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The Devil and the Afterlife in the Light of Fragments of the 13th-Century Cistercian Book of Miracles from the Library of the Cistercian Abbey in Kołbacz

Diabeł i życie pozagrobowe w świetle fragmentów XIII-wiecznej cysterskiej księgi cudów z biblioteki opactwa cysterskiego w Kołbacz

ABSTRACT

This article analyses the surviving fragments of a 13th-century Cistercian book of miracles from the library of the Cistercian abbey in Kołbacz, stored in the Archives of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. These fragments are a source unknown in scholarly circulation, but important from the perspective of the culture and spirituality of the Cistercian Order. The article will address the issue of the devil, demons, the hereafter and the theme of the monks' struggle with demons. It will also try to indicate

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whether the visions of evil and supernatural forces contained in the surviving fragments fit into a broader context, consistent with Cistercian interpretation.

Key words: devil, demons, Cistercians, monastery, 13th century, Kołbacz

STRESZCZENIE

W niniejszym artykule przeprowadzono analizę zachowanych fragmentów cysterskiej księgi cudów z XIII wieku z biblioteki opactwa cysterskiego w Kołbaczu, przechowywanych w Archiwum Polskiej Akademii Nauk w Warszawie. Fragmenty te są źródłem nieznanym w obiegu naukowym, a ważnym z perspektywy kultury i duchowości zakonu cystersów. W artykule zostanie poruszona problematyka diabła, demonów, zaświatów oraz wątek zmagania mnichów z demonami. W analizie zostanie również wskazane czy zawarte w zachowanych fragmentach wizje zła i sił nadprzyrodzonych wpisują się w szerszy kontekst, zgodny z cysterską wykładnią.

Słowa kluczowe: diabeł, demony, cystersi, klasztor, XIII wiek, Kołbacz

In monastic literature, the motif of the devil and demons was already present in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. According to texts depicting the first hermits, evil spirits constantly threatened ascetics in the desert, attacking as they attacked everyone, even the holiest and most experienced ones¹. The latter usually struggled with the most dangerous and powerful demons. Nevertheless, every desert inhabitant of the desert had to be aware of the danger, alert and ready to fight the forces of evil². It should be emphasized that in these stories, the ascetic was always stronger than the demon, but neither of them managed to achieve complete victory. The forces of evil could only be defeated temporarily; the devil always came back and tormented the monks in various and sophisticated ways³.

In the early Middle Ages, a monastery was considered the entrance to paradise on earth. Therefore, any demons attempting to cross the monastery walls therefore had to face divine punishment. However, this did not exclude encounters between monks and demons, as evidenced by the lives of saints from the Merovingian and Carolingian periods attest⁴. An encounter with a demon, however, usually took place outside the

¹ An example would be the struggles of one of the first hermits, Saint. Antoni.

² The monks' task was to recognize opponents, observe at what moments and times of the day they appeared and how they attacked. A. Diem, *Encounters between Monks and Demons in Latin Texts of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, in: *Miracles and the Miraculous in Medieval Germanic and Latin Literature*, eds. K.E. Olsen, A. Harbus, T. Hofstra, Leuven-Paris-Dudley 2004, p. 51.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 53.

⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 60–64.

monastery buildings, and the vast majority of stories concerned exorcisms of lay people. On the other hand, sparsely did these texts depict evil spirits attempting to enter monastic buildings; the ineffectiveness of such an endeavor was usually emphasized. There are, however, some exceptions in the early medieval lives describing the expulsion of demons from a church or monastery, usually during its foundation⁵.

In the monastic literature from the turn of the 11th and 12th centuries⁶, demons gained full access to monastic buildings and thus appeared in the everyday space of the monks and in the church. Groups of demons participated in prayers and services and expressed their approval for the monks' inappropriate behavior with enthusiastic cheers and applause.

