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**APOCRYPHAL TRADITIONS IN KASPER
MIASKOWSKI'S CHRISTMAS POETRY**

Although the resolutions of the Council of Trent and acts of the local council in Gniezno (1589) left no doubt as to the pejorative assessment of extra-canonical writings, apocryphal components were strong and constant in seventeenth-century religious literature.¹ Apocryphal elements appear in *Wirydarz (A Cloister Garden)* by Stanisław Grochowski, *Kolebka Jezusowa (Jesus's Cradle)* by Kasper Twardowski, *Symfonie anielskie (Angelic Symphonies)* by Jan Zabczyc and many other collections of carols distributed in Poland in the seventeenth century. Even Piotr Skarga, who in *Żywot św. Anny (The Life of St. Ann)* complains about the “blasphemous” and “insane” legend about the saint's legend² in the sermon “Na dzień Trzech Króli” (“On

¹ The negative assessment of extra-canonical writing has been analysed, among others, by Maria Adamczyk, *Biblijno-apokryficzne narracje w literaturze staropolskiej do końca XVI wieku*, Poznań 1980, . 11–12. Adamczyk has also dealt with this issue in her introduction to the anthology of Old Polish apocryphal texts (Maria Adamczyk, *Wstęp do: Cały świat nie pomieściłby ksiąg. Staropolskie opowieści i przekazy apokryficzne*, ed. by Wojciech Rzepka, Wiesław Wydra, Warszawa–Poznań 1996, s 45–46).

² Piotr Skarga, *Żywot Ś. Anny Matki Bogarodzice z Doktorów kościelnych, z Epifaniusza i z Grzegorza Nyseńskiego i Hipolita męczennika i Damascena wybrany*, w: tegoż, *Żywoty Świętych Starego i Nowego Zakonu na każdy dzień przez cały rok*, Kraków 1603, published by Andrzej Piotrkowczyk, 661. See Maria Adamczyk, *Wstęp do: Cały świat nie pomieściłby ksiąg...*, op. cit., s21. While presenting the extra canonical figure of St. Ann, Piotr Skarga referred to the authority of early Christian writers rather than to apocryphal texts Cf., Maria Adamczyk, *Wstęp do: Cały świat nie pomieściłby ksiąg...*, op. cit., 20.

Epiphany” literally “On the Day of Three Kings”) places the homage of the Magi in a “rotten shack”³ and was not very much concerned by the fact that in the Vulgate the scene is located in a house (Latin *domus*), Mathew, 2, 10⁴. Even the name of the visitors from the East used in the sermon (and at the same time commonly used) is extra-canonical. In Skarga’s rendering the description of the adoration of the baby Jesus is much strengthened in comparison with the laconic phrasing of the Evangelist (Mt 2,11) (“fell down and worshipped him” KJV).

And [...] first they fell on their knees, then on their faces as to their God, and as they came closer they kissed **the little baby’s feet**, and bowed with such humility as is becoming to the created in respect of their Creator.⁵ (emphasis P.G)

So the acts of the Council of Trent and the local council in Gniezno did not stop all the apocryphal motifs and plots, because these turned out to be necessary components of the religious imagination and also important material for meditations and considerations, or simply for common religiosity, which in no way should have been weakened in confrontation with the reformed Christianity. The reasons for the permanence of some extra canonical elements should also be searched for in the official liturgical calendar (which, for example included the holy day of “the three Kings”, and not of “the Wise Men from the East”, and also in liturgical (connected with celebrations

³ Piotr Skarga, *Na dzień Trzech Królów kazanie krótkie*, in Idem *Żywoty Świętych...*, op. cit., 26.

⁴ *Biblia sacra Veteris et Novi Testamenti. Secundum editionem vulgatam*, vol. 2, Basileae 1591, publ. by Thomas Guarina, 2. This was a mistake, apparently, common in the times of Miaskowski. Kings who have come to a “stable” are presented by Rev. Fabian Birkowski: “You say that there was only one star, I can see two, one in the sky and one in the stable, near the manger, which Three Kings saw when they entered” (Fabian Birkowski, *Kazanie na dzień Trzech Królów*, in Idem, *Kazania na święta doroczne*, Kraków 1620, publ. by . Andrzej Piotrkowczyka, 125).

⁵ Piotr Skarga, *Na dzień Trzech Królów kazanie krótkie*, in Idem, op. cit., 27.

of holy days) and extra-liturgical prayers of the Church.⁶ Such a privileged *locus* which activated in a special way the apocryphal tradition was *narratio Nativitatis*—both in sermons and the nativity, prepared by Franciscans⁷ and, last but not least, in iconography.⁸

The Christmas poetry of Kasper Miaskowski is an emphatic example of how the religious imagination of a poet, writing after the Council of Trent, is co-created by apocryphal motifs—which cannot be stopped, they are omnipresent and almost imperceptibly inter-penetrate with the canonical themes, which are recommended as the only proper ones in the official pastoral discourse.⁹ Miaskowski uses these elements carefully and skilfully.¹⁰ In order to present a “tolerably full picture of events” he is helped not only by the compiling

⁶ Cf., Andrzej Rutkowski, *Objawienie Pańskie. Trzech Króli*, in *Encyklopedia Katolicka*, vol 14, ed. by Edward Gigiliewicz, Lublin 2010, 181. Some of the church holidays “came straight from apocrypha”. (Marek Starowieyski, *Wstęp do: Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, vol. 1, ed by Idem, Kraków 2003, 52).

⁷ Cf., Adam Karpiński, *Objaśnienia do: Jan Żabczyc, Symfonije anielskie*, Warszawa 1998, 81. There was a sudden growth of Franciscan provinces (250 per cent) and monasteries (245 per cent) in Poland at the turn of the seventeenth century. (Cf., *Zakony franciszkańskie w Polsce*, ed. by Jerzy Kłoczowski, vol. 2: *Franciszkanie w Polsce XVI–XVIII wieku*, ed. by Henryk Gapski, Celestyn S. Napiórkowski, Niepokalanów 1998, 21–22).

⁸ Cf., Antoni Paciorek, *Wstęp do: Gdy Jezus narodził się w Beltejem... Ewangelia Dzieciństwa z komentarzem teologiczno-biblijnym i ikonograficznym*, ed Idem, Urszula M. Mazurczak, Lublin 2005, . 6–7.

⁹ The influence of apocrypha on Miaskowski Christmas poetry has not been extensively examined by researchers. Important information on this issue can be primarily found in two texts crucial for the research on Kasper Miaskowski's poetry: in Stefan Nieznanowski monograph *O poezji Kaspra Miaskowskiego. Studium o kształtowaniu się baroku w poezji polskich (On Kasper Miaskowski's poetry; A Study on the Formation of the Baroque in Polish Poetry)* Lublin 1965, and the critical edition of *Zbiór rytmów (A Collection of Rhythms)* ed. by Alina Nowicka-Jeżowa, Warszawa 1995). Valuable remarks about this problem can also be found in Mirosława Hanusiewicz, *Święte i zmysłowe w poezji religijnej polskiego baroku*, Lublin 2001, 239–244.

¹⁰ Cf., Alina Nowicka-Jeżowa, *Wstęp do: Kasper Miaskowski, Zbiór rytmów*, op. cit., 5–6, 8, 9.

of several stories from the Gospels, but also by the merging of different apocryphal texts.¹¹ Elements in Miaskowski's Christmas poetry which come from extra-canonical sources are usually complementary in respect of one another and in respect of canonical elements. However, at times they are juxtaposed alternatively, as is, for example, the case of *Szopa zbawienna* (*The Shack of Salvation*).

Betlejemskiej on grzbiet skały,
jeszcze niżli mury wstały
wykowany ręką prostą
i pokrzywy po nim rosta,

zgon bydłęcy, kiedy w znoju
spiesz z pola w cień do zdroju
abo cicha zimie szopa,
gdzie wół z osłem czekał snopa.

(*Szopa zbawienna*, w. 1–8)¹²

Kasper Miaskowski refers here to almost all apocryphal variants of the place of Jesus's birth. At the beginning he presents a grotto made in the rock by simple people ("simple hand"). Later he described a provisional place ("cattle's muster"), which animals occupy only for a short time, and in the final part of the second stanza he presents a vernacular vision of a shack set in a winter setting. Two alternative pictures ("[...] where the roof is dilapidated or a rock in the wall") are

¹¹ Alina Nowicka-Jeżowa wrote about the drive towards the "full picture of events" and the compilation of different Gospels. (Alina Nowicka-Jeżowa, *Wstęp do: Kasper Miaskowski, Zbiór rytmów*, op. cit., 10). Wszystkie cytaty utworów Miaskowskiego w niniejszym artykule pochodzą z krytycznej edycji *Zbioru rytmów* (Kasper Miaskowski, *Zbiór rytmów*, oprac. Alina Nowicka-Jeżowa, Warszawa 1995).

