handed to Your Ambassador at this court, how the Ottoman Porte has treated me and the Cossack Nation. I do not doubt that Your Majesty, conscious of the services which the Cossacks have rendered to Christianity, will rejoice in the happy events of my life. Your Majesty, the opportunity to gain the honor of your respect, regardless of the state of my affairs, will give me great satisfaction. Knowing Your magnanimity and good nature, Your Majesty, I expect such a kindness. With deep respect toward Your Majesty, I remain:

Georgius Gedeon Vitius Chmilinski, Prince de la Petite Ruthenie de L'Ukraine et General des Cosaques Zaporozziens. Constantinople, 7/17 aout 1677.¹¹

The treaty¹² mentioned in Yuras' Khmelnytsky's letter to Louis XIV is actually preserved in its Latin copy in the archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The English translation is as follows:

"The copy of the authentic treaty between the Emperor Sultan of the Ottoman Porte and His Majesty, Prince Gedeon Khmelnytsky, Hetman of the Cossacks and Prince of the Ukraine. We, Gedeon Khmelnytsky, Prince of the Ukraine, (Ucrainae Princeps), Hetman of the Zaporozhians, announce the following to everyone: After the series of calamities and miseries which we have experienced, we have liberated ourselves from the authority and domination of the Great Prince of Moscow and the Polish King and have renewed our full liberty (*libertati nostro plenarie restituti*). Following the example of Prince Bohdan Khmelnytsky, Hetman of the Zaporozhians and Our Father, we accepted the protection of the Sultan (here a lengthy title of the Sultan is given, E.B.). This protection was given to the Ukraine and her people in recognition of their immemorial rights and their freedom from the infamous oppression of the Moscow Tsar. Thus, the ancient inalienability of the Ukraine, which was renewed by the Lord's help, and her liberty, which had been usurped by the Moscow Tsar, are now accomplished facts. The entire population of the Ukraine will prosper under the High Protection of the Sultan. He will also protect the religion of our ancestors."

¹⁰ Nointel.

¹¹ The orthography of the time.

¹² This is a short resume of the treaty and its first printing.

Khmelnysky sent this letter and the text of the treaty to King Louis XIV through Nointel, who was probably the spiritual author of the investiture of the new prince of the Ukraine. This, of course, cannot be substantiated by documents, but on the basis of existing data one can at least prove Nointel's deep interest, or, more generally, France's interest in Ukrainian policy between the years 1677-1679. Therefore, many details about Yuras' Khmelnytsky in la Croix's *Mémoires* become clear to us. The *Mémoires* continue:

"On August 8, 1677 Khmelnytsky left Constantinople with great pomp, accompanied by a large retinue of Janizaries, Greeks and the envoys of the Sultan, all to the sound of drums. He passed through Wallachia and Moldavia, where the princes paid him great honors as a Prince and gave him gifts. When he reached the borders of the Ukraine, he wrote a circular letter to the Cossacks to inform them of his restoration. . . . He signed this letter with his own hand and stamped it with his own seal, which contained his name and title: Georgius Gedeon Vitius Khmelnytsky, Prince of Little Ruthenia, of the Ukraine, and General of the Zaporozhian Cossacks.¹³ At first the Cossacks found it difficult to accept this letter,¹⁴ for everyone in the Ukraine considered Khmelnytsky dead; nevertheless, they believed it and flocked to their old Hetman. They numbered 18,000 and on October 30, in the presence of Ibrahim Pasha,¹⁵ Prince Khmelnytsky reviewed his army. The Turks admired the Cossacks very much and showed new signs of the bounty of the Porte, which, as is the mode of all men, heaped flattery on those who were necessary to it."

Here la Croix's biography of Yuras' Khmelnytsky ends, but the final stage of Khmelnytsky's activity is known through the Warsaw correspondent of the *Gazette de France*, who on September 5, 1681 reported the following: "We received word from Constantinople that the Sultan has confirmed the Moldavian master¹⁶ and given him sway over the Ukraine, which had belonged to Yuras' Khmelnytsky. The latter was imprisoned in the Castle of the Seven Towers some time ago."

