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Old polish christmas carols by contemplative nuns (seventeenth and eighteenth centuries)

ABSTRACT: Old Polish Christmas carols in the contemplative female orders of Benedictine nuns, Poor Clares and Carmelite nuns were written and functioned at the junction of traditions – Polish and European, lay and religious, noble and elite, monastic and folk – and also in the Polish borderlands, which exhibited great diversification in terms of nationalities, religious denominations and cultures. The numerous versions of carols confirm not only their popularity, but also the fact that they functioned in specific environments, with the mutual influence of various motives, particularly noticeable in this genre, which was susceptible to all sorts of interference.

The singing of carols, including those types which were characteristic of the monastic environment, such as lullabies, religious carols, songs of the nativity and of adoration and New Year carols, was a traditional part of Christmas celebrations. Performed both as part of the liturgy and outside it, they constituted a sort of a paratheatrical spectacle, characteristic of the Baroque mentality and of the spirituality of a specific order.

KEYWORDS: Christmas carols, contemplative orders, Benedictine nuns, Carmelite nuns, Poor Clares, Republic of Poland, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

One of the essential features of the culture of Old Poland¹ was the relationship between various fields of social and artistic life and religion.² This context determined the ‘communal nature of the model of Christian life’ and reciprocally influenced religious awareness: both folk awareness – imbued with Sarmatian features and elements of medieval piety and the cult of Jesus’ humanity – and ‘high’ awareness, the manifestations of which included monastic culture, propagat-

¹ The period from the Middle Ages to the Partitions of Poland in the late eighteenth century.

² The transformations in Post-Trent Polish Catholicism were connected with the formation and development of the Baroque. This reform coincided with a period referred to as the ‘golden age’ of the Republic of Poland. See Jerzy Kłoczowski, Lidia Müllerowa and Jan Skarbek, *Zarys dziejów Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce* [Outline history of the Catholic Church in Poland (Cracow, 1986), 84ff. Further research is required in order to establish the extent of religion’s inspiration in the culture of old epochs. See Stefan Sawicki, ‘Religia a literatura. Zarys problematyki badań’ [Religion and literature. An outline of research issues], in *Inspiracje religijne w literaturze* [Religious inspirations in literature] (Warszawa, 1983), 20.

ing spirituality derived from the great mystics.³ Monasteries ‘codified the spatial aspects of their activities in a strikingly coherent manner’⁴ and mediated between the official and folk culture.⁵ Monasteries were an integral part of both the ‘macroinstitution’ of the Church and the Old Polish society in which they functioned. They belonged to a world, united by ‘religion, customs and rites, the cult of the past, blood relations and hierarchies of social estates’, in which a sense of meaning was given by faith in transcendental reality, and literary culture ‘expressed everything that was unknown and irrational in legible, named and ordered forms’.⁶ This environment was created directly, albeit to varying degrees, by confessors, preachers and other clergymen, including representatives of the numerous convents, nuns’ relatives and schoolgirls’ families, residents, neighbours, benefactors (and debtors) of the convent, members of monastic brotherhoods, and also the monastic ‘family’ and the peasants and craftsmen subject to them. On average, a female religious community during the Old Polish period would consist of 20–40 nuns, governed by a spiritual mother and the monastic council assisting her.

A slightly satirical image of such a community of Lviv-based Benedictine nuns is presented in a monastic carol in which the Baby Jesus is visited by a succession

³ See Alina Nowicka-Jeżowa, ‘Feniks w popiołach. Uwagi o kulturze religijnej drugiej połowy XVII w.’ [Phoenix in the ashes. Remarks on the religious culture of the second half of the seventeenth century], in Barbara Otwinowska, Janusz Pelc and Barbara Fełęcka (eds.) *Literatura i kultura polska po ‘potopie’* [Polish literature and culture after the ‘Deluge’] (Wrocław, 1992), 122, 127–131. It should be emphasised, however, that folk and high culture influenced each other. See Pelc, ‘Literatura na przełomie dwu stuleci (XVI i XVII). Perspektywy polskie i europejskie’ [Literature around the turn of two centuries (sixteenth and seventeenth). Polish and European perspectives], in Otwinowska and Pelc (eds.), *Przełom wieków XVI i XVII w literaturze i kulturze polskiej* [The turn of the seventeenth century in Polish literature and culture] (Wrocław, 1984), 30; Jan Kracik, ‘Religijność baroku. Przejaw reformy katolickiej czy kontrreformacji’ [The religiosity of the Baroque. Manifestations of Catholic reform or Counter Reformation], *Znak*, 482 (1995/7), 15ff; Antoni Czyż, ‘Polski barok niesarmacki’ [The non-Sarmatian Polish Baroque], in *Władza marzeń. Studia o wyobraźni i tekstach* [The power of dreams. Studies on imagination and texts] (Bydgoszcz 1997), 171.

⁴ Krzysztof Dmitruk analyses the spatial phenomena of literary culture, defining the term ‘space’ and describing it as ‘resistance’, ‘organisation’ and ‘value’. See Dmitruk, ‘Przestrzeń w kulturze literackiej’ [Space in literary culture], in Stefan Żółkiewski and Maryla Hopfinger (eds.) *Kultura – komunikacja – literatura. Studia nad XX wiekiem* [Culture, communication and literature. Studies on the twentieth century] (Wrocław, 1976), 169–170.

⁵ See Kłoczowski, *Od pustelni do wspólnoty. Grupy zakonne w wielkich religiach świata* [From hermitage to congregation. Monastic groups in the world’s great religions] (Warsaw, 1987), 209; Nowicka-Jeżowa, ‘Bazylianie na kresach – pośrednicy między kulturą oficjalną a ludową’ [Basilians in the borderlands. Intermediaries between official and folk culture], in Hanna Dziechcińska (ed.), *Literatura i instytucje w dawnej Polsce* [Literature and institutions in Old Poland] (Warsaw, 1994), 57–78. The observations quoted there largely refer to the activities of the Jesuits, as well.