¹² All quotations from Miaskowski's texts in this paper come from the critical edition of *Zbiór rytmów* (Kasper Miaskowski, *Zbiór rytmów*, ed. by Alina Nowicka-Jeżowa, Warszawa 1995). "The mount of Bethlehem's rock/before the walls had been made/was hewn by simple hands/and nettles grow underneath./cattle's muster, when in heat/from the meadow runs to a spring/or a quiet shack in winter/when an ox and an ass are waiting for a sheaf."

also present in "Przemowa na rotuły 2" ("Introduction to Rotuły 2"). The canonical version (Luke 2,7) tells little about the place of the Birth: firstly, the events for certain did not take place in an inn; secondly there was a manger inside, so the interior in which Jesus was born was a space reserved for animals. The oldest apocryphal texts (or more precisely "apocrypha proper")¹³ are not so cautious and locate Jesus's birthday in 'jaskinia' (cave)¹⁴ or, not so often in 'grota' (grotto).¹⁵ It so happens that in a given apocrypha we have different (even contradictory) phrases, for example in *Księga o narodzeniu Zbawiciela, o Maryi i o położnej* (*A Book about the Saviour's Nativity, about Mary and a Midwife*) we have at the same time "a cave" and "a stable in a detached place".¹⁶ In the Polish *Rozmyślenia przemyskie* (*Przemyskie Considerations*) there is a fragment about an unoccupied

¹³ The term "apocrypha proper" ("apokryfy właściwe") is used here after Maria Adamczyk (Cf., Maria Adamczyk, *Wstęp do: Cały świat nie pomieściłby ksiąg...*, op. cit., 29)

¹⁴ For example in *Ewangelia Arabska Jana* (*Ewangelia Arabska Jana*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 233), *Protoewangelia Jakuba* (*Protoewangelia Jakuba*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 282), *Ewangelia Pseudo-Mateusza* (*Ewangelia Pseudo-Mateusza*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 308.). Besides, in this apocrypha it was stated that in this cave "there was never any light". Ibid. In *Ewangelia Pseudo-Mateusza* there is also the expression "grotto". Cf. Ibid., 310. It presents "a stable" in which the baby Jesus was. However, it is not the place of his birth. *Ewangelia Dzieciństwa Arabska* (*Ewangelia Dzieciństwa Arabska*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 407) and *Ewangelia Dzieciństwa Ormiańska* (*Ewangelia Dzieciństwa Ormiańska*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 470).

¹⁵ *Ewangelia gruzińska* (*Ewangelia gruzińska*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 213) and *Opowieść o magach* (*Opowieść o magach*, in: *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 370–371). Even though the Magi came a while after Jesus's birth, according to the apocrypha, "they came into the place where the Guide [Jesus] had been born."

¹⁶ *Księga o narodzeniu Zbawiciela, o Maryi i o położnej*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 319, 321. Contradictory places are given in *Ewangelia Barnaby* (*Ewangelia Barnaby*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 251).

house “dom pospólny” (common house).¹⁷ While in a text which Miaskowski might have read himself *Żywot panu Jezu Krysta* (*The Life of Jesus Christ* by Baltazar Opeć) Mary and Joseph entered:

[...] pod szopę pospolitą, w którą się ludzie schodzili **czasu pluty i niepogody**.¹⁸ (emphasis P.G)

The author of this late medieval version of *Meditationes vitae Christi* also writes, bluntly, about a “poor smelly stable”.¹⁹

Kasper Miaskowski very eagerly uses the lexeme “szopa” (shack, shed), which also appears in Opeć’s translation,²⁰ even in the description of the Basilica of the Nativity. In “Introduction to Rotuły2” there is an expression—internally contradictory—“szopa kamienna” (a stone shack), “stajnia” (stable) is used less often, and so is “stajenka” (a little stable), (*Przemowa na Rotuły* l. 139). The apocryphal expressions “jaskinia” (cave) and “grota” (grotto) are replaced by “skała” (rock), while in two places (*Jasełeczka*, l. 34–36, *Szopa zbawienna*, l. 1-6). there is a longer description of the place

¹⁷ *Cały świat nie pomieściłby ksiąg...*, op. cit., 162. The motif of an empty house can also be found in sermons (for example in *Kazania gnieźnieńskie; Cały świat nie pomieściłby ksiąg...*, op. cit., . 137).

¹⁸ Baltazar Opeć, *Żywot wszechmocnego Syna Bożego, Pana Jezu Krysta, Stworzyciela i Zbawiciela stworzenia wszystkiego: wedle ewangielist świętych, z ozmyślanim nabożnym doktorow Świętego Pisma ogarniony*, Kraków 1522, k. List Xv. (The apocryphal “book was very popular” (*Cały świat nie pomieściłby ksiąg...*, op. cit., 233). *Żywot Pana Jezu Krysta* (*The Life of Jesus Christ*) was published five times in the sixteenth century alone (ibidem). “The time of wetness and inclement weather”.

¹⁹ Ibid., 252.

²⁰ The word “szopa” (“shack”) appears in the title *Szopa zbawienna* (*The Shack of Salvation*), in different lines (*Szopa zbawienna*, l. 7, 62, 131, 180), and also in: *Przemowie na rotuły* (l. 50, 85, 142) and in *rotuły Klio* (l. 33) i *Poli, (l. 24). The poet places in the “shack” not only the birth of Jesus, but also the homage of the Wise Men (*Szopa zbawienna*, l. 131; *Rotuły, 2. Przemowa na rotuły*, l. 142; *Rotuły, 9. Polihymnia*, l. 24).*

of birth.²¹ In the fragment of *Jasełeczka* (*A Little Nativity Play*) there is—paralleling Opeć's translation—a motif of a place being a shelter for people against inclement weather:

Nie w bogatej go szukajcie gospodzie [...]
ale gdzie oracz **gwoli niepogodzie**
twardą skałę wydrożył
i wierzch darnem położył. (emphasis P.G)
(*Jasełeczka*, w. 31, 34–36)²²

According to *Ewangelia Dzieciństwa Ormiańska* (*The Armenian Gospel of Childhood*), Jesus was born in the winter.²³ In *The Life of Jesus Christ* the stress was put on the cold which was piercing the poorly clothed Christ.

Patrzaj, iż się nie narodził w rozkoszy, ale [...] **na gołej i twardej ziemi** [...] **zimy barzo ostrej: od zimna drżał**, leżąc na ziemi gorzko płakał, nie mając, czym by się zagrzał.²⁴ (emphasis P.G)

²¹ The word Wyras "rock" was used in *Jasleczki* l. 35; *Szopa zbawienna*, l. 1 and *Rotuły* (*Rotuły*, 2. *Przemowa na rotuły*, l. 140).

²² "Do not look for him in a luxuriant inn/but where a ploughman **against bad weather**/tough rough hollowed/and put grass on the top."

²³ *Ewangelia Dzieciństwa Ormiańska*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 470.

²⁴ *Cały świat nie pomieściłby ksiąg...*, op. cit., 252. In another fragment of Opeć's translation we have "barren and sharp" ground (ibidem). Also, during the "very sharp winter" the Christmas story is set in the Medieval poem *Dziecię najmilejsze, proszę Cię, nie płacz*, added to *Żywot Pana Jezusa Krysta (Średniowieczna pieśń religijna polska)*, ed. by Mirosław Korolko, Wrocław 1980, 119). Mirosław Korolko states that this poem is the first Polish Christmas carol text which sets the Bethlehem events in the winter (ibidem). In many other texts the cold is mentioned, which little Jesus had to suffer as he lay on the ground. The cold Son of God was most often warmed up by animals. Cf., e.g. carols *Witaj Jezusa malutki*, l. 41–42; *O duszo moja, oto miłość Twoja*, l. 9–11; *Pójdźmy do jasełek nowych Jezusa miłego, passim* (Line numbering from the volume *Kolędy polskie. Średniowiecze i wiek XVI*, ed. by Stefan Nieznanowski, Juliusz Nowak-Dłużewski, Warszawa 1966, [respectively] 37, 44–45, l. 79–83). A longer description of winter scenery can be found in a text in *Wirydarz* by Stanisław Grochowski (8. *Pożałowania rozmaitych doległości dziecięcych*, I.

