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THE OLDEST EXTANT PROSE TEXT IN THE
POLISH LANGUAGE. THE PHENOMENON OF
THE *HOLY CROSS SERMONS*

*The finely edited Holy Cross Sermons are a unique phenomenon
against the background of our medieval prose.¹*

1. WHERE DO THE *Sermons* COME FROM?

When on 25 March 1890 Aleksander Brückner found the *Holy Cross Sermons* in manuscript Lat.I.Q.281 of the Imperial Public Library of St. Petersburg, it seemed fairly obvious to him that they must have been created in a Benedictine monastery, the Święty Krzyż [Holy Cross] Abbey, since their parchment remnants were concealed in the binding of a 15th-century paper codex from that abbey. This possibility was further acknowledged by Paul Diels, the next editor of the *Sermons*,² other researchers also assumed this conjecture to be almost natural. However, in 1943 Władysław Semkowicz, the subsequent editor of this monumental work, strongly countered this assumption.³ He concluded that the codex where the fragments of the *Sermons* were discovered had been kept far away in Leżajsk before it was brought to Łysa Góra [Bald Mountain]. This was clearly demonstrated by a note of origin on the first parchment leaf of the codex. In the note, reading: *Iste liber est monasterii Sancte Crucis in Monte Liszecz*, the words *monasterii Sancte Crucis in Monte Liszecz* were written over an erasure, in a place where – instead of the name of the Holy Cross Monastery – the previous words *in Lansensco anno d. 1445* could be found. Hence, the manuscript must have been kept in Leżajsk before, and since that was the place where the Order of the Holy Sepulchre (also

1 J. Woronczak, "Polskość i europejskość literatury naszego średniowiecza" [Polishness and Europeaness in the Literature of our Middle Ages], in *Studia o literaturze średniowiecza i renesansu*, Wrocław, 1993, p. 37.

2 P. Diels (ed.), *Die altpolnischen Predigten aus Heiligenkreuz. Mit Einleitung, Übersetzung und Wortverzeichnis*, Berlin, 1921.

3 J. Łoś, W. Semkowicz, *Kazania tzw. świętokrzyskie*, Kraków, 1934. The *Holy Cross Sermons* were also published by F. Kortlandt, J. Schaeken: this edition, however, provides nothing but an account of the lections of all the other editors to date.



Fig. 1. The Holy Cross Sermons

known as the Order of Miechów) was active, it must have also been in the monastery of this Order that the *Sermons* were cut into strips and utilised in the binding of the codex. The book, in turn, was brought to Leżajsk from the original dwelling of the Order in Miechów. According to Semkowicz, it was also in Miechów that the Polish *Sermons* were once written down.⁴ The codex had supposedly reached the Holy Cross Monastery after 1459, as on the night from 7 to 8 October that year, a fire broke out there and – as Semkowicz thought – the entire library burnt down. In the following years, efforts were made to reconstruct it by acquiring and copying books, which were supposedly generously contributed by Michał of Kleparz, the abbot at that time. It was presumably then that the codex with the Polish *Sermons* in its binding came from Leżajsk as a donation or acquisition. In order to simplify the ex libris inscription, a part of the old inscription of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre was scratched out, with the Holy Cross being substituted for Leżajsk. This hypothesis of Semkowicz was widely accepted by researchers for many years.⁵

4 Semkowicz associated the *Holy Cross Sermons* with Stanisław, son of Stojkon of Książ, doctor of decrees, parish priest of the monastery of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre in Miechów from 1384 to 1395, and preacher. He presumed that the manuscript of the *Sermons* had formed part of the “homily literature gathered at the monastery of Miechów, and might have even been used by Stojkon’s son himself in his daily activities” (Semkowicz, “Przedmowa” [Preface] in Łos, Semkowicz (eds.), *Kazania tzw. świętokrzyskie ...*, p. 17).

5 Let us note that Semkowicz’s hypothesis, although strongly documented, had one essential defect: if we agree that the *Holy Cross Sermons* were published in the first half of the 14th century (possibly during the reign of king Władysław I the Elbow-high), there is little probability that they could have originated in the monastery of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre in Miechów. The Order of the Holy Sepulchre, or the Canons Regular of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem under the rule of St. Augustine, was created in 1099 in Jerusalem to protect the tomb of Jesus Christ. They also ran a hospital and a guesthouse. Following the fall of Jerusalem, the Order spread throughout Europe. They came to Poland in 1163 to build churches, hospitals and homes for the poor in locations such as Gniezno, Nysa, Bytom, Pyzdry and Miechów. Like the others, the Order of Miechów was from the very beginning almost exclusively composed of foreigners, predominantly Germans, Bohemians and Germanised Silesians (an ethnic enclave weakly connected with the Polish society). During the fights for the unification of the Polish lands, they strongly supported Wenceslaus II of Bohemia. In revenge, the army of Władysław I the Elbow-high plundered Miechów and the monastery in 1297 and 1300. Also, in 1311, when Bishop Muskata and Albert, Mayor of Cracow, rose against Władysław I the Elbow-high with the intention of placing John of Bohemia (John the Blind) on the Polish throne, the monastery of Miechów joined in the conspiracy. Upon pacification of the rebellion, Władysław I the Elbow-high occupied Miechów and expelled the foreign monks. They came back in 1314 due to admonitions from Rome, but from then on the priors were Polish; nonetheless, ethnic conflicts within the order lasted for many years, up to the first half of the 15th century. These specific circumstances of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre in the late 13th and early 14th century in Poland make it hardly probable that the text of the *Sermons* could have been created in such an environment, and even less that it could have been written there in the form as we know it. For the *Holy Cross Sermons* are a literary masterpiece and a monumental text demonstrating a high culture of writing in Polish. No Polish texts from Miechów earlier than from the 15th century are known. The atmosphere there was not favourable to the creation of such texts. While there is little probability that foreign friars could practise preaching in Polish at such a high level of proficiency, it seems even less likely that they owned a scriptorium where a considerably long tradition of copying Polish manuscripts would have let them develop such a coherent and meticulous brachygraphic system. Therefore, the creation of the *Sermons* (or their copy) should not be associated at all with Miechów or the Order of the Holy Sepulchre in Leżajsk. See also i.a. Z. Pęckowski, *Miechów. Studia z dziejów*

However, recent findings by Marek Derwich⁶ lead us to definitively reject Semkowicz's proposal concerning the place where the *Holy Cross Sermons* were written as well as the way he reconstructed the trajectory of the codex in whose binding they were used. First and foremost, it turns out that on that fatal night of October 1459, not all of the manuscripts of the Holy Cross Monastery were burnt. Only those kept in monastic cells were destroyed, while the library as such survived, as is proven by the fact that not long before World War II, Maria Hornowska and Halina Zdzitowiecka-Jasińska described codices from Bald Mountain that were surely created before the fire of 1459 (they did not go up in flames until another month of October, in 1944, together with the manuscripts of the National Library of Poland). One of the codices described by the researchers, Lat.I.F.229, written in 1446 and 1447, contained an invaluable colophon where a Benedictine monk from the Holy Cross Monastery, called Piotr of Borzyków, stated that he had completed his writing at the Hermitage of St. Mary Magdalene near Leżajsk.⁷ Following this trace, Derwich rightly ascertained that codex Lat.I.Q.281, where the strips with the *Holy Cross Sermons* were found, had not belonged to the Order of the Holy Sepulchre (Order of Miechów) in Leżajsk, thus the *Sermons* could not have come to Leżajsk from their monastery in Miechów, and speculations that the *Sermons* had been written in Miechów were equally unfounded. According to the researcher, the Order of the Holy Sepulchre did not arrive in Leżajsk until approximately 1450–1458. Before, probably from 1423 to ca. 1450, Benedictines from the Holy Cross Monastery owned the hermitage of St. Mary Magdalene in this area.⁸ Consequently, Derwich claims that codex Lat.I.Q.281 was owned by the Benedictines from Bald Mountain from the very start and created either at the hermitage in the Leżajsk area or at the Holy Cross Abbey, or possibly partly in

miasta i ziemi miechowskiej do roku 1914 [Miechów. Studies in the History of the Town and its Region up to 1914], Kraków, 1967, pp. 50-53, 250, 311, 315, 362; see also: "Bożogrobcy" [Order of the Holy Sepulchre], in *Encyklopedia Katolicka* 2, 877-882 (with an extensive bibliography).

- 6 M. Derwich, "Kazania świętokrzyskie' a benedyktyni lysogórscy," *Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis. Historia* 76 (1112), Wrocław, 1989, pp. 189-199; Idem, "Działalność benedyktynów lysogórskich w XV wieku" [Activity of the Benedictines from Łysa Góra in the 15th century], *Kwartalnik Historyczny* 97, 1990, 3-4, pp. 37-57; M. Derwich, *Benedyktyński klasztor św. Krzyża na Łysej Górze w średniowieczu*, Warszawa, 1992, p. 524.
- 7 M. Hornowska, H. Zdzitowiecka-Jasińska, *Zbiory rękopiśmienne w Polsce średniowiecznej* [Manuscript Collections in Medieval Poland], Warszawa, 1947, p. 332. The above-mentioned colophon reads as follows: "*Finis Gloze super Cantica canticorum conscripta est in loco heremi sanctae Marie Magdalene post Lanzensko per fratrem Petrum baccalaureum exulem Monasterii S. C.*". Joachim Lelewel had the same manuscript in his possession, see J. Lelewel, *Bibliograficznych ksiąg dwoje* [...] Two Bibliographical Books [...], Wilno, 1826, vol. 2, p. 88 (The author mentions two copyists of this manuscript, Piotr of Borzyków and Paweł).
- 8 According to M. Derwich, the Benedictine hermitage in Leżajsk was established in 1421-1424, "most probably in 1423," and "disappeared shortly after 1447." See Derwich, "Kazania świętokrzyskie'..." p. 193, and Idem, *Materiały do słownika historyczno-geograficznego dóbr i dochodów dziesięcinnych benedyktyńskiego opactwa św. Krzyża na Łysej Górze do 1819 r.* [Preparatory materials for a historical and geographic dictionary of goods and revenues subject to the tithes of the Benedictine Abbey of the Holy Cross Monastery on the Bald Mountain until 1819], Wrocław, 2000, p. 109.