⁶ See Jan Kozłowski, ‘Biblioteka Załuskich w dwunastu odsłonach’ [The Załuski Library in twelve tableaux], in *Biblioteka Załuskich. Corona urbis et orbis. Wystawa w 250 rocznicę otwarcia Biblioteki Załuskich w Warszawie* [The Załuski Library. Corona urbis et orbis. An exhibition on the 250th anniversary of the opening of the Załuski Library in Warsaw] (Warszawa, 1998), 19–20.

of nuns; this gave the authoress a pretext for depicting their characteristic features, connected both with their daily functions and with their personal virtues and vices. Gifts are brought by an abbess, a cantor, a novice mistress, lay sisters, a dispenser, a cook, a doorkeeper, a nun responsible for vestments, and so on:

<i>Ksieni niech da złota</i>	(May the Abbess give gold,
<i>Kadzidła Dorota</i>	Dorothy incense,
<i>Czapeczkę Zofija</i>	Sophie a cap
<i>Płaszczyk Wiktoryja [...]</i>	And Victoria a coat [...]
<i>Ludgarda szafarka</i>	Ludgarda the dispenser
<i>Przypilnuje garnka</i>	Takes care of the pots
<i>Kucharką mu będzie</i>	She'll be the cook
<i>Bo na tym urzędzie</i>	Because that's what she does
<i>Benigna z Idą</i>	Benigna and Ida
<i>Współ z sobą przyjdą</i>	Are coming together
<i>Pocieszą Paniątko</i>	They'll cheer the little Lord
<i>Niosąc Mu jagniątko</i>	By bringing a lamb
<i>Zakonna mistrzyni</i>	The novice mistress
<i>Co może to czyni</i>	Will do what she can,
<i>Ciągnąc dziecko z świata</i>	Take a child from the world
<i>Do nowicyjatu [...]</i> ⁷	And into the novitiate [...]

The nuns come with carols and gifts. Some are poor timekeepers or oversensitive about their health, others have a very loud voice, and there are even amateur cat breeders (which is against the rules of the Order)...

<i>[...] Bogumiła śmieje</i>	([...] Bogumiła boldly
<i>Swe rozpuści trele</i>	Casts forth her trills,
<i>Głośno ciągnąc tony</i>	Singing so loudly
<i>Aż zagłuszy dzwony</i>	She'll drown out the bells
<i>Panna Cecylia</i>	Sister Cecilia
<i>Ta koteczkom sprzyja</i>	Lover of kittens
<i>Przyniesie przed wrota</i>	Will bring Baby Jesus
<i>Jezusowi kota</i>	A cat to the gate

⁷ 'Kolęda małeńkiemu Jezusowi od Panien Zakonnych' [Carol for the Baby Jesus from religious sisters], in *Kolędy zakonne* [Monastic carols]. Archive of Lviv-based Benedictine Nuns [hereafter ALB] in Krzeszów. Ref. E 16.

<i>Kunegunda chora</i>	Kunigunde's ill
<i>Więc nie była wczora</i>	So she missed yesterday
<i>Dziś Panu hołduje</i>	Today she pays tribute
<i>Wraz i postękuje</i>	To the Lord and is groaning
<i>Kiedy pozawczora</i>	Two days ago
<i>zdążyć Teodora</i>	Theodora was absent
<i>Nie mogła do szopy</i>	So today to the manger,
<i>Dziś bieży w te tropy [...]</i> ⁸	She's running along [...]

The author of this text, anticipating unfavourable comments from the nuns described in this way, emphasised that 'In the largest forest, not all firs are the same; in the most beautiful wheat, a fallen stem can be found; the world is a beautiful work, but let's see... isn't it filled with a mob of bad people?' For all the variety of people residing in the monastery who were commented on in this way, the most important thing was that they formed a community: of purpose, wishes and ideals; a monastic family.

The functioning of a contemplative monastery was connected with *opus Dei*, praising God together, subordinating all activities to the liturgy, and *lectio divina*, divine reading. An appropriately composed cycle of the Church year and canonical hours ensured there would be time for work and prayers. The ceremonial of the festivals held over the Church year indicates that the awareness of the participants in the liturgy was formed by the stimulation of their visual and oral imagination, and also through the theatricality of the verbal message. In this situation, literature fulfilled a mainly instrumental function, for the benefit of the paratheatrical performance – arising from the transgression of the liturgical and ritual canons – which the celebration of Church festivals, including Christmas, was becoming.⁹ It was a kind of immersion in that sacred period, which transformed human existence into blessed time through ritual participation in the liturgy and paraliturgical.

This period was experienced within a specific, characteristic spiritual environment, where it was organised in a particular way. In the Lviv convent, before this celebration, after *rorate coeli* and the Holy Mass, the nuns would walk in procession, with lit candles, to the refectory, where 'the cantor sister would start reading in Polish the Christmas carol that was read in Latin during the prime'. When uttering the words 'Jesus Christ immortal God', the nuns would kneel down; when listen-

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Similarly, an attempt to experience Holy Week by reconstructing its events was derived from medieval mystery plays, which engaged the whole life of the community, as well as schoolgirls and 'lay' sisters. In Nieśwież, this practice comprised canonical, sung or recited hours and the reading aloud of prescribed texts, especially descriptions of biblical events, subsequently acted by the nuns with the participation of a band. See Małgorzata Borkowska, 'Triduum sacrum u benedyktynek nieświeskich w XVIII w.' [The Holy Triduum in the practice of the Benedictine sisters of Nieśwież during the eighteenth century], *Nasza Przeszłość*, 76 (1991), 315–327.

ing to the verse ‘The Lord was born in Bethlehem of Judea’, they would prostrate themselves and lie with their arms stretched out to the sides. Then a chapter would be held, for which two ‘thrones’ were prepared for Christ and His Mother and candlesticks were placed on the tables. After confession, penitence was expressed by self-flagellation¹⁰ and then completed with a speech by the abbess and the sprinkling of all the participants with holy water. On Christmas Eve, a nativity scene was brought into the refectory and arranged in the window (perhaps with wax figurines presented by John III Sobieski, depicting the king and the queen, among others). After supper (comprising ten dishes, shared with the poor), the nuns would go to the church, carrying the figures to the choir in procession: ‘The Holy Virgin would be borne by the abbess, St Joseph by the prioress, the angels by others [nuns – J.G.] and an ox and ass by the younger ones’; next, a litany and other pious songs were sung, especially a Christmas carol composed in the monastery, ‘*Idziesz z nieba Panie*’ [You come from Heaven, Lord].¹¹