Miaskowski also places Christ's nativity in the winter, which will become typical for the Polish tradition ("[...] quiet shack in winter" (IV. *Szopa zbawienna*, l. 7), "sharp wind blows" *ostry wiatr wieje*", III. *Jesłeczka*, w. 39). Little body of Jesus put in a "stone" (*Rotuły*, 2. *Przemowa na rotuły*, w. 149) manger is cold:

[...] pod żłobem **drożonym**, kędy noworodne
członeczki położono w zimna niepogodne,
 jeden jęczy od skruchy za grzech popełniony [...].²⁵ (emphasis P.G)
 (*Przemowa na rotuły*, l. 59–60)

Some fragments of Maskowski's poetry (subtly) bring to mind the motif of the baby Jesus lying on the ground, which is present in Opeć's translation.²⁶ For example, in "The Introduction to *Rotuły*" the shepherds who come to the shack:

[...] padszy na oblicze, całują tę **ziemię**,
która naprzód witała wieczne w ciele Plemię [...].(emphasis P.G)
 (*Rotuły*, 2. *Przemowa na rotuły*, w. 141–144)

The stone ground on which the born Jesus lies is in the medieval (and later) iconography a symbol of His sacrifice: bloody (the passion)

Ubóstwo i niewczas przy narodzeniu, l. 11–16). In many texts the baby Jesus crying from the cold appears (among others in: 1. *Parafrazy*, III. *Córy syjońskie do Dziecięcia Pana Jezusa*, l. 10; 4. *Placz i narzekanie dziecięce*, III *Poeta*, l. 15). Line numbering from: Stanisław Grochowski, *Wirydarz abo kwiatki rymów duchownych o Dziecięciu Panu Jezusie*, ed. by Justyna Dąbkowska, Warszawa 1997."See that he was not born in bliss, but [...] **on the naked and tough ground** [...] **during sharp winter he was shivering from cold**, lying on the ground he was crying bitterly, not having anything to warm up."

²⁵ Information about a "hollowed" manger also appears in the poem. Informacja o żłobie „wydrożonym” *Na zaczynanie Nowego Roku* (*Wiersze na Boże Narodzenie*, 8. *Na zaczynanie Nowego Roku*, l. 36). "under a **hollowed** manger, where new born/little **bones were put in the cold**,/one is groaning in contrition for the sin committed. [...]"

²⁶ See also *Rotuły*, 3. *Klio*, l. 25–28. "Having fallen on their faces, they kiss the ground,/which had earlier welcomed in its body the eternal tribe."

and bloodless (the Eucharist).²⁷ In an analogous manner, a stone floor or a stone manger may mean a sepulchre or an altar.²⁸ The representation of Jesus lying on the ground is also connected in iconography with the information, included in apocrypha and other sources, particularly *Revelations of St. Brigid*, about Mary's painless labour.²⁹

The winter colours of Miaskowski's Christmas poetry may also be connected with other factors (for example, the fact that Christmas is celebrated in the winter) than the apocryphal tradition. However, Miaskowski's poetry shows some relationship with Opeć's translation in the fragment stressing Christ's poverty.³⁰ In the part of the chapter devoted to meditations in "O narodzeniu" ("On Nativity") the author of the translations (referring to the words of St. Bernard) encourages the poor to be joyful and admonishes the rich:³¹

St. Bernard says [...]: Have joy and you, all Christians, will be comforted, particularly the poor ones, who have rejected this vile world for the life of Christ and who have voluntarily embarked on a poor life, so that you can follow even more voluntarily on the **sharp** way of Christ. **Why are you so joyful, o rich people, who stay in**

²⁷ Cf. Urszula M. Mazurczak, *Komentarz ikonograficzny*, in *Gdy Jezus narodził się w Betlejem*, op. cit., 138–139, 193, 197; Jutta Seibert, *Leksykon sztuki chrześcijańskiej. Tematy, postacie symbole*, Kielce 2007, 216–218; Ryszard Montusiewicz, *Prefiguracja męki i adoracja Dzieciątka w utworach kolędowych Kaspra Twardowskiego. Próba interpretacji ikonograficznej*, „Roczniki Humanistyczne” 32 (1984), (1), s 122–123.

²⁸ Cf., Ryszard Montusiewicz, op. cit., 122–123; Cf., Urszula M. Mazurczak, op. cit., 197. The lyric poetry of this poet is full of eucharistic expression. Jesus in a manger is called "Bread" (Cf., *Szopa zbawienna*, w. 12; *Wiersze na Boże Narodzenie*, 8. *Na zaczynanie Nowego Roku*, l. 41–42).

²⁹ Jutta Seibert, op. cit., 218.

³⁰ Stressing the poor birth of Jesus was characteristic for texts written under the influence of Franciscan spirituality (Cf., Alicja Szulc, „*Homo religiosus*” późnego średniowiecza. *Bernardyński model religijności masowej*, Poznań 2007, 192; Ryszard Montusiewicz, op. cit., 130–131..

³¹ A similar fragment can be found in *Meditationes vitae Christi*. See. *Cały świat nie pomieściłby ksiąg...*, op. cit., 233. Pseudo-Bonawentura, *Meditationes vitae Christi*, Strassburg 1496, k. *Cały świat nie pomieściłby ksiąg...*, op. cit. 25.

**comfortable beds, when the King of Kings for his birth preferred
poor bed from your soft and rich?**³² (emphasis P.G)

Miaskowski, in a similar vein, juxtaposes the poor surroundings of the Saviour with the affluence of Jerusalem's inhabitants:

[...] **I żłób, i ostre płaty
ganią wczas i dom bogaty.**

Tu z ubóstwem włóż na wagę
pompe, stroje i powagę:
rzeczesz, ciężkie że tłómoki
na dół ciągną; to – w obłoki

**Bogate zaś po wieczerzy,
patrz, jako sen wszystkie dzierży
w miękkim pierzu, a nie dbają,
że pogłównie w skrzyniach mają.**³³ (emphasis P.G)
(IV. Szopa zbawienna, l. 19–28)

In both fragments the poverty of Jesus fosters reflections on the material and spiritual poverty of man.³⁴ Getting rid of the riches of this world allows us to be freed from unnecessary weight and gives freedom—the poor addressees of St. Bernard's words may rejoice; the reader of this poetry should move in this direction. An admonishment directly aimed at the wealthy is replaced by narration, transferred into the reality of Jerusalem.³⁵ The fragments resembling

³² *Cały świat nie pomieściłby ksiąg...*, op. cit., 253.

³³ **“And manger and sharp sheets/admonish leisure and a rich house.//Here with poverty put on the scales/pomp, clothes and seriousness,/you say this luggage heavy/pull you down-this takes you up.//While the rich after dinner,/look how dreams overcome everything/in soft feathers and they don't care/that they have taxes in their boxes.”**

³⁴ Fragments juxtaposing the poverty of Jesus and the wealth of the rich also appear in other Christmas texts of Miaskowski.(Cf., *Jasieczka*, l. 31–36, *Wiersze na Boże Narodzenie*, 8. *Na zaczynanie Nowego Roku*, l. 13–14, l. 37–40).

³⁵ The further part of this fragment testifies to this (Cf., *Szopa zbawienna*, l. 29–36).

Opeć's texts are intermixed with allusions to the Gospels.³⁶ The quoted fragments display some lexical similarities (among others, the use of the antonymous adjectives "sharp"—"soft"). Attention should also be drawn to the fragment of the poem "Na zaczynanie Nowego Roku" ("On the Beginning of the New Year"), in which the poet calls the manger of Jesus "the cold bed of a Great King" (*Wiersze na Boże Narodzenie*, l. 8. *Na zaczynanie Nowego Roku*, l. 5).

Traditionally, there are animals in the manger of Jesus:

Bo kędy wieczne kwili Słowo w żłobie,
z osłem ledwie wół grzeje,
co tak ostry wiatr wieje.³⁷

(*Jasłeczka*, l. 37–39).

The figures of an ox and an ass from the fourth century have been a permanent element of Christmas iconography³⁸ and popular Christmas carols. The oldest representations of Christmas in early Christian art consisted of three compositional elements: Christ in a manger, shepherds, and an ox and an ass.³⁹ We can see these animals next to the new born Christ on a fragment of Roman sarcophagus dated 343 A.D.⁴⁰ Animals in a stable have often been written about

³⁶ In the quoted fragment we can trace references to the parable about "a reckless rich man" (Luke 12,13–21), a story of a rich youth (Matthew 19,16–22), and the dialogue of Jesus with the disciples after a wealthy man has left them. (Matthew 19,23–30).