both places. Then it was probably bound at the Holy Cross Monastery, with the manuscript containing the text of the *Sermons* being cut into strips and used as part of the binding. Derwich believes the *Sermons* as such could have been written at the Holy Cross Monastery:

[...] in the early 14th century, and they were certainly copied in this abbey in the mid-14th century. This is also where they were kept and used until approximately the mid-15th century when, as they had become linguistically and artistically obsolete, they were cut into strips by a bookbinder from the Benedictine monastery and recycled to form part of the binding of codex Lat.I.Q.281. We do not know whether they had ever made the journey to the hermitage near Leżajsk, as they might not have been destroyed until after 1445, although probably before 1461.⁹

Shortly thereafter, Ryszard Skrzyniarz came up with a rather unusual hypothesis on the origin and trajectory of the *Sermons*, firmly opposing the views of M. Derwich.¹⁰ This researcher pointed to Iwo Odrowąż, Bishop of Cracow in the years 1218–1229, as the author of the *Sermons*, who presumably wrote them down “around 1218, before 1227”, and then donated them to the Norbertines from Ibrahimowice where his sister Gertruda was the abbess, while “between before 1227 and around the end of the 14th century”, the manuscript probably reached the Order of the Holy Sepulchre in the monastery in Miechów, where approximately between 1408 and 1430 the parchment was cut into strips and utilised in the codex binding.¹¹ As this outline of the *Sermons*’ history lacks reliable grounds, there are no reasons to discuss it further. It is based solely on the fact that Iwo Odrowąż, considered to be an educated personality, is traditionally mentioned among those figures of the Polish Church believed to be the first ones to support preaching in the vernacular language, while Ibrahimowice appears in the manuscript’s itinerary only because the abbess of this convent was his sister.

Derwich is undoubtedly right, since the Benedictine hermitage of St. Mary Magdalene “in Lansensco” certainly existed and must have been a convenient lo-

9 Derwich, “Kazania świętokrzyskie’...,” p. 198. 1461 is the year of the reconsecration of the Bald Mountain Monastery after the fire.

10 In his book, mysteriously entitled *Kazania świętokrzyskie. Przepowiadanie w XIII w.* [The Holy Cross Sermons. Preaching in the 13th Century], Lublin, 2001, and in the following articles: “Kazania świętokrzyskie a bożogrobcy,” *Archiwa, Biblioteki i Muzea Kościelne* 64, 1995, pp. 595-600, and “Problem autorstwa *Kazań świętokrzyskich*,” *Archiwa, Biblioteki i Muzea Kościelne* 72, 1999, pp. 461-466. The researcher also incorporated his views into the entry *The Holy Cross Sermons* in the Catholic Encyclopaedia [Encyklopedia Katolicka] with a high degree of certitude and disregarding other positions: “Kazania świętokrzyskie,” *Encyklopedia Katolicka*, v. 8, col. 1260-1263. See also T. Mika, “Jak się Mojżesz palił w krzaku, czyli uwagi na marginesie książki R. Skrzyniarza,” *Język Polski* 83, 2003, pp. 217-223.

11 Skrzyniarz, *Kazania świętokrzyskie...*, p. 159; see also R. Skrzyniarz, “Kazania świętokrzyskie’ a duszpasterstwo benedyktynów lysogórskich w średniowieczu,” in D. Olszewskiego & R. Gryza (eds.), *Klasztor na Świętym Krzyżu w polskiej kulturze narodowej*, Kielce, 2000, p. 72.

cation not only to store books, but also to copy them.¹² However, we can hardly agree with Derwich's other speculations that are significant for the research on the origin of the *Holy Cross Sermons*. The author claims that codex Lat.I.Q.281, where Brückner discovered the *Sermons*, could have been created "both at the abbey and at the hermitage", "but was [...] without any doubt bound at the abbey",¹³ which is unlikely. The codex, made entirely of paper, written by the hand of a single copyist, comprised 230 leaves and had an additional parchment leaf at the beginning and at the end. The proprietary note featuring the words "in Lansensco" was placed on the first parchment leaf. It was against the practice of that time – and therefore seems hardly acceptable as a hypothesis – to indicate that a manuscript belonged to the hermitage in Leżajsk on loose, copied impositions which were subsequently brought to the Holy Cross Abbey, where they were bound and at the same time had their proprietary note partly erased, so that Leżajsk could be replaced by the Holy Cross Monastery. What makes it even less likely is the fact that the note in question was found on an additional leaf (antefolium - flyleaf), only incorporated in the binding process to better protect the book. Consequently, the manuscript was already placed inside a binding concealing the pieces of the *Holy Cross Sermons* as early as in 1445, at the St. Mary Magdalene Hermitage in the Leżajsk area.¹⁴ As to the way it got to the Benedictine hermitage, we are left with speculations. It might have been written there (which is quite probable) or brought from the Holy Cross Monastery (to equip the hermitage), or it could as well have been a donation of the monasteries of Sieciechów or Tyniec, since – as Derwich writes: "in the second half of the 13th century and the first half of the 14th century, very strong and interesting connections existed between the Benedictine abbeys of Lesser Poland, wherein Tyniec was the mother abbey in respect of Łysiec and Sieciechów".¹⁵ Together with this codex – in its binding – the *Holy Cross Sermons* continued their journey. Where was it decided to recycle their manuscript and utilise it in the codex binding? An answer to this question would probably allow us to establish the place where the *Sermons* came from. Many ar-

12 The time when the Benedictines from the Holy Cross Monastery, followed by the Order of the Holy Sepulchre from Miechów, arrived in Leżajsk has not been proven by Derwich in a firm and fully convincing way, however, it is certain that the Benedictines owned a hermitage there in the first half of the 15th century. See also the discussion between R. Skrzyniarz and M. Derwich in Skrzyniarz, "Kazania świętokrzyskie..." and Skrzyniarz, "Problem autorstwa *Kazań świętokrzyskich*..."; compare also I. Rusecki, M. Wrzeszcz, "Leżajsk," in *Encyklopedia Katolicka* 10, 918–921).

13 Derwich, "Kazania świętokrzyskie'...", p. 194. Derwich adds further that "we cannot exclude a situation similar to the one which took place during the copying of manuscript Lat.F.I.229, which, as we remember, was written partly at the Bald Mountain Monastery and partly at the hermitage." Nonetheless, the history of manuscript Lat.I.F.229 (p. 193) he provides is nothing but loose speculation.

14 Additionally, Derwich's reflexions on the "typical 15th-century book binding from the Bald Mountain" (Derwich, "Kazania świętokrzyskie'...", pp. 194-195), based on descriptions by Semkiewicz, Hornowska and Zdzitowiecka-Jasińska, are equally unconvincing. These descriptions are as superficial as to match most bindings of medieval codices and incunabula.

15 Ibid., p. 198.

guments exist in favour of the Benedictine abbey as well as the Holy Cross connections: the abbey in Łysiec and its hermitage in the Leżajsk area. Could the *Holy Cross Sermons* really have come from the Holy Cross after all?

According to Derwich, the origin of the *Holy Cross Sermons* should be associated with the pastoral office of the Benedictines among the believers, who came in great numbers to visit the Holy Cross Sanctuary because of the relics of the True Cross kept there. Thus, the Sermons would have been addressed to the pilgrims. This proposition might be acceptable provided that we are talking about a special and rare sort of pilgrim, well educated and with a highly developed artistic sensitivity. Derwich indicates Mikołaj Drozdek (died in 1433), a Benedictine monk from the Holy Cross Monastery, abbot and preacher, as having utilized the *Sermons*.¹⁶ This hypothesis is hard to question, however, the *Sermons* must have represented for Drozdek nothing but a venerable artefact back then, as the times and the manner of preaching had already changed.

2. ON THE MANUSCRIPT OF THE *Holy Cross Sermons*

The *Holy Cross Sermons* are made of two double parchment leaves in *octavo* format, i.e. two folios; one of them (ff. b and c) has been preserved almost in its entirety, while only the lower part of the other (ff. a and d) has survived until today. The folios probably formed part of a *ternio* imposition, as one double leaf is missing between ff. b and c (the sermon for St. Nicolas' Day begins on f. bv, while the rest of this sermon is missing as well as the initial part of the Christmas sermon which can be found on ff. cr and cv). Folio a must have been preceded by a folio with the beginning of the Sermon for St. Michael's Day, and f. d was probably followed by a folio where the *Sermon for the Purification of St. Mary the Virgin* continued. The manuscript was written rather studiously in Gothic minuscule with an italic tendency. Before the copyist started to work on it, he ruled the leaves and marked out the margins. While writing, he was leaving blank spaces for initials to be painted in, probably with rubrum ("S" on f. br, "D" on f. bv and "V" on f. dv). Attention was apparently paid to the visual aspect of the manuscript; however, it still cannot be considered to be one of the co-called solemn manuscripts. It contained a rather selective collection of sermons *de tempore et de sanctis*, as it omitted many important holidays between St. Michael's Day and the Purification of St. Mary the Virgin. The sermons may, after all, have been selected on purpose from another collection. Many speculations might be offered, but preaching codices with sermons for different occasions put together are nothing rare. It is also hard to establish the original size of the manuscript, however, the number of the extant sermons suggests that it consisted of three impositions in total.

As codex Lat.I.Q.281 – where the *Sermons* were discovered – no longer exists, we have to rely on what Semkowicz communicated in this respect. It comprised

16 Ibid., pp. 195-196; Derwich, *Benedyktynski klasztor św...*, p. 524.

the Apostolic Letters and the Acts of the Apostles as well as the Revelation of St. John written in its entirety in the hand of one copyist. As it possessed no colophon, Semkowicz based his dating solely on the script and the filigrees which appeared on the paper (this kind of dating is always approximate). These data clearly indicated that the manuscript had been created in the first half of the 15th century, and undoubtedly before 1445, when it could already be found in Leżajsk, completely bound. Understandably, at the time when the codex was bound and the leaves of the *Holy Cross Sermons* – cut into strips – were used as supporting pieces placed under the strings, the *Sermons* must have certainly seemed outdated and disposable. In the first half of the 15th century they were already an unfamiliar text, written in a completely different spirit and with rules of orthography which were nothing like those from the *Sermons of Gniezno*, for example, written at the same time when the *Holy Cross Sermons* were handed over to a bookbinder as waste paper. In the end, the possible reasons for this are nothing but conjecture. These could be various, for example a text written in Polish might not have been considered to be as valuable as one written in Latin. Their elitist style did not fit with the universalist 15th-century preaching anymore, perhaps also the community they were addressed to no longer existed.¹⁷ How many years older were the *Holy Cross Sermons* than the codex where the bookbinder placed them?