Similarly, on Christmas Eve, the prioress of the Carmelite nuns carried the figure of Mary to the choir, the sub-prioress carried the effigy of Joseph, and all the nuns joined the procession, singing the carol ‘*Zbawiciel do nas zawita / Oto niech gospody szuka / Do cel naszych we drzwi puka*’ [The Saviour will come to us / Let him seek an inn / Let him knock on the doors of our cells].¹² Upstairs, there was a manger with a figure of the Baby Jesus. On Christmas Day, after matins, the Carmelite sisters would go in procession to the refectory, with the mother superior carrying the figure of Baby Jesus. The sisters would sing the carol ‘*Rozkwitnęła się lilija*’ [The lily has bloomed] and then kiss the feet of the figure, now lying in the middle, in the hay. They would sing or play Christmas carols, some of which they composed themselves (during Advent, they would draw ‘maxims’ on which to base them), assuming specific roles, such as shepherds.¹³

¹⁰ The signs of piety expressed in this way were nothing extraordinary, even among lay people, as has been vividly described by Jędrzej Kotowicz and recently discussed by Maria Bogucka, *Staropolskie obyczaje w XVI–XVII wieku* [Old Polish customs during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries] (Warszawa, 1994), 93–94.

¹¹ *Porządek godzin i zabaw zakonnych* [The order of monastic hours and recreation], ALB in Krzeszów, ref. D 4, 112–115. It turns out that the singing of carols was quite a challenge, as the sub-prioress could give a special meal: ‘when the nuns, poor things, have a pie each and drink some mead, they will gain wisdom and strength and will sing the songs loudly’. Thus the monastery – which also produced famous gingerbread, ‘confessor’s bread’ and ‘Carmelite cake’ – was participating in yet another field of Lviv culture: cooking.

¹² *O zwyczajach naszych i niektóre ceremonie domowe* [On our customs and some domestic ceremonies]. Library of Discalced Carmelite Nuns in Wesola [hereafter LDCNW], MS 164, fol. 51.

¹³ *Zebrań zwyczajów od WWMN Naszych Fundatorek i pierwszych Matek... konwentu S. Marcina... Roku Pań[skiego] 1729* [Collected customs from the Reverend Mothers Our Founders and first Mothers... of the convent of St Martin... in the year of our Lord 1729]. LDCNW, MS 268, 116.

If there was no biblical description that could be acted out, a new rite was created (celebrated inside the enclosure), based on recited and sung paraliturgical texts and occasional melic poetry, together with accompanying gestures. Through the repetition of this rite, a new custom was formed.¹⁴ The custom of singing Christmas carols was of the same character. Carmelite nuns would take part in 'joyful pious jumping in a circle', to the accompaniment of 'pious songs about the Birth of the Lord composed to merry tunes'.¹⁵ On Boxing Day, the nuns would stand at the refectory door with a crib and a figure of the Baby Jesus, singing a Christmas carol to the prioress – a different carol each year. The prioress prepared a meal, as well as a small gift for each nun.¹⁶ Christmas carols were sung on the way to the choir, in the refectory and in places of recreation and meditation.

Similarly, Benedictine nuns, on a specified date, would go to the cell of the abbess led by their prioress, carrying a crib with a wax figure of the Baby Jesus. Standing at the threshold, they sang Christmas carols, and when the abbess opened the door and placed the figure on the table, they were given small gifts. The nuns tried to write new texts every year, which were usually 'gratefully' accepted by the addressees; the criticism that the authors anticipated was to be pre-empted by a comment, resembling verses to unfair critics: 'If not everyone likes the verses in this carol, read this one to them [...]

*Wreszcie na małej jest to u mnie pieczy
 Że kto tam rzeczce: wiersze nie do rzeczy
 Trudniej jest zrobić, łatwiej zaś zepsować
 Trudniej napisać, łatwiej krytykować.*¹⁷

(After all it concerns me not greatly
 That somebody says: the poems are nonsense
 It's harder to do and more easy to spoil
 Harder to write and more easy to spite.)

These texts were performed with the accompaniment of a guitar or organ (departures from this custom were noted; for example, in 1794 a Christmas carol 'was not sung in the prioress's residence, but given to the hands' of the Lviv abbess Elżbieta Benigna Kruszelnicka (1723–1804)).

An important element of such a verbal message was the melody, which was a major factor – compared to the written text – in facilitating the circulation of poetry

¹⁴ An example of this situation were the so-called funerals of the BVM; in 1781, the Cracow consistory banned this rite. See Jan Gajkowski, *Benedyktynki sandomierskie* [The Benedictine nuns of Sandomierz] (Sandomierz, 1917), 83.

¹⁵ *Zebranie zwyczajów*, fol. 53.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* Cf. Czesław Gil, *Życie codzienne karmelitanek bosych w Polsce w XVII-XIX w.* [The daily life of the Discalced Carmelite nuns in Poland during the seventeenth-nineteenth centuries] (Kraków, 1997), 121–128.