³⁷ Cf., the fragment *Żywota Pana Jezusa Krysta*: "Ox and also an ass [...] breathing through their nostrils, warmed the Son of God with their vapour" (*Cały świat nie pomieściłby ksiąg...*, op. cit., 252). "Because when eternally wails in the manger God's word/the ox with the ass barely warm up/the sharp wind."

³⁸ Jutta Seibert, op. cit., 216.

³⁹ Piotr P. Maniurka, *Boże Narodzenie*, in *Encyklopedia Katolicka*, vol. 2, ed. by Edward Gigilewicz, Lublin 1976, 743; Jutta Seibert, op. cit., 216

⁴⁰ Max Schmid, *Die Darstellung der Geburt Christi in der bildenden Kunst*, Stuttgart 1890, 74; quoted in Joseph Ziegler, *Ochs und Esel an der Krippe. Biblisch-patristische Erwägungen zu Is 1,3 und Hab 3,2 (LXX)*, „Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift” 3 (1952), 387

by *Patres ecclesiae*⁴¹ and the authors of the apocrypha, for example the sixth-century *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*.⁴²

[Mary] [...] put the baby Jesus in the manger, and the ox and the ass knelt and paid homage to Him. And what the prophet Isaiah prophesied has been fulfilled: "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib" The animals surrounded Jesus and adored him ceaselessly. Then the words of the prophet Habakkuk have been fulfilled: "In the midst of two animals thou shalt be known".⁴³

The homage of animals is described in a similar way by the authors of Polish and foreign apocryphal texts (for example of *Przemyskie Considerations*44). In *The Life of Jesus Christ* the animals are given an extra task—of warming up the freezing Jesus:

Both an ox and an ass, as they knew God, to the stable went, as if they were rational creatures, knelt down and breathing through

⁴¹ Joseph Ziegler, op. cit., 390–391. Ziegler found out that both an ox and ass appear both in Greek and in Latin texts of the Fathers of the Church. Animals are mentioned in the works of, among others, Clemens from Alexandria, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, Origen, Basil the Great, and Gregory from Nazianzus, w dziełach: Klemensa z Aleksandrii, Chryzostoma, Cyryla z Aleksandrii, Origena, Bazylego Wielkiego i Grzegorza w Nazjanz. In the West the symbolism of an ox and an ass was presented, among others, by: St. Ambrose, St. Luke and St. Jerome. St. Jerome—according to the Greek tradition—connects the figures of an ox and an ass with the prophecies of Isaiah. (Isaiah 1,3). See Hieronim, *Epist. 108 (Epitaphium S. Paulae)* PL 22, 884. Another source of tradition was the line from the Book of Habakkuk rendered in Septuaginta (Ha 3,2). Cf., *Ewangelia Pseudo-Mateusza*, op. cit., 310. It is worth noting that the further part of Isaiah's prophecy (Is, 1,3 *ad finem*) contrasts the attitudes of the animals with the 'lack of reason' of Israel: „*Israël autem me non cognovit, et populus meus non intellexit*” (*Bibliorum sacrorum latinae versiones antiquae seu vetus Italica*, Paris 1751, publ. by Francis Didota. 515).

⁴² *Ewangelia Pseudo-Mateusza*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelię apokryficzne*, op. cit., 292.

⁴³ Ibid., 310. The author of this apocryphon quotes the Book of Isaiah (Isaiah 1,3) and the Greek version of the Book of Habakkuk (Habakkuk 3,2) (cf., *ibidem*).

⁴⁴ *Rozmyślanie o żywocie Pana Jezusa: z rękopisu grecko-katolickiego kapitule przemyskiej*, oprac. Aleksander Brückner, Kraków 1907, 60–61. "These non-intelligent beasts learnt about their Creator" (ibid. 61). Cf. Isaiah 1,3.

their nostrils, were warming cold Son of God with their vapours.⁴⁵
(emphasis P.G.)

While it is quite easy to explain an ass in a manger (after all the Holy Family must have had some means of transport) an ox is not so obvious. In *The Golden Legend* there is an interesting motif of an ox taken to Bethlehem for mercantile purposes:

[...] Joseph took along an ox (perhaps to sell it for money to pay the head tax and buy food and the like) and an ass, no doubt for Mary to ride on.⁴⁶

The suggestion included in *The Golden Legend* is taken as certainty in *Przemyskie Considerations*

[...] Virgin Mary, who was pregnant, sat on an ass, while an ox was to be sold
for food and other necessary things.⁴⁷

It is not known if Miaskowski had relied on any of these apocryphal texts.⁴⁸ However, it is certain that his imagination was supported by popular pictorial representations and by Christmas carols.⁴⁹ In

⁴⁵ *Cały świat nie pomieściłby ksiąg...*, op. cit., 252.

⁴⁶ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, vol. I transl. by William Granger Ryan, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993, 41.

⁴⁷ *Rozmyślanie o żywocie Pana Jezusa...*, op. cit., 58.

⁴⁸ *The Golden Legend* was at that time very popular (including in Poland, cf. e.g., Władysław Smoleń, „Rozmyślanie przemyskie” jako źródło ikonograficzne kwatery ofiarowania Maryi ołtarza mariackiego Wita Stwosza, „Pamiętnik Literacki” 51 (1960), (3), 127). There also exist premises to come up with a hypothesis about the ‘public usage’ of *Rozmyślania przemyskiego* (see idem, 143). The popularity of *Żywota Pana Jezusa Krysta* (which has already been discussed above) as well as textual similarities existing between the text of Opeć and Miaskowski’s poetry allow us to assume that Miaskowski knew this text.

⁴⁹ The motif of an ox and an ass appears regularly in the Old Polish carols of different centuries, for example in the Medieval *Mesyasz, wierny Chrystus nasz* (l. 7–8), *Wesoły nam dzień nastał* (l. 33–34), the Renaissance carols from *Kancjonał Walentego z Brzozowa 1554* (e.g. *Chwalmyż Boga Ojca Wszchemogącego*, l. 55–57 and later carols (*Pan Jezus się nam narodził w mieście Betleem*, l. 10–12, *Nuż my dziś*,

the fragment of “The Introduction to *Rotuły*” there appear almost all apocryphal information about an ox and an ass (the warming up of Jesus, the selling of an ox, the homage of animals):

Po bokach zaś onego kamiennego żłobu
para płynie gorąca nad Nim z bydłat obu
które z sobą przywiódł był ociec domniemany
(osieł dźwigał potrzeby, wół na czynsz przedany)
te też przednie spuściwszy na ziemię kolana,
chwaliły, bezrozumne, wcielonego Pana.⁵⁰

(*Rotuły*, 2. *Przemowa na rotuły*, l. 149–150, 153–154)

The western model of Christmas’s iconography was shaped only in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁵¹ It foregrounds the scene of the adoration of the baby Jesus, when people gathered around the manger to pay homage to Jesus.⁵² So we have, first of all, Mary, while St. Joseph is deep in worship. There also often appear angels, animals, shepherds and Wise Men.⁵³ The beginnings of “the Type of the Adoration of Baby Jesus” is sometimes connected with

krześcijani, l. 31–36). Line numbering according to: *Kolędy polskie. Średniowiecze i wiek XVI*, op. cit., 17, 120–121, 247, 247–248. See also Stefan Nieznanowski, *Barokowe kolędy polskie*, in *Necessitas et ars. Studia staropolskie dedykowane Profesorowi Januszowi Pelcowi*, vol. 1, Barbara Otwinowska, Warszawa 1993, 113–121.

⁵⁰ “On the sides of this stone manger,/the hot vapour comes from both beasts/
which the presumed father brought with him/(the ass carried the necessities, the ox
sold for taxes)/so having fallen to their knees,/they adored, brainless, the incarnated
Lord.” In this fragment we can also find an echo of the prophecy of Isaiah (1,3)
“they adored, brainless, the incarnated Lord”. The motif of warming up Jesus is
also present in *rotuły* (see *Rotuły*, 4. *Eutrepe*, l. 7). The homage of animals also
appears in *Szopa zbawienna*, l. 67–68. The information about the extra-Gospel origin
of the motif of an ox led for sale was introduced in *Zbiór rytmów*: Alina Nowicka-
Jeżowa, *Objaśnienia do*: Kasper Miaskowski, *Zbiór rytmów*, op. cit., 389.

⁵¹ Ryszard Montusiewicz, op. cit., 122, Jutta Seibert, op. cit., 217–218.