The strips of the *Sermons* hidden in codex Lat.I.Q.281 were dated by Semkowicz as well as by Brückner to the first half of the 14th century, based on the script, as mentioned above, using Gothic minuscule with an italic tendency.¹⁸ Almost all researchers agree in this respect. Nevertheless, Semkowicz was apparently eager to date the text more precisely to the early 14th century. He pointed to the old, still

17 Compare E. Ostrowska, “Kompozycja i artyzm językowy „Kazań świętokrzyskich,” in Idem, *Z dziejów języka polskiego I jego piękna. Studia I szkice*, Kraków, 1978, p. 99: “The specific rhetoric system of the *Holy Cross Sermons* might have been the reason why in the 15th century they ceased to be a desirable library item. The same thing might have happened to them as to the Roman churches, demolished or at least refurbished to become Gothic temples.”

18 See W. Semkowicz, *Paleografia łacińska*, Kraków, 1951, p. 474. Semkowicz concludes his thorough observations on the script in a different and less categorical manner: “Some features of the script are more typical for the first rather than the second half of the 14th century, therefore, we cannot exclude the possibility that the text could have been written in the second half of the 14th century by an elderly person still using some graphic features acquired in his youth” (Semkowicz, “Przedmowa” [Preface], in Łos, Semkowicz (eds.) *Kazania tzw. świętokrzyskie ...*, p. 11). This cautiousness seems excessive, as it is hard to imagine that between 1351 and 1400 a text could be copied with such a script and such rules of Polish orthography. Elsewhere (in a review of the edition of the *Holy Cross Sermons* published by P. Diels in 1921), Semkowicz justifies his tentative statements: “A Polish palaeographer would be willing to date the time when the *Sermons* were written down back to the early 14th century if he did not acknowledge the competencies of linguists as far as graphics are concerned, therefore, as a number of archaic features can be found in the text of the *Sermons* (e.g. an old style letter *a*), he probably has to attribute them to the age of the writer” (W. Semkowicz [review], “Diels Paul, „Die altpolnischen Predigten aus Heiligenkreuz” in *Rocznik Slawistyczny* 9, 1921-22, part 2 (1925), p. 207). Certainly, the dating of the text (and of the basis from which the *Sermons* were copied, which I will discuss further) was also influenced by the fact that the poem *Vado mori* quoted in the *Sermons* was known in Semkowicz’s times from a source dated to the late 13th or early 14th century.

13th-century features of the script such as the way the letter *a* was written and the fact that the copyist used the long *s* not only at the beginning and in the middle of a word, but also (with a few exceptions in Latin words) at the end of it (from the 14th century on, a round *s* was always written at the end of a word).¹⁹ Because of that, he would date the time when the *Sermons* were written further back to the beginning of the 14th century, which seems most reasonable. The manuscript cut into strips seems closer to the early years of the 14th century than to its midpoint.

3. THE WRITING SYSTEM AND THE TIME

WHEN THE *Sermons* WERE CREATED

The *Holy Cross Sermons* as found in the binding of codex Lat.I.Q.281 are without any doubt a copy of a previous manuscript. That lost original (autograph) is generally believed to have been written in the 13th century, however, as far as its dating is concerned, the time range stretches over almost a century: some researchers locate it towards the early 13th century,²⁰ while others believe it was written in the middle of it,²¹ at its end, or at the turn of the 13th and 14th centuries.²²

In the more precise dating of the *Sermons* attempted by Łoś and Semkowicz (continuing Diels's works), much importance was given to the *Vado mori* poem evoked in the *Sermon for the Day of Epiphany*. It was believed to corroborate the claim that the "*Sermons* could not have been created earlier than the very end of the 13th century", since the earliest source of this composition dates back to the 13th century, while it became popular mainly in the 14th and 15th centuries.²³ Ewa Ostrowska²⁴ is right to state that at present the poem *Vado mori* is not regarded as a decisive factor, as it was created either at the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries or not very much later.²⁵

The uncomplicated graphic aspect of the *Sermons* distinguishes them neatly from all the later exemplars in the Polish language. It builds on the early experi-

19 I would add to these older features the use of the letter *z* with no bar.

20 Compare Ostrowska, "Kompozycja i artyzm językowy...", p. 100; Skrzyniarz, *Kazania świętokrzyskie..., passim*.

21 Compare e.g. T. Witezak, "Kazania świętokrzyskie," in *Dawni pisarze polscy od początków piśmiennictwa do Młodej Polski. Przewodnik biograficzny i bibliograficzny*, v. 2, Warszawa, 2001, p. 110 ("at the beginning of the second half of the 13th century").

22 Compare e.g. T. Michałowska, *Średniowiecze*, Warszawa, 1995, p. 310.

23 Łoś, Semkowicz, *Kazania tzw. świętokrzyskie ...*, pp. 41, 42.

24 Ostrowska, "Kompozycja i artyzm językowy..." p. 100.

25 Compare C. Pirożyńska, Łacińska "Rozmowa mistrza Polikarpa ze śmiercią" – "*Dialogus magistri Polycarpi cum morte*" [The Latin Dialogue between Master Polycarp and Death – *Dialogus magistri Polycarpi cum morte*], in J. Lewański (ed.), "Średniowiecze", *Studia o kulturze*, vol. 3, Wrocław, 1966, p. 85; Mejor, "Łacińskie cytaty...", pp. 30-32.

ence of graphic practices related to diplomas and documents from before the 14th century, when writers limited themselves to the set of letters of the Latin alphabet, interpolating Polish words as needed (names of people and places, occasionally other single words), and to a large extent disregarding significant phonetic differences inherent in the Polish language. Some Latin letters were versatile, ambiguous, and required the reader to be prepared and perform much interpretative work, as they visually represented the oral language. Spelling was highly “subjective and spontaneous”,²⁶ and deciphering Polish interpolations in Latin texts was probably as troublesome at that time as it is today. Naturally, graphic records of Polish words from that period should not be disregarded, as the Polish writing system was used in many diplomatic documents with considerable care, or at least with consistence. The writing system of the *Sermons* – elaborated during the three centuries of the Polish Middle Ages in the chanceries of the Piast dynasty and monastic scriptoria – was rather simple. The difference between the *Sermons* and such isolated documents consists in the fact that the former is the very first large, continuous text, rather than individual words, in the history of the Polish language; it is also evident that its writing system is already well designed,²⁷ and so is its punctuation²⁸ and system of abbreviations (discussed further). Stanisław Rospond rightly asserts that the writing system used in this monumental text is “inseparably linked to a 13th-century scriptorium which used a writing system we know from diplomas”.²⁹ At the same time, researchers point out that a certain double nature can be noticed both in the writing system and the language of the *Sermons* (for example the spelling of *trsy* on cv 21 or *g* which is to be read as *j*, features typical for later manuscripts). Newer structures meet old ones. This was noted by such researchers as Brückner,³⁰ Łoś³¹ and Rospond.³² “The text of the *Sermons* represents a mix of orthographic and linguistic properties that are very old or surprisingly new, not yet dominant in artefacts of the 14th-century lan-

26 Compare I. Winiarska, “Kazania świętokrzyskie” – pomnik prozy polskiej. Uwagi historyka języka” [The ‘Holy Cross Sermons’ - a monument of Polish prose. Remarks on the history of language], *Rocznik Biblioteki Narodowej* 35, 2003, pp. 160-162. The article provides an excellent summary of the state of research on the *Holly Cross Sermons*. See also S. Urbańczyk, “Rozwój ortografii polskiej” [Evolution of Polish Orthography], *Język Polski* 35, 1955, pp. 81-84; S. Rospond, “O monografii pt. ‘Dzieje polskiej pisowni’” [On a Monograph Entitled “History of Polish Orthography”], *Język Polski* 53, 1973, pp. 172-180.

27 See Winiarska, “Kazania świętokrzyskie’...”, p. 165 and *passim*; S. Rospond, *Dawność mazurzenia w świetle grafiki staropolskiej*, Wrocław, 1957, pp. 208-228.

28 Compare with J. Godyń, “Retoryka w pieśni pasyjnej Władysława z Gielniowa, ‘Psalterzu floriańskim’ i ‘Kazaniach tzw. świętokrzyskich.’ (Funkcje średniowiecznej interpunkcji),” *Ruch Literacki* 37, 1996, v. 6, pp. 681-683.

29 Rospond, *Dawność mazurzenia...*, p. 209.

30 A. Brückner (ed.), “Kazania świętokrzyskie,” *Prace Filologiczne* 3, 1891, p. 725.

31 J. Łoś & K. Nitsch, “Czas powstania kazań,” in J. Łoś & W. Semkowicz (eds.), *Kazania tzw. Świętokrzyskie*, Kraków, 1934, pp. 44-45.

32 Rospond, *Dawność mazurzenia...*

guage,” Łoś writes.³³ The modern features should probably be attributed to the copyist rather than to the author of the *Sermons*.

Contrary to the claims of Ostrowska (and Skrzyniarz), the *Holy Cross Sermons* should not be dated back to the mid-12th century; it seems more reasonable to continue dating them to the late 13th century or possibly to the turn of the 13th and 14th centuries. While referring to the extensive literature on the language and writing system of the *Sermons*, let us point out one very important grapheme, namely “Ø”, consistently used by the copyist to mark nasal vowels. Since it was first used in a document of 1285³⁴ (and for the second time in 1300), it was there to stay as part of medieval Polish spelling. It was the first letter containing a diacritic in the history of the Polish orthography, which makes us believe that it must have been after 1285, at the end of the 13th century, that the original version of the *Sermons* was created. We will come back to the dating of the autograph later in this article.