¹⁷ 'Koleśa małeńkiemu Jezusowi...' [Carol to the Baby Jesus], in *Koledy zakonne*, ABL.

within a community, among convents and in the hierarchic society.¹⁸ From the first half of the seventeenth century, there appeared a group of Christmas carols sung to the melodies of lay songs and dances; common melodies appeared, sometimes composed (compiled) especially for monastic use, to avoid having to use the popular variant, which would have been too much of a dance version for those purposes. However, in the analysed collection of carols from the Carmelite environment of the Poor Clares and the Lviv Benedictines, no original melodies have been preserved, which also confirms the popularity and familiarity of the musical motif.¹⁹

Carols and pious songs, often containing allusions to current affairs known to the audience, were addressed directly to the abbess, guests at the monastery, inspectors, benefactors or relatives of the nuns. One anonymous Carmelite nun refers to novices,²⁰ and in 1751 the abbess of the Sandomierz Benedictine convent, Franciszka Tarłówna, was the dedicatee of a Christmas carol written by Domicella Konturnicka, a nun from Lviv:

*Wesoły tryumf dziś się nam zaczyna
Gdy narodzony Bóg mała Dziecina
Pozwala dzisiaj szczęścia majątnego
Witać nam Gościa tak pożądanego*

¹⁸ See Dziechcińska, *Oglądanie i słuchanie w kulturze dawnej Polski* [Looking and listening in the culture of Old Poland] (Warszawa, 1987), 65ff. For example, the Benedictine nuns of Lviv received a Christmas carol from the Calced Carmelite monks, presented through the intermediary of Revd Zielonka, a relative of one of the nuns. Notated traditional Ukrainian Christmas carols, as well as various versions of well-known songs, confirm the circulation of these texts in society, irrespective of the musical transmission (it was in this form that they were transmitted by the nuns). It is worth adding that sometimes, for example in the monastery in Jarosław, nativity plays were also performed, and the accessories consisted of as many as twenty-eight elements, such as a crib on silver chains, cups, a spoon, three figurines of the Baby Jesus and Mary ornamented with valuable jewels, and even a silver cage with doves. See Ignacy Rychlik, *Kościół i klasztor PP. Benedyktyniek w Jarosławiu* [The Benedictine sisters' church and convent in Jarosław] (Jarosław, 1903), 29.

¹⁹ The topic of carols and their functioning in monasteries has been discussed, for example, by Małgorzata Borkowska, *Panny siostry w świecie sarmackim* [Religious sisters in the Sarmatian world] (Warsaw, 2002), Borkowska, *Życie codzienne polskich klasztorów żeńskich w XVII-XVIII wieku* [Daily life in Polish female monasteries during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries] (Warsaw, 1996), Barbara Krzyżaniak, *Kantyczki z rękopisów karmelitańskich (XVII/XVIII w.)* [Canticles from Carmelite manuscripts (17th/18th centuries)] (Kraków, 1977), and more recently Halina Popławska, *Kultura literacka karmelitanek bosych w Polsce (XVII-XVIII wiek)* [The literary culture of the Discalced Carmelite nuns in Poland (17th/18th centuries)] (Gdańsk, 2006); see also Henryk Cempura: *Kultura muzyczna klasztoru PP. Klarysek w Starym Sączu w latach 1700–1782* [The musical culture of the Poor Clares convent in Stary Sącz 1700–1782] (Tarnów, 2009). Nevertheless, there has still not yet been a comprehensive multi-aspect study of the functions of carols in the environment of female contemplative orders, and this article constitutes an attempt to start filling that gap.

²⁰ Canticles 91 and 92, in *Kantyczki po polsku* [Canticles in Polish]. Kórnik Library, MS. Ref. 1374, 39, 40, 62.

*Xienię tak godną z której to Imienia
Świat cały zaszczyt i zakonne cienia
Mają ozdobę lubo w nich ukryta
Samemu Bogu chcąc być znamienita [...].²¹*

(Joyous triumph starts this day,
As God incarnate, the little Child
Brings us the precious happiness
To greet a longed-for Guest:
The worthy Abbess, whose name is sung
Around the world, and who adorns
The cloistral shadows, but stays concealed
That God alone might deem her glorious).

Often the addressees of the carols would turn from listeners into active participants in the event, composing and performing similar texts, for example Jan Sapieha, Voivode of Brest, Stanisław Jabłonowski, Voivode of Rus, Stanisław Ledóchowski, Voivode of Volhynia, and Antonina Rzewuska, née Potocka, wife of the Volhynia Voivode:

*Jam kolendę otrzymała, alem się niespodziewała
Uznanej ku mnie miłości, którą mi z swej przytomności
Affekt wasz wyświadczył
Gdyście wesóło śpiewały nad me godność winszowały
Ja tesz chęci moje głoszę i o pozwolenie proszę
Bym wam odśpiewała [...]
Więc przeoryszy winszuje, na nowy Rok ofiaruje
Symeona po kolendzie aby ją ten w jej urzędzie
We wszystkim wspomagał [...]
Zgromadzeniu kochanemu i na mnie łaskawemu
Za kolende ofiaruie Maryą którą miłuie
Wam z serca każda [...].²²*

(I got a gift, but had not expected
Tokens of love by your hearts affected
With your presence here.
Since you've gaily sung and wished me well beyond my worth
So I declare my will and ask your let
To sing to you in turn [...]
So the prioress doth wish, and for the New Year offers

²¹ *Kolędy zakonne*, ALB E 16.

²² *Pieśni nabożne spisane w roku Pańskim 1738* [Pious songs recorded in the year of our Lord 1738]. Jagiellonian Library, MS. Ref. 7479 II

Simeon, that in his office he might help
 Her grace with everything [...]

To the beloved congregation, so gracious to me
 The gift I offer is Mary, whom I love
 She knows us in Her heart [...].)

Etymologically, this carol refers to the Roman *calandae*, a tribute made to celebrate the New Year (*strenae*); it is a 'well-wishing' carol – a concept that since the sixteenth century has also covered the 'dedication' or 'gift' carol. In Old Polish, the meanings of the Christmas carol and the New Year carol would intermingle within a shared space of impressions and experiences, a specific world of both inner contentment and reality.²³ They arose at the juncture between universal Christianity and local national cultures, combining the sacred sphere common to them all, adopted from the outside, and a diversified profane sphere, imbued with the local tradition that preserved the specifically national world of beliefs, notions, existence and mentality.²⁴ A carol combines various cultural and literary levels, as well as different variants of the national language – dialect-based styles. The principle features of this genre are its iconicity and use of *contrafactum*.²⁵ It constitutes a literary image of Christmas, with the emphasis upon the divine or the human nature of Christ. Two strands of carol output arise from here, although the boundary between them is rather blurred: the emotional and nostalgic, on one hand, and the speculative and mystical, on the other. In the former, Christ is depicted as a child, who, for example, needs to be put to sleep (a lullaby carol); this strand is characterised by the theme of regret. In the latter, we find the motif of welcoming, conveying the immensity of the mystery of the Incarnation, fathomable only by love. Reflection here serves speculative cognition; prayer serves mystical cognition. The *contrafactum* is particularly salient in the melic nature of this poetry and the influence of other genres. One can also discern a parallel with iconographic images of Christmas; this tradition reaches back to the revelations of St Gertrude and the writings of St Theresa of Avila,²⁶ and it also refers to initials and miniatures in liturgical books from this period in the Church year.