⁵² Ryszard Montusiewicz, op. cit., 122 Jutta Seibert, op. cit., 218

⁵³ Jutta Seibert, op. cit., 218, Ryszard Montusiewicz, op. cit., 122.

the revelations of St. Bridget of Sweden.⁵⁴ However, special attention should be drawn to the findings of researchers who at the beginnings of the Western iconographic model founded the text *Meditationes vitae Christi* connected with Franciscan circles.

The author of the Meditations was the first to think of the Virgin of the Nativity otherwise than recumbent upon her bed. He visualized her kneeling before her Son. "Meanwhile, the mother, having knelt, worshiped Him, saying «I thank Thee, Lord, Holy Father, because Thou hast given me Thy Son. I adore Thee, eternal God and I adore Thy Son, Who is also my Son». Joseph likewise worshiped the Child, and the angels of heaven came to kneel down before the new-born Babe.⁵⁵

According to Emile Mâle, the lively imagination and sensitivity of the author of this piece inspired Italian artists to change the old iconographic model.⁵⁶ The representation of Mary kneeling before Jesus (rather than—as was the case before—resting after her labour) is connected with the conviction of the painless birth of God's Son,⁵⁷ which was supposed to be a proof, among other things, of Mary's being

⁵⁴ Cf., Ryszard Montusiewicz, op. cit., 122. The vision of St. Bridget introduces Jesus's birthday in a very plastic, vivida way [...] suddenly in one moment she gave birth to the Son, from whom such strong light was shining that it could not even be compared with the sun [...]. At the same time I saw this Baby lying in the shining light lying on the ground. His body was totally pure. [...] I also heard the nice singing of angels. When the Virgin realized that she had already given birth, she bowed her head, clasped her hands and paid homage to the Baby in full veneration". (quoted in Jutta Seibert, op. cit., 218).

⁵⁵ Émile Mâle, *Religious Art from the Twelfth to the Eighteenth Century*, Princeton 1982, . 103–104. Similarly, in Jutta Seibert, op. cit., 218. It is worth reminding that the homage of Mary appears as early as the fifth or the sixth century: j: "The Virgin was standing gazing at the sky, and became as if snowy white. [...] When the Light appeared, she paid homage to the one whom **she** saw that she had brought into the world. While the Babe shone greatly as the sun." (*Księga o narodzeniu Zbawiciela, i o Maryi, i o położnej*, w: *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 318, 323).

⁵⁶ Ibid., 103.

⁵⁷ Jutta Seibert, op. cit., 218.

freed from “Eve's sorrow” (Genesis 3,16). Jesus was to leave the body of Mary like light penetrating a crystal (precious metal symbolized the body of God's Mother).⁵⁸ This iconographic type, and the poetry that relied on it were connected with the conviction that was spreading at that time about Mary's freedom from Original Sin.⁵⁹

The extended fragment describing the birth of Jesus, and the homage of Mary is present in the Polish version of *Meditationes vitae Christi*:

[...] and there rose the Virgin with great joy and started to pray, and being in inexpressible sweetness she gave birth to the Son of God, not suffering any pain. And so the Son of God [...] who is like a flower brighter than the sun [...] having bloomed on a low vine, that is in the life of a humble Virgin, came out of Mary in his holy birth [...] **When the Virgin came to herself she saw the baby [...] crying. She also heard and saw singing angels. She knelt devoutly and paid him homage and she thanked the Heavenly Father, saying: “O God, All-Powerful, I am inexpressibly thankful to Your love and goodness that you gave me his son and made me his mother. [...]”**⁶⁰ (emphasis P.G)

⁵⁸ As Mirosława Hanusiewicz (op. cit., 242) pointed out, this conviction could be discerned in the rotuła *Melpomene* (*Rotuły*, 6. *Melpomene*, l. 5–6). The virgin, painless birth of Jesus was compared in medieval literature to light beams penetrating crystal (op. cit., 242–243). Light often accompanied Jesus's birth in the apocryphal tradition. This motif appears, for example, in *Protoewangelia Jakuba* (*Protoewangelia Jakuba*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 308–309), *Ewangelii Dzieciństwa Arabskiej* (*Ewangelia Dzieciństwa Arabska*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 407) or *Ewangelii Dzieciństwa Ormiańskiej* (*Ewangelia Dzieciństwa Ormiańska*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 472–473). It also appears in Polish apocryphal texts, among others in *W Rozmyślaniu przemyskim* (*Rozmyślanie o żywocie Pana Jezusa...*, op. cit., s. 60). Mirosława Hanusiewicz writes about the presence of this motif in *Przemowa na rotuły* (op. cit., 243–244).

⁵⁹ On this issue see Jan Fijałek, *Nasza nauka krakowska o Niepokalanym Poczęciu N. P. Maryi w wiekach średnich*, „Przegląd Polski” 1900, 420–285.

⁶⁰ *Cały świat nie pomieściłby ksiąg...*, op. cit., 251.

In Kasper Miaskowski's poetry, as in all quoted texts, Mary is kneeling. She leans over Jesus, and puts her hands together in prayer, as she does in paintings presenting the Nativity scene. The view is depicted from the perspective of newcomers:

Tam padszy na oblicze, całują [...] ziemię [...],
a dźwigając głowy swe ujrzą po tej stronie
Panienkę złotowłosą, co słoniowe dłonie
klęcząc nad swym podnosi dawno Niemowiętkiem,
nad tymże mąż szedziwy zdumiał się Dzieciątkiem. (emphasis P.G)
(*Rotuły. 2. Przemowa na rotuły*, w. 143, 145–147)⁶¹

The Mother of God adores the Son for a long time. Golden hair is an attribute of the internal beauty of Mary.⁶²

Next to "the Virgin" there is St. Joseph, who according to the extra-canonical tradition is an elderly man ("venerable man") (*Rotuły. 2. Przemowa na rotuły*, l. 147).⁶³ This feature first appeared in *Protoewangelia Jakuba* (*The Protoevangelium of James*).⁶⁴ The old

⁶¹ "There, having fallen on their faces, they kiss [...] the earth/And when they raise their heads they see /**The golden-haired Virgin with ivory hands/Raised above the new born Baby,/An elderly Man ponders over this baby.**" A similar picture is present in (*Szopa zbawienna*, l. 61–64).

⁶² Cf., Mirosława Hanusiewicz, op. cit., 240–241. *Rozmyślanie przemyskie* przekazuje informację o „rusych albo żółtych” włosach Maryi (*Rozmyślanie o żywocie Pana Jezusa...*, op. cit., 33). „Zainteresowanie” Kaspra Miaskowskiego „fizyczną urodą matki i dziecka” było przedmiotem rozważań Stefana Nieznanowskiego, *O poezji Kaspra Miaskowskiego...*, dz.cyt., s. 36–37), który zaznaczył, że „Opisy [...] urody [Maryi i Jezusa] są skombinowaniem przekazu apokryficznego z współczesną ikonografią tematu” (ibid., 36).

⁶³ Cf., Alina Nowicka-Jeżowa, *Wstęp do: Kasper Miaskowski, Zbiór rymów*, op. cit., 389.

⁶⁴ *Protoewangelia Jakuba*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 275. This text has been known in the Christian world since the fourth century (ibid., 267). Marek Starowieyski points out that *The Protevangelium* "became [...] the foundation for the Christian iconography of the East and West" (b99d.). The old age of Joseph is also mentioned in: *O późnym wieku Ewangelia Pseudo-Mateusza* (ibid., 304); *Księga o narodzeniu świętej Maryi* (ibid., 338) and *Ewangelia Dzieciństwa Ormiańska* (ibid., 451). Joseph is also presented as an old man in iconography.

age of Joseph was, in a sense, a guarantee Mary's virginity. The old extra-canonical texts introduce information on the old age of Jesus's guardian, which is embedded within the story of the choice of husband for the pious Virgin.⁶⁵ It is similar in Polish apocryphal texts. *Przemyskie Considerations* quotes the words of Joseph encouraged to the marriage:

I am wretched, of all people I am not worthy to touch such holy virginity, because **I am already old**, and it is not becoming for me to have such a young and eminent virgin.⁶⁶ (emphasis P.G)

An almost identical fragment can be found in *The Life of Jesus Christ*⁶⁷ (Tomasz Dobrzeniecki showed that both these texts were dependant on *Vita beate virginis Marie rythmica*⁶⁸).