More often, however, demons sought to interrupt and disrupt monastic prayers⁷. Stories of this type can be found primarily in Cistercian collections of miracles⁸. A hitherto unknown source from the Polish lands within the scope of the indicated subject matter are fragments of a Cistercian book of miracles from the library of the abbey in Kołbacz. The source is stored in the Archives of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw⁹. Unfortunately, we do not know where the preserved fragments originated from and how they found their way into the library in Kołbacz¹⁰. On the first preserved sheet there is a later annotation: *Matricul des Jünfern Clostres fü[r] Alten Stettin*, hence the suspicion that the collection was donated to the Cistercians in Szczecin and from there it was transferred to the library collection in Kołbacz. The first page also shows the year 1243, which refers to the date of the first document issued for the nuns by Marianne, wife of Duke Barnim I. On the other hand, a document from 1283, concerning the appointment of a confessor from the Cistercian monastery in Kołbacz, for the nuns of Szczecin by the abbot of the Danish Esrom, points to a connection of the Cistercian nuns with Kołbacz. This decision was dictated by the difficulty of performing these duties by the

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 65–66.

⁶ T. Licence, *The gift of seeing demons in early Cistercian spirituality*, "Cistercian Studies Quarterly" 2004, 39, 1, p. 64.

⁷ S. Boynton, „*The devil made me do it*”: *demonic intervention in the medieval monastic liturgy*, in: *European religious cultures. Essays offered to Christopher Brooke on the occasion of his eightieth birthday*, ed. M. Rubin, London 2008, p. 94.

⁸ Collections dated to the period approx. 1170–1220. T. Licence, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

⁹ APANW, *Fragment cysterskiej księgi cudów z XIII wieku z biblioteki opactwa cysterskiego w Kołbaczu*, sygn. 302/631/0 [hereinafter: APANW], sygn. 302/631/0)

¹⁰ J. Grzeszewski, *Ze stanu badań nad księgozbiorami cysterskimi w Polsce*, "Acta Universalis Nicolai Copernici: Bibliologia II–III" 1998, 328, p. 340.

mother monastery¹¹. Unfortunately, this does not explain where and when the fragments of our interest were drafted. It should be mentioned at this point that in the text itself we find references to a monastery at Ląd (claustrum Laudensi) or Landais¹² and Igny (Igniacum¹³) of the French community. However, it is difficult to build convincing conclusions on the origin of the source on this basis.

The fragments in question have been preserved on four, unpaginated parchment pages, in a two-column arrangement. The parchment is torn in some places and the text is worn out and written around holes. It is also worth mentioning that the text on the first page is not the beginning of the book in question, and the ending is also missing. The narrative begins rather vaguely, with the preparation of the body of a dead monk, presumably for burial, and ends with the story of two sisters who visited the Cistercian monastery. According to the account, one of the women was taken to hell (*mens a corpore solutus mox decuctus est ad loca inferiora et horrida nimis*); unfortunately, due to pages missing, we do not know the details of this journey. At this point it should also be added that the source analyzed does not present one coherent story. Indeed, we can point to several distinct passages. The first three visions show the problems and struggles with the forces of evil of one of the Cistercian communities, unfortunately there is no information about the location of the monastery. The second highlighted fragment takes us to Britain, the city of Namnetis, and tells the story of two presbyters from a canonical community. The next set of visions comes from the Cistercian monastery in Ląd or the French monastery in Landais. The fourth fragment presents the vision of Abbot Peter from the French monastery of Igny and the account written down by Brother Ewerad (possibly from the monastery of Igny). All surviving fragments combine themes of the devil, demons, salvation, sin and the hereafter. For the purposes of this text, we will refer to the visions from the analyzed source as Kołbacz's visions, due to the indication of the place of their original storage.

In this article we will analyze the preserved fragments in terms of their compliance with the Cistercian vision of the forces of evil and

¹¹ K. Guzikowski, *Książę Barnim i jego synowie wobec zachodniopomorskich konwentów cysterek*, in: *Cysterki w dziejach i kulturze ziem polskich, dawnej Rzeczypospolitej i Europy Środkowej. Materiały z siódmej Międzynarodowej Konferencji Cysterologów odbytej z okazji 800. Rocznicy fundacji opactwa cysterek w Trzebnicy. Trzebnica 18–21 września 2002 r.*, eds. A.M. Wyrwa, A. Kielbasa, J. Swastek, Poznań 2004, pp. 767–768.

¹² Possibly the French monastery in Landais, founded by monks from the abbey of l'Aumône.

¹³ APANW, sygn. 302/631/0, col. 7b.

the afterlife, and we will also examine what aspects of Cistercian spirituality were used in the narrative. Here it should be noted that Polish monastic research does not take into account the issues raised, so we have no comparative material. We do not know whether Cistercians from Polish lands wrote down their own experiences in contact with demons¹⁴ and whether the monastery libraries contained collections of this type¹⁵. It should also be noted that in Polish historiography there are few works devoted to the forces of evil and the afterlife. Studies in this area have been conducted mainly by Stanisław Bylina¹⁶ and Wojciech Brojer¹⁷. The issue of the devil and demons, on the other hand, is popular in foreign studies, which include the topic of the fight between monks and demons which interest us¹⁸.