²³ On this subject, see Jan Okoń, 'Kolęda jako fenomen kultury' [The carol as a cultural phenomenon], in Tadeusz Budrewicz, Stanisław Koziara and Jan Okoń (eds.), *Z kolędą przez wieki. Kolędy w Polsce i w krajach słowiańskich* [With the carol through the ages. Carols in Poland and Slavic lands] (Tarnów, 1996), 21–24.

²⁴ A. Lipatow, 'Historia literatury a gatunek (czynniki uniwersalne i lokalne: kolęda)' [The history of literature and the genre (universal and local factors: the carol)] in Budrewicz, Koziara and Okoń (eds.), *Z kolędą przez wieki*, particularly p. 68.

²⁵ On this subject see Agata Stankowska, 'O ikoniczności kolędy' [On the iconicity of carols], in Budrewicz, Koziara and Okoń (eds.), *Z kolędą przez wieki*, 61–63.

²⁶ On the reception of the output of Spanish mystics in carols, see Katarzyna Kaczor-Scheitler, *Mistycyzm hiszpański w piśmiennictwie polskich karmelitanek XVII i XVIII wieku* [Spanish mysticism in the writings of Polish Carmelite nuns during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries] (Łódź, 2005), 259–281.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, carols were written mainly within the monastic environment, manifesting a piety that was consistent with the spirituality of a particular order. In the old Republic of Poland, there were female communities of mediaeval provenance (Augustinians, Carmelites of the Ancient Observance), contemplative orders (Benedictines, Cistercians), orders of the Augustinian tradition (Dominicans, Bridgettines, Sisters Canonesses of the Holy Spirit, Norbertines), of the Franciscan tradition (Bernardines, Poor Clares) and newly established or reformed orders (Sacramentines, Visitandines, Discalced Carmelites).²⁷ Christmas carols functioned in each order, irrespective of its monastic rule; however, one notes differences in the motifs chosen and the attitudes towards them. This is visible in the texts analysed here, from convents of Benedictine nuns, Carmelite nuns and Poor Clares. To a certain extent, given the universality of the subject, that diversity reflects the spirituality characteristic of each order, a certain intellectual atmosphere, and even the specificities of an individual monastery, including its geographical location (e.g. Christmas carols from Lviv contain references to local folklore). However, that aspect requires further research.

The Carmelite nuns treated Christmas as a subject of meditation, searching for the meaning of God's sacrifice, transferring real experience into metaphorical reality. Mother Euphrasia of St Casimir (Helena Sanguszkówna), a Vilnius-based Carmelite nun, was the author of 'songs', thirty of which are devoted to Christmas.²⁸ They represent 'religious poetry of the high Baroque', proving that the author 'moved around the world of symbolic culture [...] with great competence and freedom',²⁹ referring to the Gospel:³⁰

*Czemu Bóg w żłobku leży przy swym narodzeniu,
Lecz łatwy jest w tym domysł i duchownych zdanie,
Iż ten żłobek figurą, że Pan Jezus stanie
W sercu które jak żłobek całe wypróżnione
Będzie z swoich afektów ściśle ogółocone.*³¹

²⁷ This subject is described in more detail in Borkowska, *Zakony żeńskie w Polsce w epoce nowożytnej* [Female monasteries in Poland during the modern era] (Lublin, 2010).

²⁸ For a discussion of authorship and an analysis of the carols, see Popławska, *Kultura literacka karmelitanek bosych w Polsce* [The literary culture of Discalced Carmelite nuns in Poland] (Gdańsk, 2006), 109–156.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

³⁰ Stanisław Nieznanowski notes the faithfulness to the Gospel, emphasising that the Carmelite nuns offered their own interpretation of biblical events. For analysis, see Nieznanowski, 'Barokowe kolędy polskie' [Baroque Polish carols], in Otwinowska et al. (eds.), *Necessitas et ars. Studia staropolskie dedykowane Profesorowi Januszowi Pelcowi* [*Necessitas et ars. Old Polish studies dedicated to Professor Janusz Pelc*], i (Warszawa, 1993), 113–121.

³¹ *Kantyczki*, Kórnik Library, MS. Ref. 1374, 77.

(Why God was in a manger born,
 One well might guess and priests divine,
 This crib's a sign the Lord will rule
 The hearts of those who, like an empty crib,
 Are stripped of their affects.)

The religious experience in carols depicts primarily love for God, who is 'the eternal light', 'the living flame', 'the Monarch of heaven', 'the innocent Lamb' and, above all, 'the love of the soul':

*Znalazłam tego, którego miłuję,
 Któremu się serce moje kontentuje...*³²

(I've found the one I love,
 In whom my heart delights...)

The events of the Bethlehem Night, as related to the monastic environment, inclined nuns to reflection, often concluding with prayer.³³ Thus the monastic customs, inscribed within the space of the cell or the kitchen, provided an opportunity to express religious feelings: a sister asked the mother superior to be allowed to stay in the kitchen to heat and cook food for the 'Baby'.³⁴ Similar readiness to serve God is declared by another Carmelite nun:

*Będę pieluszki chędogo prala,
 Tobie z Matusią jeść gotowała.
 Hej, hej obrałam sobie,
 Służyć mój Jezu Tobie...
 Co tylko każesz, będę robiła
 W szczęściu, w nieszczęściu będę służyła.*³⁵

(I'll wash Thy swaddling clothes
 And cook Thy food with Mum
 Hey, hey, knowst Thou I've chosen
 To serve Thee, my Lord Jesus...
 Whatever Thou may bid I'll do.
 Content or sad I'll serve Thee.)