¹³ M. Kostomarov (XV, 291), using the Moscow Archives, describes Khmelnytsky's seal as follows: A rider with a mace in his hand; the horse's head is decorated with a feather and over it there is an apple with a cross and near the rider a man armed with a musket. On the seal there is an inscription: The Seal of the Little Russian Principedom.

¹⁴ See above.

¹⁵ A Commander-in-Chief of the Turkish Army who accompanied Yuras' Khmelnytsky.

¹⁶ Duka.

To conclude this article it is worthwhile to relate the diplomatic incident which occurred in Constantinople and which concerns both Yuras' Khmelnytsky and the French Ambassador, Marquis de Nointel. The latter describes the incident in a report to his government. "On July 6, 1678 the Polish resident at Constantinople, Hninski, visited the French Ambassador and complained of Yuras' Khmelnytsky's terrible pride; he, so to speak, not only rejects the authority of the Polish King in regard to the Ukrainian territory, which is due Poland by the Treaty of Zhuravno,¹⁷ but also corresponds with the King as his equal and calls him 'friend.'

Hninski presented a copy of Khmelnytsky's letter to King Sobieski as a proof of this statement. It seems that this letter, written in Latin and mailed from Bendery, has been published. However, to understand the complaint of the Polish Ambassador more precisely, it is worthwhile to reproduce Khmelnytsky's letter:

(After the title, E.B.) "We greet Your Most Serene Royal Majesty and wish You a long reign in Poland and the extension of Your Happy Kingdom. Simultaneously, by the will and order of the Serene and Unconquerable Turkish Emperor, Our Master and Lord of the Most Serene Porte, and through Sir Hubar, Colonel of Bratslav, we acquaint Your Royal Majesty with Our Friendship and ask Your Royal Majesty to carry out the points of the Treaty of Zhuravno, which had been concluded between the Turkish Emperor and Your Royal Majesty. We demand from Your Royal Majesty peace without future bloodshed, i.e., the removal of Your garrisons from Kalnyk and Nemyriv, abandoning of all Your military equipment, evacuation of all fortresses and villages which belong to us and in general removal of all the armies of Your Majesty from the Ukrainian territory, which belongs to us (except Povolocha and Bila Tserkva), as well as the withdrawal of all bailiffs and commanders. As is well known by Your Majesty, all of these demands had been accepted by Sir Kulmenski, voyevoda of the province (Hninski, E.B.). Thus, we only ask that these obligations be carried out.

"We remain the devoted friend of Your Majesty, Yury Gedeon Vitius Khmelnytsky, Prince of Little Rus' and Ukraine and Hetman of the Zaporozhians."

¹⁷ Zhuravno is a Galician town on the bank of the Dniester. Here, one deals with the Turkish-Polish Agreement concluded at Zhuravno on August 1-16, 1676. According to this the regions of Kiev, Bila Tserkva, Pavoloch and other parts of the Right Bank Ukraine remained a "Polish" Cossack possession; the region of Chyhyryn and Zaporizhzhya was transferred to Turkish control. Kamennets-Podil's'ky simply became a Turkish fortress.

What was the French Ambassador's answer to the Polish Ambassador's demarche? We find it in the report of the Marquis de Nointel to his government:

"I said to Sir Hninski that Khmelnytsky really has the title of Prince of the Ukraine and is an ally of the Porte. Therefore, he has the same right as the masters of Moldavia and Voloshchina to address the Polish King as "friend"; I also remarked that Khmelnytsky had written me, as the representative of the Very Christian King, a letter with a signature of "friend" in the same way as the Great Vizier writes to the King of France and Navarra."

In his answer, Nointel merely interpreted contemporary international law. In the works of Vicfort,¹⁸ an authority in the field of international law at that time, we read the following: "The sovereign signs his letters to another sovereign as friend (*ami*). The sovereign, who is under someone else's protection, can sign 'friend' in letters addressed to other sovereigns but not to his superior."

¹⁸ *L'Ambassadeur et ses Fonctions*, La Haye, 1680, livre II, part IV, paragraph 3.