

DOMINIK ERDMANN  
Humboldt-Universität, Berlin

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6556-4673>

DOI: 10.26106/W1JP-MN38

MONIKA JAGLARZ  
Jagiellonian University in Kraków

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6436-9163>

A PRESENT FROM BELOW THE EQUATOR.  
A SNIPPET FROM THE MANUSCRIPT  
OF ALEXANDER VON HUMBOLDT'S  
JOURNAL FROM HIS TRIP TO AMERICA.  
FROM THE COLLECTION OF RADOWITZ

Prussian Lieutenant General Joseph Maria von Radowitz (1795–1853) bequeathed one of the most important and extensive 19<sup>th</sup> century collections of autographs. Among nearly 13 thousand of items, there are manuscripts of ca. 5500 people who represent all areas of science and culture in the span of four centuries.<sup>1</sup> The Radowitz Collection – part of the autograph collection from the former Prussian State Library in Berlin<sup>2</sup> – contains a significant group of manuscripts related to Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859).<sup>3</sup> This is where a largely unknown fragment of a hand-

---

<sup>1</sup> H. D ö h n, *Die Sammlung Autographa der ehemaligen Preussischen Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin. Autographenkatalog* (CD-ROM), Berlin 2005, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> On the transfer of the Radowitz Collection to the then Royal Library in Berlin in 1864 see Ch. W. H ü b n e r - T r a m s, *Verzeichniss der von dem verstorbenen Preussischen General-Lieutenant J. von Radowitz hinterlassenen Autographen-Sammlung*, Berlin 1864, vol. 1–3.

<sup>3</sup> On the history of collections from the former Prussian State Library in Berlin held in Jagiellonian Library in Kraków (so-called „Berlinka”) see i.a. Z. P i e t r z y k, *Zbiory z bylej Pruskiej Biblioteki Państwowej w Bibliotece Jagiellońskiej*, “Alma Mater” 100, 2008, pp. 15–19, [online] <http://www2.almamater.uj.edu.pl/100/03.pdf> [accessed on: February 22, 2017].

written travel diary<sup>4</sup> of a scientific expedition Humboldt made together with Aimé Bonpland to the American tropics in 1799–1804 is to be found.

A long time after his return from this expedition, Humboldt seems to have cut out this fragment from the travel diary and supplemented it with lengthy explanations on the margins. It is not clear how this manuscript ended up in the Radowitz Collection. Most likely, it was a gift from Humboldt himself since the preserved correspondence implies Radowitz used to receive numerous valuable autographs from Humboldt, i.a. letters directed to him from such eminent figures as François Arago, Jean Baptiste Boussingault, Michael Faraday, François-René de Chateaubriand, Carl Friedrich Gauß, William Herschel, and many others. One finds a letter from Heinrich Heine there, too, which Humboldt calls a *curiosum*.<sup>5</sup>

General Radowitz was a type of a private autograph collector that only appeared in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Owing to his efforts and the efforts of the like individuals, it is the case today that libraries and literary archives possess many items that give evidence of that time. Obviously such collectors followed their own passions. Radowitz was among the very first to venture a theoretical reflection on his connoisseurship. In a book<sup>6</sup> of 1852, he revealed that in expanding his collection he was driven by the form of the handwriting rather than the content of the items. He believed the form of the handwriting allowed one to infer the author's character.

The Radowitz collection was divided into sections (one of them being devoted to scientists), but it was not preserved in this manner eventually. In line with the 19<sup>th</sup> century archive practice, it was divided and included in a general Autograph Collection of the Royal Library in Berlin. During WWII, the collection along with other valuable possessions of the Library, renamed Prussian State Library, was evacuated from Berlin to Silesia. The evacuation included two other collections containing numerous Humboldt manuscripts, e.i. the extensive Karol August Varnhagen Collection and the so-called Alexander von Humboldt Legacy, which contains manuscripts of finished works and materials for them and which is the second biggest collection of Humboldt's records after the *Cosmos collectanea* kept in the State Library in Berlin. Recently, the Humboldt Legacy has been cataloged, digitalized, and made avail-

---

<sup>4</sup> The first one to draw attention to this snippet in the Jagiellonian Library was Margot Faak in her notes to the edition of excerpts from the American expedition travelogues. See M. Faak, *Alexander von Humboldt – Reise auf dem Rio Magdalena, durch die Anden und Mexiko*, teil II: *Übersetzung, Anmerkung und Register*, Berlin 2003, p. 312. Besides, Ulrike Leitner points to this snippet in U. Leitner, *Alexander von Humboldt. Estancia en España y viaje americano*, eds. M. Cuesta Domingo, S. Rebok, Madrid 2008, pp. 163–176.