³² Ibid.

³³ See Stanisław Dobrzycki, 'O koledach' [Carols], in *Z historii literatury polskiej* [From the history of Polish literature] (Warszawa, 1989), 247–248.

³⁴ Ibid, 75, 83.

³⁵ 'Pójdę do Niego' [I shall go to Him], in *Pieśni różne wyięte z różnych Kancjonałów o Bożym Narodzeniu...Roku Pańskiego 1741...* [Various songs taken from different songbooks about Christmas... the year of our Lord 1741...]. Jagiellonian Library MS. Ref. 3642, 35–36

At the same time, this familiar reality is a pretext for depicting a monastic context – devotion to God: ‘for swaddling clothes’, Mother Euphrasia gives her heart and soul, renewing her vows (‘I am Your and Your Mother’s slave’).³⁶

Similarly, the Poor Clares concentrated on the emotional experience of leaving the Holy Family.³⁷ The influence of the Franciscan tradition in the texts of Christmas carols is distinct in the strand of the ‘bird wedding’, known throughout Slavic lands, as well as in Germany.³⁸ Animals also appear in the sacrificial procession as a reference to a secular carol for the host, or they constitute a pretext for making a complaint to the new-born Jesus and His Mother with a request for intercession for the poor and the harmed, and for justice:

*Pasły się owce za borem, a wilczek do nich z ferworem
Skarżą się owce w stajence, skazują rany Panience
Na pasterzów się skarżyli że długo w szopie bawili
Kazał Pan wilka zawołać, pasterzom sprawę obwołać [...].*

(The sheep were grazing through the wood; a young wolf neared with relish.
The sheep complained within the barn; they showed the Lord their wounds.
They blamed the shepherds at the crib for lingering too long.
The Lord God bade the wolf be called, the shepherds brought to book [...])

And the same motif in another version:

*Rozpędził owieczki, a one w ucieczki, do Pana w Betleem,
Wilczek nas pokąsał, jeszcze się natrzęsał nad nami, nad nami
A my niebożęta i nasze jagnięta ginimy, ginimy [...]*³⁹

(He chased the little lambs, which fled – unto the Lord in Judah,
The young wolf bit us lambs and sneered, derided us and sneered.
And we poor things and all our lambs are dying here, are dying [...])

In the Carmelite canticles, this motif reads as follows:

*Pasły się owce pod borem, przybieżał wilczek z ferworem, rozproszył owieczki, one do
jameczki za Panem. Skarżąc się przed nim w stajence, pokażą rany Panience; wilczek
nas pokąsał, jeszcze się natrzęsał nad nami.*⁴⁰

(The sheep were grazing through the wood; a young wolf neared with relish, scattering the lambs forthwith, which fled unto the Lord. Complaining to him in the barn, they

³⁶ Ibid, 78.

³⁷ Lipatow, ‘Historia literatury a gatunek’, 68.

³⁸ On this subject, see Stanisław Koziara, ‘Świat zwierzęcy w kolędach’ [The animal world in carols], in Budrewicz, Koziara and Okoń (eds.), *Z kolędą przez wieki*, 242.

³⁹ *Pieśni nabożne spisane w roku Pańskim 1738*, 12.

⁴⁰ Koziara, ‘Świat zwierzęcy w kolędach’, 242.

showed the Lord their wounds; the wolf has bitten us and sneered, has bitten us and jeered.)

As a result of the intervention of the animals gathered in the barn, the wolf is severely punished. Thus the brutal laws of nature and social relations lose their power for a moment due to the miracle of the Bethlehem Night – a ‘classic example of the symbolic values that have become established around these animals’.⁴¹

The texts of Christmas carols circulated in copies not only around monasteries, but also around the whole of Poland and abroad.⁴² Thus a monastery adhered to the model of a communicational situation with the paradigms of time (Christmas) and space (the nativity scene). The stable or barn is a space where historical time is annulled (the setting switches to Poland and the shepherds acquire Polish names) and a mystery comes into being, comprising the universe, all people and the whole of creation.

Christmas carols, as part of established customs, were well known and popular in society,⁴³ particularly since, in the religious awareness of Old Poland, the Post-Trent unification of the liturgy brought the nationalisation of other forms of religious worship as well. One such example was the depiction of the supernatural world in a way that was adapted to the recipients’ mentality, as is visible in religious works of art.⁴⁴

Carols were strongly rooted in the reality of the serfs: the advent of Christ takes place in contemporary times, in a Polish village. It is accompanied by the problems connected with a child’s birth in a poor family, and even the gifts offered to Him replicate the peasants’ tribute:⁴⁵

⁴¹ Lipatow, ‘Historia literatury a gatunek’, 68.

⁴² In Moravia, as the Carmelite nuns of Vilnius noted on their journey, people living in and around Lachowice would sing various ‘songs in Moravian about the Birth of Jesus. There were so many different voices that they sounded beautifully like music’. See *Klasztory karmelitanek bosych w Polsce, na Litwie i Rusi. Ich początek, rozwój i tułactwo w czasie rozruchów wojennych w XVII wieku. Rzecz osnuta na kronikach klasztornych* [Convents of Discalced Carmelite sisters in Poland, Lithuania and Rus. Their beginnings, development and wanderings during the times of the military tumult in the seventeenth century, on the basis of monastic chronicles] (Lviv, 1901), 89. On the peregrinations of the Carmelite nuns, see Karolina Targosz, *Piórem zakonniczy. Kronikarki w Polsce XVII w. o swoich zakonach i swoich czasach* [Nuns of the pen. Female chroniclers in seventeenth-century Poland on their convents and their times] (Cracow, 2002).

⁴³ See Mirosław Korolko, ‘Pieśń religijna’ [Religious song], in Teresa Michałowska (ed.), *Słownik literatury staropolskiej (Średniowiecze. Renesans. Barok)* [Dictionary of Old Polish literature (Middle Ages, Renaissance and Baroque)] (Wrocław, 1990), 578–585.