¹⁴ Information about demons and possessions can be found in the miracles of St. Jadwiga Śląska from the Cistercian monastery in Trzebnica. *Vita sanctae Hedvigis ducissae Silesiae*. (*Vita maior, minor, genealogia*), in: *Monumenta Poloniae Historica* 4, ed. A. Semkowicz Lwów 1884, p. 574.

¹⁵ R. Witkowski, *Biblioteki klasztorne opactw cysterskich na ziemiach polskich i dawnej Rzeczypospolitej. Zarys problematyki i stan badań*, in: *Monasticon Cisterciense Poloniae*, vol. 1, *Dzieje i kultura męskich klasztorów cysterskich na ziemiach polskich i dawnej Rzeczypospolitej od średniowiecza do czasów współczesnych*, eds. A. M. Wyrwa, J. Strzelczyk, K. Kaczmarek, Poznań 1999, pp. 151–171; E. Gigilewicz, *Pojęcie „piśmiennictwo pragmatyczne”. Rozważania leksyko-graficzne*, in: *Piśmiennictwo pragmatyczne w Polsce do końca XVIII wieku na tle powszechnym*, eds. J. Gancewski, A. Wałkowski, Olsztyn 2006, pp. 25–31.

¹⁶ S. Bylina, *Czyścić u schyłku średniowiecza*, „Kwartalnik Historyczny” 1983, 90, 4, pp. 730–744; idem, *Obraz zaświatów w chrześcijaństwie zachodnim u schyłku średniowiecza*, „Kwartalnik Historyczny” 1986, 93, 1, pp. 3–21; idem, *Człowiek i zaświaty. Wizje kar pośmiertnych w Polsce średniowiecznej*, Warszawa 1992; idem, *Religijność późnego średniowiecza. Chrześcijaństwo a kultura tradycyjna w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej w XIV–XV w.*, Warszawa 2009.

¹⁷ W. Brojer, *Diabeł w wyobraźni średniowiecznej. Trzynastowieczne exempla kaznodziejskie*, Wrocław 2003; Devil in sermons: M. Kielbus, *Diabeł w kazaniach Perygryna z Opla*, „Ogrody Nauk i Sztuk” 2011, 1, pp. 321–328. DOI: 10.15503/onis2011-321-328.

¹⁸ Inter alia: D.L. Walzel, *Sources of Medieval Demonology*, “The Rice University Studies” 1974, 60, 4, pp. 83–99; A. Diem, *op. cit.*, pp. 51–67; T. Licence, *op. cit.*, pp. 49–65; D. Brakke, *Ethiopian Demons: The Monastic Self and the Diabolical Other*, in: *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity*, Cambridge 2006, chap. 7, pp. 157–181; *Demons and Devil in Ancient and Medieval Christianity*, eds. N. Vos, W. Otten, Leiden–Boston 2011; J.F. Ruys, *Demons in the Middle Ages*, [no place of publication] 2017; C. Fanger, *Weren't medieval monks afraid of demon?*, in: *Hermes Explains, Hermes Explains. Thirty Question About Western Esotericism*, eds. W.J. Hanegraaff, P.J. Forshaw, M. Pasi, Amsterdam 2019, pp. 88–94; S. Boynton, *op. cit.*, pp. 87–104; M.G. Newman, *Cisterciana Stories for Nuns and Monks. The Sacramental Imagination of Engelhard of Langheim*, Pennsylvania, 2020; E. Gardiner, *Visions of Heaven and Hell: a monastic literature*, “The Downside Review” 2021, 139, 1, pp. 25–29. DOI: 10.1177/00125806219970; E. Tingle, *Changing Western European Visions of Christian Afterlives*,