<sup>5</sup> Kraków, Jagiellonian Library (BJ), two letters of A. von Humboldt to J. M. von Radowitz (one of 30.01.1850 and the other undated) from the Autograph Collection of the former Prussian State Library in Berlin, Humboldt Alexander von (accession numbers: Radowitz 6270 and 6273).

<sup>6</sup> J. M. Radowitz, *Die Autographen-Sammlungen*, Berlin 1852.

able online owing to a mutual project of the State Library in Berlin and the Jagiellonian Library.<sup>7</sup> The Varnhagen Collection, even more culturally significant as it is, awaits a detailed catalog now. The travel diary snippet that is being discussed here lets us infer the kind of precious discoveries to be made in the Autograph Collection.

The item is a manuscript *Sobre algunos puntos interesantes para la Navegacion, o extracto de las observaciones de longitud deducida de Eclipses del Sol y de la Luna de Satellites de Jupiter, distancias lunares y Chronometros en los annos de 1799–1803* written in Spanish.<sup>8</sup> Originally it was a part of an exceptionally neat manuscript (presumably prepared for publication) in a notebook where Humboldt wrote his South and Central America expedition travelogue. It was only towards the end of his life that he ordered the individual notebooks in which he used to write his observations during the travel, to be bound. They were acquired in this form by Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz Foundation in 2013 and were subsequently examined, digitalized and made available online for the public.<sup>9</sup> Since Humboldt paginated his diaries, we can accurately tell where the snippet comes from. It contains the pages 71–84 of the Fascicle VIII, which bears the title *Voyage de Lima à Guayaquil*.<sup>10</sup> The content pertains to a presentation and discussion of diverse systems of determining geographical co-ordinates, chiefly longitude, of several central points in South and Central America and in the Greater Antilles.

At the beginning, Humboldt described older textual and cartographic sources that dealt with determining longitude of particular points – typical for the way the location of places in the New World was ascertained – and afterwards he made a critical comparison among them. At the same time he obviously discussed his own methods of determining longitude and gave advice on the instruments he utilized in his observations. The manuscript mentions two such instruments. One is “Chronometro n. 27 de Louis Berthoud,” which he received from Charles de Bordy prior to departure, and the other is a Peter Dollond telescope, which is otherwise hinted to as originating from “Observatoire de Marseille,” where Guillaume de Saint-Jacques de Silvabelle used it to do his “grand travail sur les eclipses des satellites de Jupiter.”<sup>11</sup> As regards measurement methods, the title clarifies, that in addition to the chronometric method Humboldt resorted primarily to observations of the eclipses of Jupiter moons.

---

<sup>7</sup> See [online] <http://jbc.bj.uj.edu.pl/dlibra/publication?id=374508&from=&dirids=1&tab=1&lp=1&QI> [accessed on: February 15, 2017] and <http://humboldt.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de> [accessed on: February 13, 2017].

<sup>8</sup> BJ, Autograph Collection from the former Prussian State Library in Berlin, Humboldt Alexander von (accession number: Radowitz 6258).

<sup>9</sup> See [online] <http://humboldt.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/> [accessed on: February 12, 2017].

<sup>10</sup> See [online] <http://resolver.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/SBB0001527B00000000> [accessed on: February 14, 2017].

<sup>11</sup> Berlin, State Library IIIA, Nachl. Alexander von Humboldt, box 2, file 4, No. 11, f. 1v.

More details of the origin and history of the snippet is to be gleaned from margin notes made in French, which – judging by the color of the ink and the style of handwriting – were added much later. At the top right corner of the first page Humboldt wrote:

J'ai composé ce Mémoire à Lima dans l'idée de l'envoyer par D<sup>n</sup> Thomas Ugarte à Mr Espinosa à Madrid. Je n'ai pas pu profiter de la Frégate la Rufina et je l'ai rédigé dans la Navigation de Guayaquil à Acapulco au Sud de l'Equateur. Je l'ai refondu et envoyé enfin par Mr. D<sup>n</sup> Manuel Espinosa du Mexique à Madrid.

According to this remark, Humboldt intended to send the manuscript from South America to José Espinosa y Tello (1763–1815), then the head of the Depósito Hidrográfico in Madrid. Humboldt met this former participant of the scientific expedition of Alessandro Malaspina to the Pacific in Madrid in 1799, shortly before setting out for South America. He was presented with a catalog of geographical coordinates of different places in the New World by him, which Humboldt acknowledged in an asterisked footnote on the margin of the first page. Humboldt's own measurements and calculations diverged by far from Espinosa's data and the maps of the Depósito Hidrográfico.<sup>12</sup> Naturally, he wanted to break the news of the latest longitudinal data to Espinosa and thus bring about creation of more accurate maps of the New World. One may also surmise that he wished to demonstrate the accuracy of his own measurements.