⁴⁴ See Janusz Tazbir, ‘Polonizacja potrydenckiego katolicyzmu’ [The Polonisation of Post-Trent Catholicism], in *Rzeczpospolita i świat. Studia z dziejów kultury XVII wieku* [The republic and the world. Studies on seventeenth-century culture] (Wrocław, 1971).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 115, 120. Thus Christmas carols, although confirming the sense of the sanctity of everyday family life, sometimes also ‘concealed the presence of God in the Bethlehem family’. See Nowicka-Jeżowa, ‘Feniks w popiołach’, 130.

[...] <i>Wziąwszy zatem z kosza Franek, obwarzanek Stach masła garnuszek Kuba worek gruszek Kładę Panu po kolędzie jeśli tego mało będzie Dam i jabłuszek</i>	(...) From the basket, Frank took crack- nel Stan a pot of butter, Jake a bag of pears did take I offer them unto the Lord And if proves too little, I'll give some apples too ⁴⁶
<i>Za drugimi Iwan stary, od koszary Bieży wziąwszy mleka i woła z daleka Aby miało święte Panie Słodką kaszę na śniadanie Moje kochanie [...].'⁴⁷</i>	After them old Ivan runs With milk fresh drawn and calling That the holy Lord sweet-meal might have Sweet-meal to eat for breakfast My dear lord [...]

Thus the fate of a simple poor peasant is compared with the fate of the Holy Family.

The structural transformation of the language of Christmas carols proceeded unevenly and in a variety of ways. Quite frequently, the aim was not to imitate dialects, for example, but to evoke the image of a rural language. We encounter a rich and vivid use of language: folk stylisation (folklore, humour, generic features, composition of content, folk names of instruments, products and utensils, colloquial phraseology and vocabulary, including the distortion of incomprehensible foreign words), numerous repetitions (rhetorical reinforcement of content, melic function, cyclicity), neologisms (for the purposes of rhythm, diminutives), revealing the narrator's emotional attitude, or archaic linguistic forms (verbal and syntactic).⁴⁸ In particular, Rus carols (documented in several texts from the Benedictine nuns of Lviv) referred to folk 'dumas' of a specific lyrical colouring and temperament and drew on traditional song, thereby demonstrating the coexistence of various cultures.⁴⁹

In female convents, the performance of carols was one of the Christmas customs, including types of carol that were characteristic mainly of this environment, such as lullabies, religious carols, carols of the nativity and of adoration,

⁴⁶ In the Polish, the nouns of all the offerings are deliberately given in diminutive form.

⁴⁷ 'Kolęda na Boże Narodzenie' [A carol for Christmas], in *Kolędy zakonne*.

⁴⁸ On this subject, see Jan Godyń, 'Folklor i gwara w pastorałkach karmelitańskich z XVIII wieku' [Folklore and dialect in Carmelite pastoral carols of the eighteenth century], in Budrewicz, Koziara and Okoń (eds.), *Z kolędą przez wieki*, 263–271.

⁴⁹ See Nowicka-Jeżowa, 'Pieśni ruskie z rękopisu Biblioteki Muzeum Czartoryskich (sygn. I 2337)' [Rus songs from a manuscript held at the Czartoryski Museum Library (shelf-mark I 2337)], *Barok. Historia. Literatura. Sztuka*, 3/2 (1996), 187–188.

and well-wishing carols (for the New Year).⁵⁰ Pastoral carols adhered to the Arcadian myth by freeing people from the bonds of time through the adoration of the Baby Jesus – a link between divine and human childhood – just as mysticism released people from the slavery of time by conquering the imperfections of existence and passing from the ‘theology of reason’ to a ‘theology of the heart’ – the ‘monastic cell of inner communion with God’, the key to which could be found by illuminating the mysteries of faith.⁵¹ Thus, in a monastic Christmas carol, the simple gifts we know from pastoral carols (cheese, milk) acquire symbolic meanings (heart, soul), and the dialogue, of a ritual character, is incorporated into the mystery of Christmas, as in the monastic version of the carol ‘Ach ubogi żłobie’, where only the text of the first stanza is similar to the version commonly sung today:

*Ach ubogi żłobie, co ja widzę w tobie
Drozsza piękność, niżli Niebo w ludz-
kiej osobie [...]*⁵²

*Ach ubogi żłobie, co ja widzę w tobie:
Droższy widok niż ma niebo
w maleńkiej osobie [...]*⁵³

(O poor manger, what do I see in you?
A beauty more dear than Heaven in
human form [...])

O poor manger, what do I see in you?
A sight more dear than hath Heaven in
the little form [...])

The next stanzas were composed in the environment of a female contemplative monastery as testimony to the existential experiencing of the events of the Christmas period:

⁵⁰ The best known Carmelite hymnal. See Maria Bokszczanin, ‘Kantyczka Chybińskiego. Z tradycji biblijnych i literackich kolędy barokowej’ [Chybiński’s canticle. From the biblical and literary traditions of the Baroque carol], in *Literatura –komparatystyka –folklor* [Literary, comparative studies and folklore] (Warszawa, 1968), 712–791. Krzyżaniak, *Kantyczki z rękopisów karmelitańskich; Kantyczki karmelitańskie. Rękopis z XVIII w.* [Carmelite canticles. A manuscript from the eighteenth century], ed. Krzyżaniak (Warsaw, 1980). On Christmas carols of the Benedictine nuns during the sixteenth century, see *Kolędy polskie* [Polish carols], ed. Juliusz Nowak-Dłużewski, i (Warsaw, 1966), 5; cf. Nieznanowski, ‘Stan prac nad edycją kolęd polskich XVII – XVIII w.’ [The state of work on an edition of Polish carols from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries], in Budrewicz, Koziara and Okoń (eds.), *Z kolędą przez wieki*, 84–85. The preserved Christmas carols of the Sandomierz convent have been collected by Wendelin Świerczek: ‘Katalog rękopiśmiennych zabytków muzycznych Biblioteki Seminarium Duchownego w Sandomierzu’ [Catalogue of music manuscripts of the Seminary Library in Sandomierz], *Archiwa, Biblioteki i Muzea Kościelne*, 10 (1965), 237–246.