Similarly to Mary, Joseph also adopts the pose of adoration:

Ściągnąwszy i Józef dłonie,
w niskim dał mu cześć ukłonie [...].⁶⁹
(*Szopa zbawienna*, l. 65-66)

We know from the fragment of *Przemowy na rotuły* quoted above, describing Joseph's surprise, that this is a prayer of adoration and worship. In this aspect Miaskowski's poetry is similar to the Polish apocryphal tradition expressed in *Przemyskie Considerations*⁷⁰

⁶⁵ In this way in all the apocryphal writings mentioned in the previous footnote.

⁶⁶ *Rozmyślanie o żywocie Pana Jezusa...*, op. cit. 41.

⁶⁷ Baltazar Opeć, op. cit.,, List IIIv.

⁶⁸ Tadeusz Dobrzeniecki, *Łacińskie źródła „Rozmyślania przemyskiego”*, in *Średniowiecze. Studia o kulturze*, vol. 4, ed. by Julian Lewański, Wrocław 1969, 260, 269.

⁶⁹ “Joseph also put his hands together/And bowed low in his homage [...]”.

⁷⁰ The author of the Polish translation of *Meditationes vitae Christi* does not mention this event, although it is mentioned in the original (Cf., the quoted fragment is from Émile Mâle's study).

[...] Joseph turned back, found the virgin Mary, who had already given birth to the son of God, immediately knelt down, paid homage to the Baby, and praised God the Omnipotent in His grand power.⁷¹

The wonder of Mary's guardian was expressed in *Przemyskie Considerations* in the canticle of Joseph⁷², in which he recalls the Old Testament pre-figurations of Christ.⁷³

This is this nice, holy babe, in whom we see holy prophets [...] he is a snake [...] copper in the desert, who Moses ordered to raise on the cross [...] this is the dew which wetted the clothes of Gideon [...] this is the flower who is blooming outside the womb ! He is to be the saviour and redeemer of the world. He is the manna hidden in Ark of the Covenant [...], he is the child prophesied by prophets [...]. He is the child of whom Isaiah prophesied that a virgin would give birth to the Son of God, one in the Trinity.⁷⁴

All these motifs are present in the poetry of Kasper Miaskowski (his Christmas texts are full of proof for the notion that Jesus came to "fulfil" [...] the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 5,17), (King James Version))⁷⁵. However, they are never said by Joseph. But Miaskowski

⁷¹ *Rozmyślanie o żywocie Pana Jezusa...*, op. cit., 60.

⁷² The motif of homage and the song of Joseph was (most probably) taken from quasi apocryphal (in the apocrypha proper included in the edition of Marek Starowieyski there is no guardian kneeling and adoring the baby Jesus).

⁷³ Tadeusz Dobrzeńcki, op. cit., 289. The author remarks that the pre-figurations appear in the second part of the canticle.

⁷⁴ *Rozmyślanie o żywocie Pana Jezusa...*, op. cit., 61–62.

⁷⁵ The presence of "Christ's Pre-figurations" in *Przemowa na rotule* was pointed out by Stefan Nieznanowski, *O poezji Kaspra Miaskowskiego...*, op. cit., 41). The contextuality of this poetry was also written about by Alina Nowicka-Jeżowa (*Wstęp* in op. cit., 9). In this aspect the Christmas poetry of Kasper Miaskowski is closely connected with the message of St. Matthew's gospel. This gospel, addressed to Jews, stresses in the most profound manner, "that in the person, life, deeds and teaching of Jesus all the prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled." (*Wstęp do: Ewangelia wg św. Mateusza*, in *Pismo Święte Starego i Nowego Testamentu* [Biblia Tysiąclecia], ed. by Zespół Biblistów Polskich z inicjatywy Benedyktynów Tynieckich, 1124).

twice put a speech expressing joy resulting from the fulfilment of prophecies into the mouths of shepherds *Szopa zbawienna*, l.73–112; *Przemowa na rotuły*, l.163–172; 163–172; 175–183⁷⁶). In *Szopa zbawienna* they cry enthusiastically:

Co śpiewają nam prorocy,
to już widzą nasze oczy,
Zyściły się twoje karty,
mężu ostrą piłą tarty⁷⁷.

(*Szopa zbawienna*, w. 73–76)

The man “sawn with a sharp saw” turns out to be Isaiah.⁷⁸ The shepherds, similarly to Joseph, proclaim that the birth of Jesus is the fulfilment of the words of the prophet cut into two with a sharp saw.⁷⁹ The extra-canonical tradition can be traced here; it had—maybe—its source in the Jewish apocrypha, according to which Isaiah had died a martyr’s death during the reign of king Manasses. According to the Ethiopian version of the apocrypha, the *Assumption of Isaiah*:

Because of these visions Beliar got angry with Isaiah and settled down in the heart of Manasses, who cut Isaiah with a wooden saw. While Isaiah was being cut, next to him stood Bekira, the prosecutor, stood all the false prophets celebrating and mocking Isaiah. Isaiah, when

⁷⁶ In the lines 163-172 we have the praises of shepherds in reported speech, in the lines 175-183 in direct speech.

⁷⁷ “What prophets sing to us,/this our eyes see,/your cards have been fulfilled,/you, the man sawn by a saw”.

⁷⁸ Alina Nowicka-Jeżowa connects this fragment of the the text with the Biblical passage with the prophecy of God’s revenge over Assyria. (Isaiah 10,15) (*ibidem.*).

⁷⁹ The hypothesis about the Jewish origin of this motif is mentioned by Marek Starowieyski, although he himself opts for the Judeo-Christian origin of the whole apocrypha choć sam optuje raczej za judeochrześcijańskim pochodzeniem całego apokryfu (Marek Starowieyski, *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Listy i apokalipsy chrześcijańskie*, Kraków 2002, 134–135).

he was being cut, did not shout or cry, but his mouth was speaking with the Holy Ghost, till he was cut into two⁸⁰.

Although a saw is the main iconographic attribute of St. Simon, there are also representations in which this torture tool is used to symbolize the martyr's death of Isaiah.⁸¹ An example here is provided by the left wing of the triptych *Burial of Jesus* by Maarten van Heemskerck.⁸² The martyrdom of Isaiah is shown in many illuminations of medieval manuscripts. One of them decorates the French translation of *Historia scholastica* by Peter Comestor (two torturers are cutting the prophet's head with a saw).⁸³

The shepherds pay homage to Jesus kneeling, as do other figures in the Christmas story (*Jasieczka*, l. 40–42; *Szopa zbawienna*, l. 89–90).⁸⁴ The poet 'is kneeling' together with them:

⁸⁰ *Wniebowstąpienie Izajasza*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Listy i apokalipsy chrześcijańskie*, op. cit., 147–148. The Greek version of this apocryphon has survived only in short fragments. (op. cit., 135).

⁸¹ Jutta Seibert, op. cit., 126, 311.

⁸² Les Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, 1559–1560.

⁸³ Jean Bondol, *Męczeństwo Izajasza* illustration to: Piotr Comestor, *Bible historique complétée*, transl. by Guyart des Moulins (manuscript c. a. 1372), k. 355v

⁸⁴ In Miaskowski's poetry the shepherds, while entering the stable, see the ox and ass kneeling in front of Jesus (*Jasieczka*, 37–39 – here the unutterance of an angel anticipated the event; *Szopa zbawienna*, l. 61–68; *Przemowa na rotuły*, l. 143–154). This scheme might have been taken (directly or indirectly) from *Przemyskie Considerations*, where this moment is stressed: "[the shepherds] were surprised a lot when the ox and ass paid homage to Jesus" (*Rozmyślanie o żywocie Pana Jezusa...*, op. cit., 63).

The hypothesis about the Jewish origin of this motif is mentioned by Marek Starowieyski, although he himself opts for the Judeo-Christian origin of the whole apocryphus. (Marek Starowieyski, *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Listy i apokalipsy chrześcijańskie*, Kraków 2002, 134–135).

Wniebowstąpienie Izajasza, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Listy i apokalipsy chrześcijańskie*, op. cit., 147–148. The Greek version of this apocryphon has survived only in short fragments. (op. cit., 135).

Jutta Seibert, op. cit., 126, 311.

Les Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, 1559–1560.