4. COPY OF A COPY

The extant manuscript of the *Holy Cross Sermons* is a copy. This is beyond any doubt. The mistakes the writer corrected bear it out, which will not be discussed here in detail, as their exhaustive account has been provided by Łoś.³⁵ Crossed-out words and letters can be found in the *Sermons* along with words and letters added between the text lines and in the margins, erasures, and corrected letters. When turning his eyes from the copied manuscript to the parchment in front of him, the copyist was making mistakes. It would appear that he sometimes amended them immediately, but it probably happened more often as he was proofreading the copied text after finishing an entire leaf or passage of text.

Furthermore, the extant *Sermons* are probably a copy of another copy executed from the autograph. This hypothesis is supported by the Latin glosses incorpo-

33 J. Łoś & K. Nitsch, “Czas powstania kazań”, p. 44. See also Winiarska, “Kazania świętokrzyskie’...”. Here, we shall also add a simplification in the spelling of consonant clusters joining prepositions, such as: <z> *stadla* (bv 37), <z> *stapi* (cr 16), <z> *świętq* (cr 20), typical for documents from the 15th and the first half of the 16th century.

34 This symbol was used in the word *KØblou* (=Kłębów) in a document drawn up at the chancery of Prokop, chancellor of king Bolesław V the Chaste, and subsequently of Leszek the Black and Przemysł II. The letter *O* slashed in various ways (standing for a variant of *ą*^o) is of Anglo-Saxon or Old Norse origin. According to Rospond, it was introduced in Poland by Iro-Scottish Benedictines. See S. Rospond, “Problem genezy polskiego języka literackiego” [On the Origin of the Polish Literary Language], *Pamiętnik Literacki* 44, 1953, pp. 516-520; Idem, “Z badań nad stosunkami językowymi polsko-czeskimi do XVI w.” [Studies on Polish-Bohemian Literary Contacts up to the 16th century], in *Rozprawy Komisji Językowej Wrocławskiego Towarzystwa Naukowego*, vol. 4, 1963, pp. 138-139; Idem, *Kościół w dziejach języka polskiego* [The Church in the History of the Polish Language], Wrocław, 1985, p. 27; M. Sulisz, *Staropolska fonetyka w świetle materiału onomastycznego do XIV wieku* [Old Polish Phonetics against the Backdrop of the Onomastic Material up to the 14th Century], Warszawa – Wrocław, 1976, i.a. pp. 54, 59; B. Dunaj, *Język polski najstarszej doby piśmiennej (XII-XIII w.)* [The Polish Language of the Earliest Literate Era (12th-13th century)], Kraków, 1975, pp. 16, 54, 59.

35 J. Łoś & K. Nitsch, “Czas powstania kazań”, p. 44.

rated into the text by the copyist or (what is more likely) by the copyist of the copy used by the person copying out the *Sermons*.

Brückner and Łoś indicated that the *Sermons* had some literary value, however, the virtuosity of this monument of the Polish language was only discovered by Julian Krzyżanowski³⁶ and developed in a detailed study by Ostrowska,³⁷ where she succeeded in demonstrating that the *Holy Cross Sermons* are a true masterpiece of the Polish Literature of the Middle Ages,³⁸ as they constitute “a rhythmic, rhymed prose created independently without following any model Latin sermons, in accordance with the *ars dictandi* principles of Latin poetic prose”. Teresa Michałowska agrees:

Besides adhering to strict composition rules, the sermons show high artistic qualities as far as the style and linguistic organization of discourse is concerned, which results from adopting the principles of Latin artistic prose in the Polish language. The fact that a 13th century writer was at ease in practically applying knowledge stemming from studies of *ars dictandi* deserves the greatest attention.³⁹

Tadeusz Witczak expresses a similar view on this monument of the Polish language:

A composition following the rules of *ars sermonandi*, scholastic enumeration, allegory, elaborate rhythm and rhymes respecting the principles of *ars dictandi* along with Latin fragments (which make the text a bilingual work) prove the scholarly character of the sermons.⁴⁰

Let us quote one more work, an important study by Paweł Stępień. As a matter of fact, Stępień is the very first researcher not to content himself with searching for sources of the Latin passages in the *Sermons* as others have, but instead provides a holistic vision of the *Sermons* as a truly “bilingual work”. This aspect was overlooked even by Ostrowska, who – admiring the use of the Polish language – did not seem to notice one Latin word in the *Sermons*. According to Stępień:

The *Sermon for St. Catherine’s Day* – composed in accordance with the principles of *ars praedicandi* and deeply ingrained in the theological,

36 J. Krzyżanowski, “O artyzmie „Kazań świętokrzyskich” [1951] in idem, *Tradycje literackie polszczyzny. Od Galla do Staffa*, Warszawa, 1992, pp. 46-53.

37 Ostrowska, “Kompozycja i artyzm językowy...”.

38 E. Ostrowska, “O nowe odczytanie wiersza o świętym Aleksym” [For a New Interpretation of the Poem on St. Alexius], in Idem, *Z dziejów języka polskiego i jego piękna. Studia i szkice*. [On the History of the Polish Language and its Beauty. Studies and Sketches], Kraków, 1978, p. 105

39 Michałowska, *Średniowiecze*, p. 308.

40 Witczak, “Kazania świętokrzyskie,” p. 110.

hagiographical, aesthetic and rhetoric tradition – harmoniously combines various traditions in one, coherent work [...].⁴¹

Subsequently, the author states that the sermon has a “rigorously planned structure”. Nonetheless, the detailed analysis of the *Sermon for St. Catherine’s Day* which he conducted contradicts in fact the “highly artistic rhythm and rhymes”, “rigorous composition”, “harmonic coherence” and “symphony of the Polish and Latin texts”⁴² in the sermon. When discussing particular Latin passages, only once does Stępień remark⁴³ that most of them violate the text cohesion, are unstructured, represent nothing but a draft sermon or a supplement, a set of additional remarks. Let us list the most suspicious passages: from “*Nota in vita sua in principio*” to “*sicut melius scis*” (br 25-29); from “*Nota de quinquaginta sapientibus*” to “*post ignis incendium apparuerunt*” (br 41-43, bv 1-2); “*Require superius in sermone* <...> folio” (bv 5-6); “*Nota, quomodo surrexit beata Katerina*” to “*per palmam martirii ad Christum migraverunt*” (bv 6-14); “*Hic nota de martirio regine*” to “*ad Christum migraverunt*” (bv 14-15) and perhaps also: “*Et certe talium infinitus est numerus*” to “*matri sue, videlicet Ecclesie*” (bv 17-24) and “*Nota ergo, quomodo imperator Maxencius*” to “*ad infernum descendit*” (bv 28-34). A similar foreign interpolation appears in the *Sermon for St. Michael’s Day*: “*Iudicum: Cum<que loqueretur angelus> Domini*” to “*fleverunt*” (av 2-4). These fragments (perhaps as well as other Latin texts in the *Holy Cross Sermons*) probably did not form part of the original text of the *Sermons*. They counter the “highly artistic style and linguistic organisation of discourse”, the artistic value of the *Sermons*, as they suddenly allow the preacher to formulate large passages of the sermon in his very own words, while the whole artistic structure of elaborate prose tumbles down and disappears. This would be just like reading only selected passages of *Hamlet* by Shakespeare while retelling others.

“The fact that the Polish and Latin texts alternate” – Mieczysław Mejor writes – “is an important feature of the *Sermons’* composition, since Latin was used to

41 P. Stępień, “Przemieniająca miłość Oblubieńca. ‘Kazanie na dzień św. Katarzyny’,” in Idem, *Z literatury religijnej polskiego średniowiecza. Studia o czterech tekstach: ‘Kazanie na dzień św. Katarzyny,’ ‘Legenda o św. Aleksym,’ ‘Lament świętokrzyski,’ ‘Żołtarz Jezusow,’* Warszawa, 2003, p. 115.

42 Mejor writes: “Stępień outlined and comprehensively documented that the Polish text not only co-exists, but also harmonizes with the Latin one, the large fragments and paraphrases of the life of the Saint Alexandrian virgin” (M. Mejor, “Łacińskie cytaty w ‘Kazaniach świętokrzyskich,’” *Pamiętnik Literacki* 95, 2004, v. 1, p. 19).

43 When discussing the first Latin fragment in the *Sermon for St. Catherine’s Day*, Stępień writes: “That Latin passage seems to confirm that the *Holy Cross Sermons* had been designed as a collection for preachers, as the author left them with the task of not only pronouncing the sermons as written, but also of giving them the final touch. Intertwining the sermons composed in this way with homiletic tips was their characteristic feature”. “The sermon’s author addressed his remarks to every preacher who wished to use the text of the *Sermon for St. Catherine’s Day* and indicated the source they should evoke (*Nota in vita sua in principio*), with an express certainty that they were perfectly familiar with it (*sicut melius scis*). The expression *nota* (‘note that...’), however frequent in Latin sermons, as it was used to capture the listeners’ attention, was addressed here to the clergyman. The author referred the latter to the version of the legend strictly based on *Passio* [...]” (Stępień, “Przemieniająca miłość Oblubieńca...”, pp. 87, 88).

evoke the sources: quotes from the Bible and *auctores*, while Polish was the language in which the sermons had been conceived and written”.⁴⁴ The fragments of the sermons – as he writes further – “had been apparently used by the author as material for further elaboration, a kind of excerpt from the sources (a *florilegium* or a collection of sermons...?), naturally, quoted or paraphrased in Latin”.⁴⁵ “[...] the way the Latin texts function [...] shows the rather literary character of this collection. Also, the form in which it has been conserved signals that it was not a collection of sermons intended to be given in Polish”.⁴⁶ Another noteworthy observation of Mejor:

The author of the *Sermons* clearly indicated the places where he quoted someone’s words, mostly by switching from Polish to Latin, especially in the case of quotes from the books of the Bible.⁴⁷