Visions of demons in 12th-century collections were interpreted by the Cistercians as a spiritual gift, bestowed by God¹⁹. This explanation appears in Herbert of Clairvaux's *Liber Miraculorum*, the *Exordium Magnum* and Caesarius Heisterbach's *Dialogus Miraculorum*²⁰. As Tom Licence points out, this was a 'monastic recovery' of abilities attributed to hermits. The reference to the eremitic tradition is nothing new; scholars have long noted that hermitic ideas are evident in the spirituality, art, literature and architecture of the Cistercian order²¹. It is in these terms that we should consider monk's abilities described in the first preserved fragments of the Kołbacz's collection of miracles. For he was endowed with demonic visions, inaccessible to other members of the community²², a vision he only revealed at the request of his fellow monks, who noticed his altered condition, through which we learn that one of the rank monks and the abbot were attacked by the devil. The worried monks, trusting in their brother's spiritual gift, asked him to reveal further visions²³, seeking consolation in them in their fight against the forces of evil. Indeed, the subsequent visions presented brought solace to the friars' fears. In the first vision, the gifted monk was himself beset by a vast number of demons, and in this unequal struggle he was supported by the figure of a bishop (*venusta facie*), arriving with a lily flower. The monk took advantage of his presence because, as he told his fellow monks, he asked the arriving bishop to defend the monastery against demonic forces, who responded by planting a lily flower²⁴. According to the source, the flower

1350–1700: *Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory*, in: *A Companion to Death, Burial, and Remembrance in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, c. 1300–1700*, eds. P. Booth, E. Tingle (*Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition*, Vol. 94), Leiden–Boston 2021, pp. 33–71; I. Moreira, *Purgatory in Historical Perspective*, in: *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, eds. B.N. Wolfe et al., St Andrews 2023, pp. 1–41.

¹⁹ T. Licence, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 49–52.

²¹ M.B. Bruun, *Bernard of Clairvaux and the landscape of salvation*, in: *A companion to Bernard of Clairvaux*, ed. B.P. McGuire, Leiden–Boston 2011, pp. 249–278; E. Jamroziak, *The Cistercian order in Medieval Europe 1090–1500*, London–New York 2013, pp. 13–42; D. Tabor, *In search of the perfect wilderness. Anchoritism in Cistercian art and spirituality*, "Folia Historica Cracoviensia" 2016, 22, pp. 513–514.

²² After some time, signs of life were noticed: 'cumque suspirare cepit'.

²³ He answered them that the law was holy, but 'multum minus quam nobis scriptum est facitis'. APANW, sygn. 302/631/0, col. 1a.

²⁴ 'In the Gospels (according to Matthew 6:28-29; according to Luke 12:27), Jesus, comparing the splendour and wealth of the lily of the field to King Solomon in his full glory, made it an emblem of God's grace and care. Christianity, drawing on the texts of the Old and New Testaments, and probably in part on ancient tradition, brought two aspects of the

grew to a considerable size and was supposed to protect the community from devilish danger. The description of this event was probably a metaphor for God's protection of the Cistercian community. In another vision, the aforementioned bishop, introducing himself as Augustine, celebrated mass on the summit of the mountain and, together with the abbot and the brothers, made a sacrifice and afterwards announced his return (*Iterim autem videbo vos. Que gaudebit cor vestrum*), which can also be interpreted as a promise of care for the community. These passages show that the monk experiencing the vision was not only a source of knowledge for the community about following monastic rules and morals, a voice of admonition to the community, but also, as noted above, he offered hope and consolation that the forces of evil would be defeated. We should therefore recognize that recourse to the ability to see demons was not merely a return to ancient monastic traditions, it was a tool to put the religious life of the community into perspective, as well as a means of conferring power over hostile and supernatural forces²⁵.

The aforementioned figure of St. Augustine also appears in other Cistercian collections – including those of Herbert of Clairvaux, but the bishop appears there in a completely different role. He is not the savior or protector of the community, but the guide of the pious man to the hereafter²⁶. At this point, it should be emphasized that descriptions of these wanderings were a popular motif in monastic literature between the 6th and 13th century. In keeping with the genre, monks commonly acted as vision recipients and scribes²⁷. The protagonists of these stories, on the other hand, were laypeople or clergy who travelled in the afterlife, in a dream, vision, or near-death state. The motif of visits to hell by lay people, especially those who did not believe in its existence, also appears very often in 13th century exemplifications. These people returned charred²⁸, frightened, and