My też, padszy na kolana,
 Wzywamy Cię jako Pana,
 A Ty przyjmij hołd nasz pierwszy –
 upominek prostych wierszy.⁸⁵

(*Szopa zbawienna*, l. 89–92)

Miaskowski's story about the shepherds' homage includes two elements of apocryphal origin: the mountainous terrain⁸⁶ where shepherds grazed their sheep, and the star leading both the Wise Men as well as the simple ones. The information about shepherds staying in the mountains is presented in the clearest way in *Księga o narodzeniu Zbawiciela, o Maryi i o położnej* (*The Book about the Birth of the Saviour, about Mary and the Midwife*) 87:

Last night we were sitting **on the top of the moutain** keeping vigil,
 and the moon shone as if it was a bright day. We, as the custom had

Jean Bondol, *Męczeństwo Izajasza* illustration to: Piotr Comestor, *Bible historiale complétée*, transl. by Guyart des Moulins (manuscript c. a. 1372), k. 355v

In Miaskowski's poetry the shepherds, while entering the stable, see the ox and ass kneeling in front of Jesus (*Jasieczka*, 37–39 – here the utterance of an angel anticipated the event; *Szopa zbawienna*, l. 61–68; *Przemowa na rotule*, l. 143–154). This scheme might have been taken (directly or indirectly) from *Przemyskie Considerations*, where this moment is stressed: “[the shepherds] were surprised by an ox and an ass, when they paid homage to Jesus.” (*Rozmyślanie o żywocie Pana Jezusa...*, op. cit. 63)

⁸⁵ “We, having fallen to the knees/Are calling You as our Lord./And You, please, accept our first homage/a gift of simple lines.”

⁸⁶ The Vulgate only mentions “regione eadem” (“that region”) („*Et pastores erant in regione eadem vigilantes, et custodientes vigiliis noctis super gregem suum*” (Lc 2,8: Quoted in: *Biblia sacra Veteris et Novi Testamenti. Secundum editionem vulgatam*, vol. 2, Basileae 1591, printing shop of Thomas Guarin, 55.

⁸⁷ *Ewangelia gruzińska* (*The Georgian Gospel*) points to the place “near [...] the rock” (*Ewangelia gruzińska*, ed. by Marek Starowieyski, w: *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelię apokryficzne*, op. cit., 213). This information is connected with placing the birth of Jesus in a grotto. In *Ewangelia Dzieciństwa Ormiańskiej* (*The Armenian Gospel of the Childhood*) shepherds graze their sheep “in mountains and valleys. However, they spend the night of Christmas (as any other night) in a sheepfold (*Ewangelia Dzieciństwa Ormiańska*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelię apokryficzne*, op. cit., 474.

it, were protecting our sheep from thieves and wolves. When [...] we were speaking with each other, suddenly a big and huge man appeared.⁸⁸

Mountainous landscape, on the other hand, does not appear in *Przemyskie Considerations* or in *The Life of Jesus Christ*. It seems likely that Miaskowski relied here on extra literary sources, for example, on iconography.⁸⁹ In "Introduction to *Rotuły*" there is a fragment which extends the tradition present in the apocrypha proper quoted above:

A pod ten czas **nad miastem**, nie wierząc czeladzi, [...] rozpuścili stada swe przestronnym odłogiem,
psy na smyczy w obrożach dzierżąc jedną dłońią,
żeby mieć na wilka gotową pogonią.⁹⁰ (emphasis P.G)
(*Rotuły*, 2. *Przemowa na rotuły*, l. 96–100)

The phrase "over the town" suggests the high location of the place in which the shepherds kept their vigil. The similarity of descriptions in the way in which the protection from wolves is presented may be accidental. St. Luke writes about "country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night". (King James Version). Therefore, it is easy to draw a conclusion from this that sheep had to be protected from wild animals. A similar fragment can be found in the further lines:

⁸⁸ *Księga o narodzeniu Zbawiciela, o Maryi i o położnej*, ed. by Marek Starowieyski, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 325.

⁸⁹ Artists often portray shepherds as simple and poor people against the local scenery. (Urszula M. Mazurczak, op. cit 203). Here are some examples of this motif: illustrations to Medieval manuscripts: *Les Belles Heures* (Brothers Limburg, *Annunciation to Shepherds*, illustration to: anonymous author, *Les Belles Heures du Duc de Berry*, Paris 1408–1409, k. 52r.; the manuscript is now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York), and well known Renaissance works of art (for example, Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Shepherds' Adoration*, The Holy Trinity Church, Florence, 1485; Hugo van der Goes, *Shepherds' Homage* [central painting in the so called "Portinari Triptych"], Gallery Uffizi, Florence, 1476–1478).

⁹⁰ "And in that time **over the town**, not trusting servants/they have spread their herds/dogs on leashes keeping in one hand,/to be ready to chase wolves."

Bieżą tedy z weselem **na góry** zaś **znowu**

Dojrzeć, by tam samopas nie wziął zwierz obłowu.⁹¹ (emphasis P.G)
(*Przemowa na rotuły*, l. 187–188)

After paying homage to Jesus the shepherds returned to their work, which they had left (leaving the flocks unprotected) trusting in God's care. A parallel fragment can be found in *The Life of Jesus Christ*: [...] and so, joyful, they returned to their flocks.⁹²

There is a well-known motif of an angel watching a flock grazing uphill.⁹³

The shepherds, after entering the town, found the Bethlehem stable at once, because the star appeared in the sky:

A wpadszy w głuche miasto w nocny czas głęboki,
drugi cud im pokażą wesołe obłoki,
bo ogień roznieciwszy nowa gwiazda nowy
[...] wiodąc i jezdne wprzód, i pozad sługi,
promieniem [...] ubogiej stajenki sięgała [...].⁹⁴

(*V. Rotuły*, 2. *Przemowa na rotuły*, l. 131–133, 138–139)

A huge star in the context of homage paid to God is also described by the author of *The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*.⁹⁵ In *Przemyskie Considerations* the information about the fact that simple people saw a new celestial object is given *expressis verbis*:

⁹¹ “**They run** joyfully **uphill again**/to protect [their sheep] from animals”.

⁹² Baltazar Opeć, op. cit., k. Letter XIV.

⁹³ . As, among others, in the painting of Domenica Ghirlandaio, mentioned above.

⁹⁴ “And when they came to a deaf town deep at night,/merry clouds will show them the second miracle,/because the new star has lit new fire,/[...]leading the mounted servants this and that way,/it reached with its beam [...] the poor stable.”

⁹⁵ “The angels told them [shepherds] that the Saviour of people has been born, Christ our Lord, through whom the salvation of Israel will come. And from the evening till the morning the star was shining bigger than any other star seen before. This star heralded the birth of Christ, who will fulfil prophecies not only towards Israel but towards all other nations.” (*Ewangelia Pseudo-Mateusza*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 310). This motif is also present in *Ewangelia gruzińska*, *Utwory z Cyklu o Magach: Pokłonie Magów i Korespondencji Longinusa z Augustem* and in *Ewangelia Dzieciństwa Ormiańskiej*.

The shepherds started to speak to each other: let us go to Bethlehem, we will see the Babe about whom the angel told us [...]. When they came to Bethlehem they saw a new bright star. [...]⁹⁶

The star leads both the shepherds and the kings to "the stable" ("[...] first the mounted ones, after them servants" *Przemowa na rotuły*, w. 138). In *The Nativity Play* the supernatural celestial object is both an inspiration and a guide:

Co to za **gwiazda** tak bystrych promieni
od zorze aż różan<ój>
i głos ten niespodziany,
że orszak gości wielkich się nie leni
witać Króla [...]? (emphasis P.G)
(*Jaslecza*, w. 67–71)⁹⁷

This "unexpected voice" is not necessarily the voice of angels singing to Jesus. In the quoted fragment we can discern the tradition going back to the ancient *Opowieści o Magach* (*The Story of the Magi*), where we have a "mild and sweet" voice calling the Wise Men to learn about the mystery. *Historia Trium Regum* by John of Hildesheim is similar in this aspect:

At that time [the star] **bright as the sun** started rising and lit all the heavenly firmament. [...]. And there was heard a voice in this star saying: "**Today the Jewish king is born**" [...]. [...]. And therefore these Three Kings [...] with horses and mules and camels and also with treasures immense and together with many people and their great entourage, as quickly as they could **to search for the king** [...]

⁹⁶ *Rozmyślanie o żywocie Pana Jezusa...*, op. cit., 62.