The opinions of several of the researchers quoted above, sometimes contradictory, will help us to understand the following conclusion: that indeed, the autograph of the *Holy Cross Sermons* was composed as a text with “highly artistic rhymes”, “a rigorous composition”, “a harmonic coherence” where “the Polish text was in perfect unity with the Latin one”, because the Latin quotes were indicated with special formulas (as highlighted by Mejor). The sermons, in their artistic perfection, were intended to be read as well as forming a model for preachers so that they could master the art of homiletics. The texts could serve as a model for composing their own sermons, or could be learned by heart, this being facilitated by the rhythm and rhymes (mnemonic characteristics), or, finally, the preacher could extend them by adding new elements (introducing additional quotes or the legend of St. Catherine). Practically any medieval sermon or collection of sermons was a model for the preachers in the first place. After all, they were not read out loud from codices brought to the church.⁴⁸ Even though many copies of sermon collections were in use, oral performances did not strictly follow the written texts. It is most likely that Latin glosses were incorporated into the *Sermons*, which is confirmed by the *Sermon for St. Catherine’s Day* (where we can find in particular much Latin that completely violates the artistic structure of the text). They allowed for the preacher’s own invention when delivering the sermon by introducing examples from the life of St. Catherine, which transformed the written text

44 Mejor, “Łacińskie cytaty...”, pp. 19-20.

45 Ibid., p. 20.

46 Ibid., *op.cit.*

47 Ibid., pp. 21-22.

48 For more about mnemonic techniques for memorising sermons see R. Wójcik, *Opusculum de arte memorativa Jana Szklarka. Bernardyński traktat mnemotechniczny z 1504 roku*. [*Opusculum de arte memorativa* by Jan Szklarek. A Bernardine mnemotechnical treatise of 1504], Poznań, 2006, pp. 121, 122.

into oral discourse. Glosses with observations such as *nota* (which should rather be understood as *nota bene*, a remark, an instruction, “please note well”)⁴⁹ were

49 Below, I quote a valuable opinion I received from Krzysztof Bracha, eminent specialist in the field of medieval Polish preaching: “As to the notes, I came across this issue in my collection of sermons by Piotr of Mirosław. I am also convinced that fragments such as “*Nota...*” were not supposed to be voiced, but helped the preacher prepare supplements, strengthen the argumentation or orally underline the importance of some of the problems discussed. For instance, the remark in the sermon for St. Catherine’s Day preceding the note “*Nota, quomodo surrexit...*” reading: “*Require superius in sermone...*” or the like confirm unequivocally that such observations were addressed to the preacher, not to the listeners. David D’Avray, who investigated these issues (*The Preaching of the Friars. Sermons diffused from Paris before 1300*, Oxford, 1983, pp. 105-106), singled out a so-called group of homiletic guidelines in a sermon text regarding the way the sermon should be delivered or linked to the relationship between the written and the oral text, which according to the researcher excluded the possibility that the texts were destined for private reading only. He believes these are signs of real-life use of the sermon texts, evidence that they were preached to the public. In my opinion, the notes comply with this formula. The collection of sermons by Piotr of Mirosław confirms this technique of their “writing down” or copying, as similar notes are recorded as separate texts, which in my view are of an auxiliary character, together with other texts, such as the lives of saints, *miracula* etc., or texts of prayers and chants. The latter tended to be introduced to a sermon in an abridged form or generally to codices, as we know, on the inner side of the binding or on the last leaves, following the collection of sermons. It is hard to believe that during a sermon the preacher retold often lengthy texts proceeding from normative sources on topics such as the tithe, liturgical issues or *inhibiciones sacramenti* etc., destroying at the same time the fine structure of the sermon (except sermons for Good Friday where a detailed account of the Passion of the Christ was given), naturally, provided that he actually applied it coherently in his verbal practice, which I doubt after all, especially in case of less educated preachers. Prayers or even chants are a different story, as they indeed could be a part of the preaching action or a subject of exhortation during the sermon, for example in the form of a commentary or an explanation of their contents. In this way, the preaching codex was not only a sermon collection, but a universal manual of pastoral activities which substituted for an entire library. In the specific case of the sermon on St. Catherine, therefore a *de sanctis* sermon, it seems striking that the notes contain references to the life of the saint, indicate its particular fragments (“*usque ad illum locum*”), while in the texts by Piotr of Mirosław many *de sanctis* sermons are finished with a complete or semi-complete text of the respective *vita* or *miracula* as a supplement to the sermon as such. In a sense, in the sermon on St. Catherine, the life of the saint was split into pieces by evoking through inserted notes only specific fragments of her life which the preacher should take notice of, so at the same time reference was made to his knowledge, as he was supposed to be familiar with the life of the saint. In the case of the *Holy Cross Sermons*, the Latin notes in the sermon on St. Catherine obviously oppose the so-called principle of *colores rhetorici*, that is a stylistic ornament, which according to the reference books played a mnemonic role both for the preacher and the listeners. The latter issue is, however, still subject to debate. Questions are raised whether the rhymes could have been accidental. Another doubt is whether it was possible at all to preach a sermon which was rhymed in its entirety. Wouldn’t sermons with such a regular stylistic ornamentation be nothing but literature? More and more questions are raised and not necessarily answered, although the so-called archeology of recorded sermons or preacher’s codices in general is fascinating, but still open. To summarise, you are probably right that the Latin notes could have been added secondarily in the copying process, which at the same time may suggest that the *Holy Cross Sermons*, written in the form we know, were not created *ex auditu*, in the technique of *reportationes*, but that the extant copy was copied from an older version, which in turn could have been originally created in the technique of *reportationes*. Also, it cannot be ruled out that the whole text was copied together with existing notes, as there is evidence of copying sermons together with glosses incorporated *in extenso* from other glosses that were originally inter-linear or marginal. The situation could have been similar with respect to the notes, which were originally put in the margins or below the sermon text, but incorporated into it in subsequent copies. In any case, the Latin notes may be a trace of the fact that the *Holy Cross Sermons* were also interesting as preaching material, that someone probably used them to learn how to preach or as pious reading. The question is: why was it done only in the case of the *Sermon*

probably written in the margins, apparently not in the original text (autograph), but in the copy, since the reading of the copied *Sermons* seems to be uniform, copied faithfully, with mistakes resulting only from the writer's inadvertence. It looks as if someone of a lower position in the ecclesiastical hierarchy prepared them for a person of a higher rank, so that he could preach them, and added guidelines to the Polish text saying where the sermons should be extended and which authorities should be referred to. His remarks were addressed to someone very competent and – just like the author – perfectly familiar with the life of St. Catherine, broadly educated, probably even better than the latter, which might be the rationale for the mysterious note (or possibly expression of courtesy) addressed to the reader: “*ut in vita narracio patet, sicut melius scis*” (br 29) (“as you know better”) instead of, for example, “*sciut bene scis*” (“as you well know”).⁵⁰ The observation “*Require superius in sermone <...> folio*” (bv 5-6) is also addressed to such a recipient (the word “*folio*” must have been preceded by “*verso*” or a similar expression, as no leaf numbering was applied in manuscripts back then). “[...] The Latin parts of the *Sermons*, predominantly strongly abbreviated by means of suspension, apparently played a mnemonic role. Meanwhile, in the proper Polish sermon, the writer applies the abbreviation method in a fully conventional manner,” Semkowicz⁵¹ remarks. It was in the glosses where abbreviations were applied so intensively because of their “mnemonic function”. The text of the *Sermons* with the glosses was copied, but the scribe did not seem to care about their “harmonic coherence” anymore, and incorporated the marginal notes to the text, as was often the case in the Middle Ages. Then, the *Sermons* were copied again, and this manuscript survived in the codex from the Holy Cross Monastery as parchment strips.

5. WORK OF AN UNKNOWN SCRIPTORIUM

The text of the *Holy Cross Sermons* was written in Gothic minuscule, with frequent and intensive abbreviations. An abbreviation system of such extent, such saturation, has not been found in any other medieval examples of Polish (and Bohemian) writing.⁵² Nearly 30% of the Polish words are written in a shortened form. The system of abbreviations is consistent, even sophisticated, and strictly

for St. Catherine's Day? Other Latin fragments, especially *verbum thematum*, are easier to interpret, as preaching manuals instructed that the subject should first be presented in Latin, and then translated into the vernacular language”. I thank Krzysztof Bracha and Rafał Wójcik for the discussion on the *Holy Cross Sermons* and their valuable remarks.

50 We ought to add that in his analysis of the Latin interpolations in the *Sermon for St. Catherine's Day*, Stępień assumes that the reader was perfectly familiar with the life of St. Catherine as well as with the quotes and sources referenced, which is unlikely. The recipient of this sermon (as well as the others) could only be a well-educated person.

51 Semkowicz, *Paleografia łacińska*, p. 474.

52 Also compare footnote 55 and P. Diels, “Abbreviaturen in den mittelalterlichen Schrift,” *Archiv für slavische Philologie* 38, v. 102, 1922, p. 136.

follows Latin brachygraphy, although some individual solutions appear. Brückner took note of the singularity of the abbreviations used in the *Holy Cross Sermons* right from the start:

The most interesting feature of the writing system of this specimen is its extensive system of abbreviations, and especially the fact that the Latin system was applied to the vernacular language, which is extremely rare and could be explained by an excessive stinginess of the writer and the high price of parchment if it was not for an external influence, or a Polish tradition or school of orthography, of which another specimen – written lavishly and still containing abbreviations – informs us [...]. Because of its singularity, I must discuss the problem of abbreviations further.⁵³

The abbreviation system has been thoroughly described by Semkowicz,⁵⁴ who nonetheless limited his reflections to the descriptive side, without paying much attention to its uniqueness or to the fact that such a system in the first (literary!) text written in Polish in its totality could not have been accidental or have unwittingly (automatically) followed a Latin model. It could not have “originated in the void”, consequently, the anonymous copyist could not have possibly created such an elaborate abbreviation system to write one text only: it is absolutely unlikely that the same copyist invented this system and recorded sermons in this way exclusively for private use. The manuscript was intended also for the use of other readers (preachers) for whom the orthography and brachygraphy of the text must have presented no obstacle in its deciphering and understanding. This leads to the conclusion that a longer practice of reading and writing in Polish existed and that an entire complex system of Polish abbreviation was in use, purposefully prepared according to Latin models, or even that a scriptorium⁵⁵ operated where that

53 Brückner (ed.), “Kazania świętokrzyskie”, p. 725. Brückner refers to the *Sermons of Gniezno*, he is, however, mistaken. Although abbreviations do appear in the *Sermons of Gniezno*, their frequency and character are trivial as compared to the *Holy Cross Sermons*.

54 W. Semkowicz, “Przedmowa” [Preface], in J. Łoś & W. Semkowicz (eds.), *Kazania tzw. Świętokrzyskie*, Kraków, 1934, pp. 11-13.