⁵¹ Teresa Obiedzińska, ‘Mit arkadyjski w literaturze i sztuce polskiego baroku’ [The Arcadian myth in the literature and art of the Polish Baroque], in Otwinowska, Pelc and Fełęcka (eds.) *Literatura i kultura polska po ‘potopie’*, 105ff.

⁵² *Pieśni nabożne spisane w roku Pańskim 1738...*

⁵³ Mioduszewski, *Pastorałki i kolędy...*

*Ach ubogie dziecko, powiedz mi, proszę Cię
 Kto Cię zesłał w ten żłobek, kto złożył na
 świecie
 Święte Ręce były, które Cię powiły, czemu
 w sianku, a nie w miętko pościółkę złożyły
 Twoje śliczne lice i wdzięczne zrenice
 Poznawają i bydlęta i łakome lvice
 Bo i sam zwierz dziki i bydlęce ryki
 Uznawają wyrażają, że ty Bóg ukryty
 Pozwól Dziecie moje prosić matki twojej
 By cię chciała wiecznie złożyć w grzesznej
 duszy mojej
 Tam ci będę nucić, płacz śpiewaniem krócić,
 Bym ci miała już by mi się dom w niebo
 obrócił
 Będziesz mi kochaniem, pieszczaniem
 chowaniem
 Będziesz Królem, będziesz Ojcem, serca
 mego panem⁵⁴*

(O poor child, tell me, I beg You,
 Who sent You to this manger? Who brought
 You to this world?
 They were holy hands that wound You, why
 laid in straw and not soft bedding?
 Your fair visage and Your graceful eyes
 Are recognised by lowing cow and hungry
 lioness,
 For e'en wild beasts and bellowing cattle
 Acknowledge that You're God concealed.
 Allow me, Child, to ask Your mother
 To place You in my sinful soul forever.
 There I'll hum to You and stop Your tears
 with gentle singing,
 So to have You, that my house become like
 heaven.
 You will be my loved one, fondling, refuge
 You will be my King, my Father, lord unto
 my heart.

*Ach, ubogie Dziecię, powiedz a wezmę
 Cię,
 Kto Cię odbiegł w tej jaskini, kto odbiegł
 na świecie?
 Święte ręce były, które Cię powiły
 Czemu w sianku, lichej szopie Ciebie
 położyły?
 Gdyby nie te lice i śliczne zrenice,
 Już by Cię był zwierz pochłonął i łakome
 lvice.
 Ale i zwierz dziki i bydlęce ryki
 Czują skryty ogień wryty do Twojej
 twarzyczki
 Powiedz Dziecię moje, gdzie masz Matkę
 Twoję
 Ja uproszę, że Cię w moje zaniosę pokoje.
 (albo) że Cię uniosę w liche serce moje⁵⁵*

O poor child, pray tell and I will take You:
 Who left You in this lowly cave? Who left
 You in this world?
 They were holy hands that wound You.
 Why laid in straw, in a manger poor?
 If not for Your face and Your lovely eyes,
 Some beast, some hungry lioness would
 eat You.
 But e'en wild creatures and bellowing
 cattle
 Sense the hidden fire upon Your face.
 Say, my Child, where is Your Mother?
 I'll beg Her to let me take You to my
 room.
 (or) to bear You to my wretched heart.)

⁵⁴ *Pieśni nabożne spisane w roku Pańskim 1738...*

⁵⁵ Świerczek, *Katalog*, 237. The text comes from the Benedictine convent in Sandomierz, with which the sisters from Lviv maintained close contacts.

The numerous versions of well-known carols confirm not only the popularity of these songs, but also their functioning within a specific environment.⁵⁶ The texts are often anonymous, their authorship being rarely marked.⁵⁷ Consequently, the lively tradition of carol singing is testified by those songs which mention nuns who hold various functions in a convent, carry gifts to the Baby Jesus⁵⁸ or represent various nationalities and social estates (in such instances, the texts were stylised in a folk or dialect manner⁵⁹). The context of Christmas carols is connected with agriculture. The birth of Christ is perceived in a childish manner, with the singing together of lullabies and other songs and prayer stylised on the way children were addressed in secular families. Motives include dialogue and the coexistence of everyday life and religious feasts.

Old Polish Christmas carols in the contemplative female orders of Benedictine nuns, Poor Clares and Carmelite nuns were written and functioned at the junction of traditions – Polish and European, lay and religious, noble and elite, monastic and folk – and also in the Polish borderlands, which exhibited great diversification in terms of nationalities, religious denominations and cultures and also the mutual influence of various motives, particularly noticeable in this genre, which was susceptible to all sorts of interference.

⁵⁶ Comparison of several dozen carols confirms their presence in the collections of the Poor Clares, the Carmelite nuns and in printed editions, mainly in Michał Mioduszeński's *Pastoralki i kolędy*. Nevertheless, the variant character of these works is clearly marked.

⁵⁷ By way of example, named authors among the Benedictine nuns from Lviv included Domicella Konturnicka (vows in 1720; d. 1752) and Aldegunda Szklińska (vows in 1731; d. 1801); among the Carmelite nuns, we have 'Music composed by the Prioress, Reverend Mother Krystyna', 'manger by the Prioress, Reverend Mother Krystyna, 1747' (see *Kantyki albo Zebranie różnych pieśni duchownych... roku 1736* [Canticles, or Collected miscellaneous pious songs... the year 1736]. LDCNW, ref. 94, 43–45, 47–48) and the authorship of Mother Euphrasia. Halina Popławska has confirmed that this was Euphrasia of St Casimir (Helena Sanguszkówna). Popławska, *Kultura literacka karmelitanek bosych*, 109–156. The talent of some nuns 'for composing poems' and creating 'beautiful and spiritual' orations is confirmed in biographical notes. See Gil, *Słownik polskich karmelitanek bosych 1612–1914* [Dictionary of Polish Discalced Carmelite nuns 1612–1914] (Warszawa, 1999), 198.

⁵⁸ For a typology and discussion of monastic carols, see Krzyżaniak, *Kantyczki z rękopisów karmelitańskich, passim*.

⁵⁹ See Godyń, 'Folklor i gwara', 263–271.