⁹⁷ Alina Nowicka-Jeżowa connects the fragment about "the unexpected [...] voice" with the voices of angels praising God *łączy* fragment a (Luke, 2,13–14). "The rosy glow" is also mentioned in (*V. Rotuły*, 9. *Polihymnia*). In *Szopa zbawienna* (l. 124) there is "a new candle in the sky"; "What is **this star** of quick beams/rosy with the aurora/**and this unexpected voice**/that a large entourage is not lazy/to welcome the King?"

they started. As the voice from this star told them, they went quickly and eagerly [...] ⁹⁸ (emphasis P.G)

Kasper Miaskowski, while meditating about the mystery of the Epiphany, is cautious. Maybe he did not want to rely on apocryphal tradition following the rules of the Council of Trent.⁹⁹ However, he attempts to move beyond the laconic narration in the Gospels, and considers the true version of events—this time he does not offer any alternative version but asks the question: “What kind of star is it [...] and the voice?” The expression “great” is surely an allusion to the royal background of the Wise Men (*Przemowa na rotuły*, l. 137); “Kings’ are explicitly mentioned only in the ninth poem from the cycle *Na Boże Narodzenie* (*For Christmas*) confirmed by many apocryphal texts.¹⁰⁰ The author of *The Georgian Gospel* describes these three mysterious visitors as “great kings”.¹⁰¹ The royal background of the Wise Men

⁹⁸ *Opowieść o Magach*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 364. *Opowieść o Magach*, according to Witold Witakowski, comes from the fourth century. (Witold Witakowski, *Wstęp do: Opowieść o Magach*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 353).

⁹⁹ See Alina Nowicka-Jeżowa, *Wstęp do: Kasper Miaskowski, Zbiór rytmów*, op. cit., . 8.

¹⁰⁰ Hugo Kehrer pointed out that Tertullian was the first one to connect the Wise Men from the East with the kings from Psalm 71 (Ps 71,10) Hugo Kehrer, *Die Heiligen Drei Könige in Literatur und Kunst*, Leipzig 1908, 13. Important findings about the origin of the motif of the kings are presented in a new book by Marek Starowieyski, who wrote “that authors of some apocrypha and quite early patristic writers (for example, Tertulian) changed the exact term *Magoi*, which located the visitors to the manger quite precisely, into the wider term “kings”, which allowed for more fantasy and more exoticism into apocrypha, a feature strongly associated with it. This change was the result of the reference to the episode (Psalm, 71,10n) (Marek Starowieyski, *Gwiazda Betlejemska w apokryfach*, in *Idem, Z historii wczesnego chrześcijaństwa. Biblia, męczennicy, poganie i inni*, Kraków 2015).

¹⁰¹ *Ewangelia gruzińska*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 210–212, 214–215. The Wise Men are also ascribed royal background in *Ewangelia Arabska Jana* („*Magowie, którzy byli królami*” *Ewangelia Arabska Jana*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 237) and in *Opowieści o Magach* („*królowie, [...] zwani Magami*” *Opowieść o Magach*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 355)..

also appears in *Przemyskie Consideration, History of Three Kings* and in *The Life of Jesus Christ*.¹⁰² The majestic aspect of these figures is strengthened by the word "orszak" ("entourage"), which conveys the idea of a large number of people coming with the learned men.¹⁰³ In some apocrypha the monarchs are accompanied by huge caravans, consisting of a few thousand people. As is the case in *History of Three Kings*.¹⁰⁴

A specific mixture of a canonical and extra-canonical text is offered by fragments mentioning the countries of the mysterious wanderers, often inspired by Psalm 71.¹⁰⁵ The Biblical author lists inhabitants of Africa, Tarsus, Arabic countries and the kingdom of Saba.¹⁰⁶ Kasper Miaskowski points to India as a country from which the Wise Men came, as he mentions the river Ganges,¹⁰⁷ or giving the name

¹⁰² *Rozmyślanie o żywocie Pana Jezusa...*, op. cit., 67; Baltazar Opeć, op. cit., k. Letter. XVv

¹⁰³ The word "poczty" ("detachments")—quite often used by Miaskowski—has a similar function (*Szopa zbawienna*, l. 123; *Wiersze na Boże Narodzenie*: 8. *Na zaczynanie Nowego Roku*, l. 45; 9. *Na święto Trzech Królów*, l. 1). A caravan, of course, requires animals:—in *Szopa zbawienna* the Wise Men ride their horses (l. 125–126), in *Na zaczynanie Nowego Roku* they ride "swift camels" (l. 51).

¹⁰⁴ In *The Georgian Gospel* each of the three kings took "four thousand priests and four thousand people" (*Ewangelia gruzińska*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelia apokryficzne*, op. cit., 210–211), 12 thousand people are listed in (*Ewangelia Dzieciństwa Ormiańska*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelia apokryficzne*, op. cit., 475). In *The Arabic Gospel of John* we have "three thousand people" who travelled together with the Wise Men (*Ewangelia Arabska Jana*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelia apokryficzne*, op. cit., 238). This motif is often used in art, for example in the painting of Domenico Ghirlandaia referred to in footnote 87, and also in the painting (Sandro Botticelli, *Adoration of the Magi*, Uffizi Gallery, Florence, 1500).

¹⁰⁵ Inspiration from the psalms is also visible, for example in: *Jasieczka*, l. 73–74; the song of *Urania* (*Rotuły*, 10. *Urania*, l. 17–18), and in *Wierszy na Boże Narodzenie* (8. *Na zaczynanie Nowego Roku*, l. 61–64).

¹⁰⁶ "They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts." (Psalm 72, 9–10) (King James Version).

¹⁰⁷ *Jasieczka* (l. 47), *Szopa zbawienna*, (l. 106) and *Przemowa na rotuły* (l. 135).

directly (10. *Urania*, l. 17–18). The Indian origin of the Wise Men is probably grounded in apocryphal literature—one of them came from India according to: *The Georgian Gospel* and *The Armenian Gospel of Childhood*.¹⁰⁸ The author of *The History of Three Kings* writes about rulers,

[...] who in these lands, in India and Persia and Caldeia ruled.¹⁰⁹

The Persian roots of the Wise Men also intrigued Miaskowski. However, he proposes them in a very subtle way—the visitors paying homage to Jesus, his lips seem to be like purple “which adorns Persian markets” (*Szopa zbawienna*, l. 154).¹¹⁰ Miaskowski is not certain about the Wise Men’s nationality (the Biblical fragment telling about the homage of the Wise Men includes only the very general information that they were from the East), so he provides a couple of different versions. This situation is best seen in one fragment from “Introduction to Rotuły”

[...] tam, kędy wymiatają piaskmi na ostrowy
bądź Indus, bądź Efrates, albo z opoczyst<ej>
góry Tygrys, spychając pław swój przeźroczysty [...]¹¹¹

(*V. Rotuły, 2. Przemowa na rotuły*, l. 134–136)

¹⁰⁸ *Ewangelia gruzińska*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 210–211; *Ewangelia Dzieciństwa Ormiańska*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 475.

¹⁰⁹ *Cały świat nie pomieściłby ksiąg...*, op. cit., 215.

¹¹⁰ Persia as the homeland of the Wise Men is located in : *Ewangelia gruzińska* (*Ewangelia gruzińska*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 210), *Ewangelia Dzieciństwa Ormiańska* (*Ewangelia Dzieciństwa Ormiańska*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 475), *Ewangelia Arabska Jana* (*Ewangelia Arabska Jana*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 238), and the texts from *The Cycle of Three Magi* (*Cykl o Trzech Magach*, in *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne*, op. cit., 350n

¹¹¹ “Where sands are blown onto islands/or Indus, or Euphrates/or from the huge mountain Tigris pushes its transparent weight”,

Miaskowski at times connects the origin of the Wise Men with the context of the universality of the Salvation.¹¹²

Kasper Miaskowski's imagination was not immune to suggestive Christmas motifs present in apocrypha. The straightforward and certain answer to the questions about the firmness and durability of certain extra canonical Christmas components in Polish literature of the early seventeenth century seems to be impossible, although iconographic presentations are clearly discernible elements of this transmission (we should also not forget about the influence of Christmas carols). Despite the sharp critique of *fabulas aniles*, authors of this period often used the rich pool of apocrypha. A considerable part of extra canonical motifs was only concrete representation of the scenes from the Gospels fixed in the common imagination (Jesus's place of birth may be used as an example here), and as such it was not a threat to Roman Catholic orthodoxy, while extra canonical elements going beyond the Gospels had to be kept within the borders of "narrative reliability".¹¹³ Ideally, they should have been supported by the authority of the Fathers of the Church. It was only then that they could serve meditation of the mystery.

¹¹² In "Urania" (V. *Rotuły*, 10. *Urania*, w. 17–18) and in the poem *Na zaczynanie Nowego Roku* (VI. *Wiersze na Boże Narodzenie*, 8. *Na zaczynanie Nowego Roku*, l. 61–64).

¹¹³ Alina Nowicka-Jeżowa, *Wstęp* : K. Miaskowski, *Zbiór rytmów*, op. cit., 8.