55 “The word abbreviations created within the Latin language and writing, due to their connection with the language for which they were designed, were completely impossible or difficult to adapt to other languages of medieval literature. The written language of the Bohemian, Polish, German or English exemplars has almost no abbreviations at all, more were used in Italian and French because of close analogies between these languages and Latin. In italic script, attempts were made at imitating the Latin abbreviation system in all other languages to a larger extent. [...] The high proportion of abbreviations [in the *Holy Cross Sermons*] is an argument in favour of the existence of a longer practice – either individual or collective – or this manner of abbreviations. Later exemplars of the West Slavic languages from the 14th and 15th centuries have fewer abbreviations than the *Holy Cross Sermons*” (A. Gieysztor, *Zarys dziejów pisma łacińskiego* [Outline of the History of the Latin Script], Warsaw, 1973, p.150). Abbreviations of Polish words appear as early as in documents from before the 14th century. They may be found in texts from the 15th century, mainly written in italic script (court oaths, and most of all Polish glosses in some manuscripts). Nevertheless, they are infrequent, simple and incomparable with the wealth of abbreviation models and frequency in the

system had been elaborated through many years for the use of numerous recipients. With no hesitation, we can assume that apart from the miraculously saved *Sermons*, that scriptorium must have issued many other manuscripts in Polish, which have been irrevocably lost.

As the abbreviations used in the Polish text of the *Holy Cross Sermons* have been presented in detail by Semkowicz in his introduction to their edition, there is no need to repeat what is known already. In the *Sermons*, almost all kinds of abbreviations known from medieval Latin texts can be found. Three of them deserve a special mention, as they do not reappear in any other medieval Polish text and confirm the consistency of the *Sermons*' brachygraphic system. One of them is the initial *•i•* standing for the word *jeść* ['is'], modelled on the Latin *.i. = id est* (and the Latin *.e. = est*), then the symbol *₃* = *-uż* (*knemu⁹ – k niemuż* ['to him'], cr 15; *iemu⁹ – iemuż* ['him'], dv 4)⁵⁶ at the end of a word, an equivalent of the Latin *-us*, and the symbol *z=ec, eć, ek* (*tzto = tećto* ['that'], br 14, dv 6, 12, 19; *oc₃ = ociec* ['father'], dv 6, 12, 19; *skut₃ = skutek* ['act'], cv 16, *yusic₃ = i wszyciek* ['and the entire'], ar 4). Such a use of the “*₃*” symbol standing for the omitted letters *ec, eć* or *ek* is unique to this scriptorium, as the same sign in such places in Latin words meant an omission of the letters *et*.⁵⁷ Often, the copyist also put one letter or two above a word, which confirms that he had a longer experience in writing in Polish, enough to acquire some writing habits. He did not do so in order to save space, since in fact it did not have such an effect.⁵⁸ In general, abbreviations in the *Sermons* (as well as in other medieval manuscript) must not be seen as merely a way to save writing material and effort on the part of the writer,⁵⁹ as many researchers happen to do.

The above leads not only to the conclusion that there must have been an entire scriptorium behind the *Holy Cross Sermons*, a group of people who had already been writing in Polish for some time, and not only did they employ clearly defined Polish orthography, but they also created an elaborate system of abbreviations for this script. Another important conclusion is that the date of the creation of the original (autograph) of the *Sermons* cannot be loosely dated back towards the beginning of the 13th century, which some researchers do, as has already been men-

Holy Cross Sermons.

- 56 Such an abbreviation could be used, as the letter *s* in the *Sermons* is one of the most versatile graphemes: *s = s, sz, ś*, sometimes also *z* and *ż*. Rospond (*Dawność mazurzenia...*, p. 214) considers that the use of this symbol may be a sign of the dialectal phonetic features of the language the writer used (substituting dental consonants such as *s, z, c, dz* for alveolar ones: *sz, ż, cz, dż*).
- 57 This symbol could denote two different consonants (*ć* and *k*), as the letter *c* had many different functions in the *Sermons* (*c = c, k, cz, ć, dż*).
- 58 “We may argue as to the rationale for superscribing selected letters only: was it supposed to save space within the line? Or was it rather inspired by a certain trend, looking for originality or even aesthetic reasons? The fact is that superscribed letters appeared in places with no abbreviation whatsoever, where they could just as well stand in line with all the others,” Semkowicz comments on this phenomenon (Semkowicz, *Paleografia łacińska*, p. 468).
- 59 Compare Gieysztor, *Zarys dziejów pisma...*, p. 140, and others. The reasons for such a prolific use of abbreviations, especially in the Gothic script, are far more complex.

tioned. If we date the extant strips to the end of the 13th century or even to the turn of the 13th and 14th centuries, then the original version cannot have been almost a hundred years older, because in that case we would have to assume that several generations of copyists existed (or even that a scriptorium or scriptoria operated), commonly using this complex abbreviation system, and that writing in Polish was something ordinary for them. Although this cannot be excluded, it seems to be a rather adventurous presumption. The original version of the *Sermons* must not have been from very much earlier than its copy, or may even have been very close in time to it.

At the time when the *Holy Cross Sermons* were created, writing in Polish was not something natural, and certainly not widespread, especially when it came to sermons. The Polish language played nothing but an auxiliary role in education. Since abbreviations were introduced right from the start in Latin writing instruction,⁶⁰ the people of the Middle Ages used them instinctively. While writing, their pens produced words on the parchment or paper in their abridged versions almost automatically unless they happened to be carefully copying manuscripts in a codex script (*Textura* in particular) where abbreviations were scarcer and less complex. Today, we need years of studies in palaeography to be able to read texts that were readily legible for any pupil of a cathedral school, who wrote and read abbreviations from the very beginning of his education.⁶¹ Thus, where did the copyist of the *Holy Cross Sermons* (and the community he represented) learn to write in Polish so perfectly, using such strictly codified abbreviations? Certainly not in a parish⁶² or cathedral school, but perhaps in a monastic one, at a monastery which had a scriptorium where writing in Polish was nothing unusual.

6. THE *Holy Cross Sermons* AND ARCHBISHOP ŚWINKA

Skrzyniarz might be right to say that “the *Sermons* in Polish were probably written in response to a demand for sermons in the vernacular language and the growing Germanisation of many urban, rural and monastic communities throughout the 13th

60 Compare *Ibid.*, p. 146; Semkowicz, *Paleografia łacińska*, p. 460.

61 Naturally, given the large number of word abbreviations, they were not understandable to everyone at that time, since different abbreviations were used in various fields of study (such as theology and particularly law), which is why as early as in the Middle Ages specialized dictionaries of abbreviations were issued; compare Gieysztor, *Zarys dziejów pisma...*, pp. 141-142, and others.

62 At that time, writing was a separate school subject, independent of reading. The former was taught in Latin from the start, with Polish used only as long as the students could not do without it. See A. Karbowiak, *Dzieje wychowania i szkół w Polsce w wiekach średnich* [The History of Education and Schools in Medieval Poland], vol. 1, St. Petersburg, 1898, pp. 59-60, 188-190, vol. 2, St. Petersburg, 1903, pp. 276, 277, 413; H. Manikowska, “Szkoly: nauczanie szkolne i uniwersyteckie” [Schools: School and University Education], in *Kultura Polski średniowiecznej XIV-XV w.* [The Culture of Medieval Poland of the 14th-15th Century], B. Geremek (ed.), Warszawa, 1997, pp. 330-331, and others. See also E. Potkowski, *op. cit.*, p. 38 (footnote no. 13).

century, which was evident in churches and at schools”.⁶³ They should not, however, be linked with Iwo Odrowąż, as the *Holy Cross Sermons* did not exist at that time yet, but with the pro-Polish activity of Archbishop Jakub Świnka. Of course, by saying this, we do not imply that he could have been the author of the *Sermons*, but perhaps a hidden animator. The *Sermons* could have been a secondary result or an echo of his campaign aiming to unite the lands of Poland and provide strong support for the Polish language. Jakub Świnka, Archbishop of Gniezno from 1283–1314, acted in favour of uniting the Polish state and fiercely opposed the German influence. He crowned Przemysł II as the king of Poland, and then strongly supported Władysław the Elbow-high and his policy of the country’s unification. Archbishop Świnka inspired national consciousness. German clergymen, preachers and teachers – who from the beginning of the 13th century remained with the settlers – practised and propagated their own language. German was used by the royal court, in tribunals, in the church and at schools. Świnka encouraged monastic vocations among the Poles and was trying to substitute Polish for German in the church and at schools. At two synods held in Łęczyca in 1285 and 1287, he ordered that schools only appoint teachers who spoke Polish, and that any benefices involving preaching duties could only be received by clergymen born in Poland and able to speak Polish, so that on Sundays they could join the believers in their daily prayers and explain their meaning.⁶⁴

We can probably assume that at the turn of the 13th and the 14th centuries the Polish language ceased to be nothing but a language spoken in everyday life, but also entered churches, those mainstays of Latin thus far, and was a suitable tool of inspiring national consciousness and supporting the authority of the Polish prince, the legal heir to the crown of Poland. A connexion between *lingua Polonorum* and *gens Polonorum* appeared in the witness testimonies of the Muskata trial.⁶⁵

This is the summary of the intellectual condition of Poland in the late 13th century provided by Jadwiga Krzyżaniakowa. It was probably in the atmosphere of that period, so favourable towards the Polish language, that the *Holy Cross Sermons* were created.

63 Skrzyniarz, *Kazania świętokrzyskie...*, p. 49.

64 Compare i.a. W. Karasiewicz, *Jakub II Świnka, arcybiskup gnieźnieński 1283-1314* [Jakub II Świnka, Archbishop of Gniezno 1283–1314], Poznań, 1948, pp. 249–251, 269, 328–329 and *passim*; T. Silnicki & K. Gołąb, *Arcybiskup Jakub Świnka i jego epoka* [Archbishop Jakub Świnka and his Times], Warszawa, 1956, pp. 56, 65–66, 182–183, 186–187, 289; Z. Kliszko, “Przepisy synodalne w Polsce średniowiecznej o kaznodziejstwie” [Synodal Regulations on Preaching in Medieval Poland], *Studia Theologiczna Varsaviensia* 13, 1975, issue 1, pp. 122–126; J. Krzyżaniakowa, “Kultura umysłowa w czasach przełomu. Ośrodki – ludzie – dokonania” [Intellectual Culture at a Turning Point. Centres – People – Achievements], in *Polska około roku 1300. Państwo, społeczeństwo, kultura*, W. Fałkowski (ed.), Warszawa, 2003, pp. 82–83; and J. Bazydło, “Jakub Świnka,” in *Encyklopedia Katolicka* 7, 727–728 (with bibliography).