Humboldt was unable to dispatch the manuscript from South America, however. As a result, he had a chance to make corrections during the voyage to New Spain while still in the Southern hemisphere, as he explicitly wrote. After arriving in Mexico City, he supplemented the last page with the longitudinal data of this place, which were determined on the basis of astronomical observations. He wrote about it to Jean-Baptiste Joseph Delambre on July 29, 1803 and added that Espinosa's data used for the latest maps of Depósito Hidrográfico were 2 degrees off.<sup>13</sup>

The manuscript was never sent to Espinosa to Madrid. Humboldt made a new summary in Mexico, which was subsequently dispatched to José Espinosa by the courtesy of his brother Manuel. This manuscript has also been preserved and is currently kept in the Archives of the Marine Museum (Archivo del Museo Naval) in Madrid.<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, it is not a Humboldt autograph; it was written by the hand of his travel-

<sup>12</sup> U. L e i t n e r, *Alexander von Humboldt – Von Mexiko-Stadt nach Veracruz. Tagebuch*, Berlin 2005, p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> Letter from A. von Humboldt to J. B. J. Delambre, México 29.07.1803, [in:] U. M o h e i t, *Alexander von Humboldt – Briefe aus Amerika 1799–1804*, Berlin 1993, p. 244.

<sup>14</sup> Madrid, Archivo del Museo Naval 0101 Ms. 0096. A transcript of the document see U. M o h e i t, op. cit., pp. 253–259. Moheit believes the document was addressed to José Espinosa's brother Manuel.

ling companion Aimé Bonpland.<sup>15</sup> Museo Naval possesses two further Humboldt's letters to José Espinosa where he also mentioned new findings about longitudes. The last letter was written on April 25, 1804 from Havana and explained reasons why he had written many times about the same findings. As it was only very erratically that he was receiving replies to his letters during the expedition, he did not know whether his collections and correspondence had actually reached Europe. He said:

Depuis mon départ d'Europe en 1799 j'ai osé Vous adresser plusieurs lettres en Vous communiquant des observations de Longitudes, surtout des Satellites de Jupiter et des distances lunaires que je pensais Vous être intéressantes même après la récolte que Vous avez faites Vous même sur les Lieux [...]. Peut-être que ces lettres ont eu la sort de tant d'autres que j'ai adressé à Madrid et à Paris et qu'elles ne Vous sont pas parvenues.<sup>16</sup>

Since Humboldt had no way of being certain he would return to Europe alive, he repeated the same findings time and again in different letters of the same content. Thus he was increasing the probability of his efforts not being made in vain even in case of a personal misfortune to him.

The manuscript that is the focus of this paper came to Europe from the expedition together with Bonpland, Humboldt, specimen collections, and journals on August 3, 1804 and was kept among various notes from the travel. Some remarks on the margins and cross-references on further pages of the travelogue show that these notes were further elaborated on and utilized. In fact, later publications contain advice on the use of the longitudinal data given in the manuscript and information on the instruments and measurement methods Humboldt described. It appears that one of the first such publications was not to be a work by Humboldt himself but of his colleague Jabbo Oltmanns (1783–1833), who organized almost all astronomical-geographical measurements of Humboldt and obviously got the original notes from him. In his 1806 treatise *Über die geographische Lage von Mexico und Acapulco*,<sup>17</sup> Oltmanns said Humboldt determined the longitude of Mexico City by three observations of the Jupiter moons through a telescope of “300 magnitude.”<sup>18</sup> Barring Hum-

---

<sup>15</sup> Humboldt availed himself of Bonpland's assistance in making copies of other texts as well. The manuscript *Essai sur la géographie des plantes*, authored by Humboldt and kept in Musée Nationale d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris now, is a copy made in Bonpland's hand with corrections and additions in Humboldt's hand. See B. S a v o y, D. B l a n k e n s t e i n, *Les frères Humboldt, l'Europe de l'Esprit*, Paris 2014, p. 135.

<sup>16</sup> Letter from A. von Humboldt to J. B. J. Delambre, Mexico, 29.07.1803, [in:] U. M o h e i t, op. cit., p. 286.

<sup>17</sup> J. O l t m a n n s, *Über die geographische Lage von Mexico und Acapulco; nach den von Herrn von Humboldt im Königreiche Neu-Spanien angestellten astronomischen Beobachtungen*, [in:] *Monatliche Correspondenz zur Beförderung der Erd- und Himmels-Kunde*, pub. F. X. Zach, November 1806, pp. 461–472.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 465.

boldt describing a slightly different magnitude to be gained by a Dollond telescope on the last page of his manuscript, the data given by Oltmann are in keeping with those given by Humboldt. The longitude figures from this manuscript are repeated also in “geographical introductions” to *Essai politique sur le royaume de la Nouvelle-Espagne* and *Essai politique sur l’île de Cuba*,<sup>19</sup> which were published later.

But notwithstanding the later uses of the manuscript in publications, one may wonder why Humboldt made a gift of this particular fragment to an autograph collection of a befriended connoisseur. Today it is impossible to find out when and where this happened, but the fact of extracting the snippet and supplementing it with a commentary by Humboldt proves he regarded it as worthy leaving to posterity. It is evident, therefore, that Humboldt was aware of the importance of his legacy and took care to have the evidence of his work and research in the form of autographs preserved for future generations. The content of the remarks on the margins let us surmise, moreover, that Humboldt did not want to stop at drawing attention of the future readers to the scientific value of the document. The way he narrated the circumstances the manuscript had been made in links the document to an important period of his own life and a specific place; these details turned this particular autograph into a perfect gift for Radowitz, who cherished the history and context of documents even more than their scientific significance. It is also imaginable that Humboldt was driven by another motivation, too, as was the case when he was sending numerous letters of almost identical content. Since paper is a material of a limited durability, prone to loss or destruction, he may have regarded dividing up the manuscript and distributing it in parts as the most sensible way of securing his legacy for posterity.

Translated by Dariusz Rossowski

#### SUMMARY

The collection of autographs of the former Prussian State Library in Berlin – now held by the Jagiellonian Library – contains a valuable autograph of Alexander Humboldt – fragment from Humboldt’s travel diary entitled *Sobre algunos puntos interesantes para la Navegación, o extracto de las observaciones de longitud deducida de Eclipses del Sol y de la Luna de Satellites de Jupiter, distancias lunares y Chronometros en los annos de 1799–1803*.

---

<sup>19</sup> In both cases, we find these data in a discussion of geographical issues in *Analyse Raisonnée de L’Atlas de la Nouvelle-Espagne* and *Analyse Raisonnée de la Carte de l’île de Cuba*. Similarly to the manuscript snippet that is presented here, Humboldt examined and compared geographical co-ordinates of the New World obtained by his predecessors with his own findings. See A. von Humboldt, *Essai politique sur le royaume de la Nouvelle Espagne*, vol. 1, Paris 1811, pp. 28–41 and *Essai politique sur l’île de Cuba*, vol. 1, Paris 1826, pp. VII–XXXVI.

The Humboldt's manuscript travel diary was acquired by the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz Foundation in Berlin from a private owner in 2013. The part which is discussed in the present article (pp. 71–84) was cut out of Fascicle VIII of the notebook in the nineteenth century – most probably by Humboldt himself – after which it was annotated and given as a present to General Radowitz, who was a collector of autographs. It eventually found its way to the Royal Library in Berlin together with Radowitz's entire collection.

#### KEYWORDS:

Aleksander von Humboldt, travel diary, America

### PREZENT SPOD RÓWNIKA. WYCINEK Z RĘKOPISU DZIENNIKA PODRÓŻY ALEKSANDRA VON HUMBOLDTA DO AMERYKI. ZE ZBIORU RADOWITZA

#### STRESZCZENIE

W Zbiorze Autografów z byłej Pruskiej Biblioteki Państwowej w Berlinie, przechowywanym w Bibliotece Jagiellońskiej, znajduje się cenny autograf Aleksandra Humboldta *Sobre algunos puntos interesantes para la Navegación, o extracto de las observaciones de longitud deducida de Eclipses del Sol y de la Luna de Satellites de Jupiter, distancias lunares y Chronometros en los annos de 1799–1803*. Fragment ten pochodzi z rękopiśmiennego dziennika podróży Humboldta. Rękopis samego dziennika pozyskała Fundacja Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz w Berlinie z rąk prywatnych w 2013 roku, natomiast omawiany w artykule fragment (s. 71–84) został wycięty w XIX wieku z zeszytu nr VIII dziennika najprawdopodobniej przez samego Humboldta, opatrzone komentarzem i ofiarowane kolekcjonerowi autografów gen. Radowitzowi, po czym razem z całym Zbiorem Radowitza trafił do Biblioteki Królewskiej w Berlinie.

#### SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:

Aleksander von Humboldt, dziennik podróży, Ameryka