65 J. Krzyżaniakowa, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

7. LOST WAX TABLETS

As stated above, the *Holy Cross Sermons* are a copy, and maybe even a copy of another copy. We ought to ask why this singular specimen of Polish writing from those distant times survived until today, destroyed and discovered accidentally in the binding of a later codex. Why were no other Polish texts cut into pieces found in the bindings of other manuscripts? Only one more specimen of this kind is known, namely *Fragment Łopacińskiego* [‘Łopaciński’s Fragment’] from the late 14th century, whose trajectory is similar to that of the *Sermons*, as it was also cut into strips which served as supporting pieces for binding strings.⁶⁶ Furthermore, several other precious specimens (leaves or their pieces) were extracted from bindings of old codices, such as the so-called *Pasja Połocka* [‘Połock Passion’] from the end of the 14th century,⁶⁷ *Karta Glogera* [Gloger’s Leaf] from the early 15th century,⁶⁸ a fragment of the *Revelations of Saint Bridget (Malinowski’s Leaf)*,⁶⁹ a fragment of a *Life of Saint Blaise* from the first half of the 15th century,⁷⁰ a remnant of a manuscript from the end of the 15th century with a chant entitled *O nadroższy kwiatku panieńskiej czystości*⁷¹ [‘To the Precious Flower of the Virgin’s Chastity’] accompanied by music notation, and a piece of a Polish prayer book from the first half of the 15th century⁷² – however, it is likely that only the latter has been extracted from the binding of a medieval manuscript,⁷³ while all the others were found

- 66 See W. Wydra & W. R. Rzepka, “Fragment Łopacińskiego. Z problemów krytyki i analizy tekstu” [Łopaciński’s Fragment. On the Criticism and Analysis of the Text], *Prace Filologiczne* 29, 1980, pp. 309-332.
- 67 See J. Janów, “Resztki Biblioteki Jadwigi? (Nowe urywki Legendy złotej w oprawach dzieł K. Drużbickiego)” [Remnants of St. Hedwig’s Library? (New Fragments of the Golden Legend in the Bindings of K. Drużbicki’s Works)], *Sprawozdania z Czynności i Posiedzeń PAU* 49, 1948, issue 7, pp. 345-350. The manuscript was used in the binding of works by Kasper Drużbicki in the 17th century.
- 68 See Z. Gloger, “Ułamek starożytnego kazania o małżeństwie” [Extract of an Ancient Sermon on Marriage], *Biblioteka Warszawska* 1873, vol. 3, pp. 51-55. The manuscript was used in the binding of an incunable unknown today.
- 69 See J. Łoś, “Dwa teksty staropolskie. I. Objawienia św. Brygidy” [Two Old Polish Texts. I. Revelations of Saint Bridget], *Materiały i Prace Komisji Językowej AU w Krakowie* 5, 1912, pp. 423-436. The manuscript was used as the binding of another manuscript unknown today, probably from the 17th century.
- 70 See L. Malinowski, “Żywot św. Błażeja” [Life of St. Blaise], *Prace Filologiczne* 5, 1899, pp. 309-353. The manuscript was used as the binding of another manuscript unknown today, probably from the 17th century.
- 71 See H. Łopaciński, “Reguła trzeciego zakonu św. Franciszka i drobniejsze zabytki języka polskiego z końca w. XV-go i początku XVI-go” [Rule of the Third Order of St. Francis and Smaller Exemplars of the Polish Language from the Late 15th and Early 16th Century], *Prace Filologiczne* 4, 1893, pp. 749-751. The manuscript was found in the binding of an incunable.
- 72 See J. Zathę, “Fragment nieznanego modlitewnika staropolskiego z XIV wieku” [Fragment of an Unknown Old Polish Prayer Book from the 14th Century], *Biuletyn Biblioteki Jagiellońskiej* 15, 1963, issue 1/2, pp. 33-38; and M. Karaś, “Urywek staropolskiego modlitewnika” [Fragment of an Old Polish Prayer Book], *Język Polski* 45, 1965, pp. 102-107. The manuscript was found in the binding of a codex belonging to Paweł, son of Paszek, of Piotrków, rector of the Cracow Academy in 1442 (manuscript of the Jagiellonian Library no. 292).
- 73 The so-called *Karta medycka* [Leaf of Medyka] (Psalm 50) of the early 15th century was also origi-

in later bindings of incunabula and codices from the 16th or 17th century. From the previous centuries, prior to the *Holy Cross Sermons*, we only know of documents, especially the famous *Bull of Gniezno* issued in 1136, where Polish names of people and places appeared of necessity, along with three short sentences in Polish and the anthem *Bogurodzica* [‘Mother of God’], which we know, however, from a later copy of about 1410. How did it happen that the *Holy Cross Sermons* – a large and highly sophisticated Polish text, written with clearly defined orthography and abundant Polish abbreviations, proving that before it was written, or even much earlier, writing in Polish had been nothing unusual – appeared so suddenly within this well-known series of artifacts of the Polish language? If we agree that the *Sermons* were created during the reign of Władysław the Elbow-high, then we can note a subsequent time gap in the sequence of artifacts, since it was not until the end of the 14th and the early 15th century that writing in Polish became more common, which is confirmed by the extant specimens,⁷⁴ especially the texts of the Polish court oaths.

Considering the number of documents and manuscripts produced in Poland between the 11th and 13th centuries that have survived up to the present, we may come to the conclusion that generally at that time the art of writing was a rare one, practised by only a small fraction of the society, its intellectual elite.⁷⁵ Only to a certain extent is this statement accurate. The number of those who practised writing was probably higher. Historians of literature and the Polish language tend to forget that the main writing materials back then were a wax tablet and a stylus, just as in the Roman period. It is true that a considerable part of Polish writing is likely to have been destroyed in fires, as a result of neglect and of the tragic history of the Polish libraries. This, however, is not the whole story when it comes to the reasons why no manuscripts from before the 15th century can be found in Poland.⁷⁶ We must assume that a significant proportion of the Polish (and European) me-

nally a flyleaf of a codex binding (see S. Rospond, *Psalterz floriański a tak zwana Karta medyczna czyli Świdzińskiego* [The Florian Psalter and the So-called Leaf of Medyka or Świdziński’s Leaf], Wrocław, 1953).

74 As well as the lost ones, such as the manuscripts from Queen Hedwig’s Library (see i.a. W. Wydra & W. R. Rzepka, *Fragment Łopacińskiego...* [Łopaciński’s Fragment...], *op. cit.*) or the texts which formed the basis used by the author who compiled *Rozmyślanie przemyskie* [The Przemysł Meditation].

75 “If – according to rather optimistic estimates – the population of the regular and royal court clergy in ca. 1200 amounted to 700 people, this is also the upper limit of the number of those who were able to actively use Latin, moreover at varying levels of proficiency. This would represent approximately 0.04% of the whole population,” writes J. Dowiat (J. Dowiat “Środki przekazywania myśli” [Means of Transmitting Thought], in *Kultura Polski średniowiecznej X-XIII w.*, J. Dowiat (ed.), Warszawa, 1985, p. 207).

76 In the medieval book collections preserved up to today, manuscripts from the 15th century make up over 80%. Compare E. Potkowski, “Pismo i społeczeństwo w Polsce późnego średniowiecza (XIV-XV wiek)” [Writing and the Society of Poland in the Late Middle Ages (14th-15th Century)], *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 22, 1978, p. 35.

dieval writing has been irrevocably lost because it was written on wax tablets.⁷⁷ Tablets covered with wax (*tabulae ceratae*) made of various species of wood and other materials, such as ivory, were easy to produce and far more affordable than the precious parchment, which required sophisticated preparation and was exclusively used for truly important texts. Several – even a dozen – of them could be bound together with leather straps (*polyptychs*). It was only later (in Poland during the reign of Casimir the Great) that paper – cheaper and more available than parchment – caused the use of tablets to slowly decline, although they continued to be utilised in various places, especially in elementary schools, for as long as until the 19th century. Few medieval tablets from the Polish territory have been preserved to this day,⁷⁸ since they were being burnt and destroyed throughout the centuries as being no longer useful. Due to their physical aspect, it was impossible to store them in archives and libraries, their contents became obsolete, and as wax was not a very resilient material, the writing was getting illegible with time. However, numerous styluses to write on tablets (chisels made of iron, bronze, antlers, bone, or exceptionally silver) found by archeologists show that in 11th–14th century Poland wax tablets were a commonly used writing material,⁷⁹ not only by parish school pupils. They were in common use all throughout Europe in reading and writing instruction, in chanceries, in literary and scientific work for taking notes, outlining concepts, administering and managing state and church property, regis-

77 More on this issue in i.a. Semkowicz, *Paleografia łacińska*, pp. 40-43; J. Dowiat, *op. cit.*, pp. 236-239, and particularly T. Jasiński, *Tabliczki woskowe w kancelariach miast Pomorza Nadwiślańskiego* [Wax Tablets in the Chanceries of the Vistula Riverside Pomeranian Towns], Poznań, 1991, pp. 44-69.

78 There are extant wax tablets from chanceries of the Old and New Town of Toruń, the Gdańsk Rechtstadt, the Old Town of Elbląg and Jawor in Silesia. The National Museum of Cracow has preserved a codex composed of seven beech tablets; also compare i.a. T. Jasiński, *op.cit.*, pp. 5, 52, 61.

79 In the Polish territory, nearly 70 styluses from the 11th and 12th centuries have been found. Styluses from the 11th century have been found in the locations of the most important towns. This, however, changed at the turn of the 12th and the 13th centuries and throughout the 13th century when they started to appear not only in towns, but also in urban settlements, which began to develop dynamically then. Styluses have been found in Biskupin, Giecz, Gniezno, Kołobrzeg, Cracow, Legnica, Łęczyca, Milicz, Opole, Płock, Poznań (26 items!), Puck, Trzemeszyn and Wrocław. As the literature on these archeological finds is quite abundant, only selected titles are listed below: J. Żak, "Wczesnośredniowieczne rylce do pisania na tabliczkach woskowych" [Early Medieval Styluses for Writing on Wax Tablets], *Dawna Kultura* 1, 1954, pp. 15-16; Idem, "Z dziejów znajomości pisma w Polsce" [On the History of the Command of Writing in Poland], *Slavia Antiqua* 5, 1954-1956, pp. 377-397; K. Dębska, J. Żak, "Rylce do pisania na tabliczkach powoskowanych z Pomorza" [Styluses to Write on Wax Tablets from Pomerania], *Materiały Zachodniopomorskie* 3, 1960, pp. 242-244; J. Kaźmierczyk, "Zagadnienie piśmienności w miastach śląskich w świetle źródeł archeologicznych XI-XII w." [Literacy in Silesian Towns in the Light of the Archeological Sources from the 11th-12th centuries], *Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny Sobótka* 28, 1973, issue 2, pp. 213-227; K. Sołtan, "O stylusach rogowych lub kościanych. Przyczynek do zagadnienia średniowiecznych technik pisania na tabliczkach woskowych" [On Horn and Bone Styluses. A Supplement to the Question of Medieval Techniques of Writing on Wax Tablets], *Kwartalnik Historii Kultury Materialnej* 3-4, 1999, pp. 413-420; H. Kóčka-Krenz, "Archeologiczne świadectwa o początkach szkolnictwa w Poznaniu" [Archeological Evidence of the Early School System in Poznań], *Kronika Miasta Poznania* 2001, issue 4, pp. 7-13.

tering the income and expenses of churches and monasteries, listing belongings, recording transactions, making checklists and drafting versions of documents etc. What is of particular importance to us, they were also used to make draft versions of texts (including literary works) that were subsequently copied onto parchment.⁸⁰

Therefore, we can safely presume that a considerable part of Polish writing, especially from before the 15th century, has been irrevocably lost, because it was recorded on nothing but wax tablets. That was where the Polish national literary language and its orthography developed throughout the first centuries of medieval Poland. It was rare for Polish text to reach parchment codices, as they were not valuable and respected enough to be considered worth recording on this precious material, restricted for selected Latin texts. This is probably the reason why a gap in Polish writing exists between the times when only isolated Polish words appeared in written documents and in the *Holy Cross Sermons*, therefore it appears to us as if this exemplar of an unexpectedly high culture of writing and language emerges suddenly from a non-existent pool of Polish writing.

The *Holy Cross Sermons* are the second masterpiece of the earliest Polish literature, following *Bogurodzica* ['Mother of God']. Apparently, they are also an original Polish work; despite extensive research, no Latin models for them have been discovered. As the oldest recording of *Bogurodzica* comes from the early 15th century, the *Sermons* should be considered the first continuous Polish text where the language, oral thus far, achieves a written form. They also attest to a well-developed culture of Polish writing before the mid-14th century. Finally, let us recall these astute words of Aleksander Brückner:

We are facing – if not the earliest monument of our language – then its copy [...]. This monument is formed by the *Sermons* – and the history of writing has never begun with sermons – therefore they must have been preceded by at least translations of major catechetical excerpts. The accomplished language and regular spelling rules of this monument also corroborate that it could not have been the first attempt, that the beginning was much earlier.⁸¹

The *Holy Cross Sermons*, together with *Bogurodzica* (the two first stanzas) and (most probably) the Psalter used by Saint Kinga of Poland in her prayers according to her biographer, form the earliest, archaic layer of Polish literature. Before the mid-14th century, literary works in Polish were highly elitist.⁸² In that period, Poland had intellectual circles interested in creating literature in the national lan-

80 Wax tablets were also used to record important speeches. T. Jasiński (*op.cit.*, p. 47) describes a manuscript of the sermons by Saint Bernardino of Siena which were immediately written down on wax tablets. Could the *Holy Cross Sermons* also have been created in this way?

81 Brückner (ed.), "Kazania świętokrzyskie," p. 739.

82 Compare also Michałowska, *Średniowiecze*, p. 310.

guage on a highly artistic level. Since the mid-14th century, or perhaps as of its end, writing in Polish and using it in literary works becomes more and more natural. This literature also gradually evolves, opens up to a larger audience and becomes more popular.

ADDENDUM

Finally, I would like to share certain doubts I had upon writing the above text. A couple of times, a hypothesis was expressed that the autograph (original version) of the *Holy Cross Sermons* was probably written at the end of the 13th century or at the turn of the 13th and 14th centuries, and that its copy – the remnants of which have been preserved up to the present times – was most likely executed soon thereafter. Nonetheless, this dating, although supported by, I believe, strong arguments, may be challenged because of the number of the kings who visited the newborn Jesus in the *Holy Cross Sermons*, namely the Three Kings. After all, to put it briefly, we ought to mention that the cult of the Three Kings, though also known previously, started spreading throughout Europe from the 12th century, after 1164, when the discovered relics of the Three Kings were transferred to Cologne. However, this cult did not become widespread until the 14th century, aided by the publication of *Historia Trium Regum* by the German Carmelite friar John of Hildesheim († 1375). Before, in accordance with the Gospel of Matthew, the pagans who came to visit the Christ were called the Magi, the Wise Men or the Magi Kings, and their number significantly varied.⁸³ The *Holy Cross Sermons* tell us about the Three Kings, not the Magi Kings. We may “[...] presume that the cult of the Three Kings existed in Poland as early as from the second half of the 12th century,” writes Jerzy Kaliszczuk who investigates this issue, “[...] Nevertheless, we have no evidence of this cult being practised in the Polish territory earlier than from the 14th century. [...] Definitely, most of the records related to this cult come from the 15th century. As it appears, that was when it gained in popularity within the Kingdom of Poland”.⁸⁴ Hence, the *Holy Cross Sermons* would be one of the earliest documents of the Three Kings’ cult in Poland.⁸⁵ Obviously, what we know about the history of the Three Kings’ cult in Poland cannot be decisive as far as the dating of the *Sermons* is concerned, but it makes us consider years closer to the mid-14th century rather than its beginning as the time of their creation. At first, the cult of the Three Kings was propagated in Poland by the German bourgeois-

83 Compare: J. Kaliszczuk, *Mędrcy ze Wschodu. Legenda i kult Trzech Króli w średowiecznej Polsce*. [Wise Men from the East. The Legend and Cult of the Three Kings in Medieval Poland], Warszawa, 2005.

84 See *Ibidem*, p. 225.

85 For instance, even in the works of Peregrine of Opole (died after 1333) we encounter twelve Wise Men, and three Magi Kings in the works of Jacobus de Voragine (died 1298).

sie.⁸⁶ The above might be an important research guideline that may help establish the time and circumstances of the *Sermons*' creation in a more precise manner as well as the environment they originated in. Of course, this does not exclude their earlier dating. They may attest, at least in certain milieux, to a more common and extensive cult of the Three Kings in Poland before the mid-14th century. This is one more mystery of the *Holy Cross Sermons*.

SUMMARY

The manuscript of the *Holy Cross Sermons* consists of 18 parchment strips, which are fragments of 4 folios in octavo format (13 strips make up a dual folio, and 5 form the lower parts of two other folios). These strips are probably remnants of a more extensive manuscript. This monument was discovered in 1890 by Aleksander Brückner in a Latin codex in the Imperial Public Library in St. Petersburg, bearing the number Lat.I.Q.281. It had come to the St. Petersburg manuscript collections from the Library of the University of Warsaw, expropriated by the Russians after the November Uprising in 1831. The Codex (destroyed during the last war) came from the library of the Benedictine monastery of the Holy Cross at Łysa Góra (Bald Mountain). It was made in the 1st half of the 15th century, and during the binding, as individual contributions were sewn together, the manuscript of the Polish sermons was cut into strips and used as supporting pieces. Before coming to Łysa Góra, the Codex in which the sermons were found was lying near the hermitage of St. Mary Magdalene at Leżajsk, where it belonged to the Benedictine monks of the Holy Cross. This monument contains a set of six sermons, one of which survived in its entirety, and five in irregular sections. These are sermons for the following days: St. Michael (only the end of the sermon is preserved), St. Catherine (all), St. Nicholas (the beginning), the Nativity (the ending), Epiphany (the beginning and end) and the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary (the beginning). The sermons are clearly intellectual in style. They differ from one another in structure. They are written in exquisite, artistic prose, rhythmic and rhyming. The unknown author wrote them in a style used in Latin literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that stood out through parallelisms of syntax, rhyme and rhythm (ie. *Ars dictaminis*). So far, no Latin models have been found for the *Holy Cross Sermons*. The Polish manuscript of the sermons is probably from the early fourteenth century. It is, however, a copy, and perhaps a copy of a copy, the original being likely from the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century. The text of Sermons was written in Gothic minuscule with numerous acute abbreviations. Such a strongly developed system of abbreviation has not previously been seen in any medieval monument of Polish literature (as well as Czech). The system used in the abbreviations is thoughtful and closely modeled on Latin forms. This proves the long practice of writing in Polish and the existence of the

86 See J. Kaliszuk, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

scriptorium, where many other manuscripts in the Polish language were probably created for the purposes of other collections, now irretrievably lost. The text of the Sermons contains many very archaic linguistic forms and compound words, in which it definitely differs from all subsequent historical forms of the Polish language. It still uses orthography found in diplomas and documents from before the fourteenth century. The *Holy Cross Sermons* stand thus at the beginning of the history of Polish literature, as this masterpiece is the first continuous independent Polish text in which the Polish language, previously existing in oral forms, takes the form of writing. They are also proof of the high level of Polish written culture before the middle of the fourteenth century. The *Holy Cross Sermons* belong to the oldest, most archaic layers of Polish literature. They indicate that before the middle of the fourteenth century, works in the Polish language were of an elite character. There was then in Poland an intellectual milieu interested in cultivating a literature in the national language and of a high artistic level. From the middle of the fourteenth century, literary works in the Polish language became a much more popular focus of collections.