lily's symbolism to the fore, adding new values to them. These were the question of the lily as a symbol of purity and virginity – in relation, mainly but not exclusively, to Mary, and the lily as a symbol of power and majesty – in relation to God and Christ'. (A. Rusakiewicz, *Najdawniejsze godła książąt wschodniopomorskich: lilia i gryf*, in: *Biskupi, lennicy, żeglarze, Gdańskie studia z dziejów średniowiecza*, vol. 9, ed. B. Śliwiński, Gdańsk 2003, p. 152; M. Pastoureau, *Średniowieczna gra symboli*, transl. H. Igalson-Tygielska, Warszawa 2006, pp. 109–111.) The authors of the work on images of saints did not note that the attribute of Saint Augustine was a lily, there is no information about this type of performances. J. Marecki, L. Rotter, *Jak czytać wizerunki świętych. Leksykon atrybutów i symboli hagiograficznych*, Kraków 2013, pp. 87–88.

²⁵ T. Licence, *op. cit.*, pp. 49–65.

²⁶ J.F. Ruys, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

²⁷ E. Gardiner, *op. cit.*, pp. 24–43.

²⁸ M. Kielbus, *op. cit.*, p. 323.

attested to the existence of the forces of evil and a place of damnation²⁹. The scope and purposes of the 'journeys' varied; above all, their protagonists brought a message to the world of the living, concerning the fate of the soul after death. The indicated motif of a journey in the afterlife also appears in the fragments of Kołbacz. Unfortunately, we do not have a full description of this vision, due to the fact that the source has not survived in its entirety. We only learn that two sisters appeared in the Cistercian community, one of whom visited hell as part of her vision. The sisters in question must have come from the immediate vicinity of the monastery, as it was not advisable for women to travel to distant places at the time. Furthermore, the monks must have already intervened with the demons, since these women considered the Cistercians to be the proper recipients of this miraculous event. The vision should be seen as a warning that could have been addressed to the laity, but also to the monks themselves.

Cistercian collections abound with narratives in which demons most often harassed monks during prayers, their particular activity taking place during the matins³⁰. This should not surprise us; a monk had not only to get up early, but also to arrive at the church at the right time and actively participate in prayer. He may, therefore, have had the impression, in his half-sleep and in the dim light, that someone was accompanying him to the morning service and making it difficult for him to concentrate. These stories clearly indicate the difficulty of attending the morning Office. In the analyzed fragments from the library of Kołbacz, we also find stories indicating the difficulty of maintaining concentration during prayers. In the Łąd monastery, an unbearable and noisy group of demons appeared during the evening Office. From another story from this monastery, we learn that the devil (*hostis antiquus*) sat on the shoulder of a praying monk Christian and crushed him with his weight. In both cases, the demons impeded concentration and distracted the praying monks.

Another recurring motif in Cistercian collections was the theme of demons harassing novices³¹, which also seems understandable from the perspective of monastic life, as inexperienced young adepts could easily succumb to various temptations and longings. However, the analyzed fragments of Kołbacz lack stories specifically dedicated to novices, which does not mean that the collection was not written with these least experienced members of the community in mind. On the contrary, the surviving material of Kołbacz indicates that the entire community, both

²⁹ A. Guriewicz, *Kultura i społeczeństwo średniowiecznej Europy. Exempla XIII wieku*, transl. Z. Dobrzyński, Warszawa 1997, pp. 68–72.

³⁰ S. Boynton, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 95.

the ordinary friars and the monastic superiors, were exposed to the forces of the devil³². For example, one vision showed an abbot being followed and tempted by the devil³³. As part of the temptation, this demon suggested nuns to the abbot; the superior was freed from sin by confession³⁴. This vision can, of course, be interpreted as a metaphor for the various desires, sinful thoughts and even specific misdeeds of the abbot, which were revealed before the whole community. The purpose was probably to admonish the superior and to reassure the confreres that the abbot's sins had been forgiven and that he had managed to escape the snare of evil. It should be noted that in the preserved miracles, however, abbots are more often shown as protectors of the community and slayers of demons. For example, the abbot, with the help of a bright light (*cum claro lumine*), snatched one of his brothers from the jaws of the enemy, saying: *O infelix Sathan non habebis partem in fratribus nostris*³⁵. The aforementioned story of the monk Christian with a demon on his shoulder also points us to the abbot as a conqueror evil forces. For the monk turned directly for help to his superior, who recognized the cause of his suffering and took immediate action, after which the pride-filled demon (*superbissimus*) let go of the monk's arm. As it turned out, however, the experience was a test for the Cistercian. While praying, he heard the admonition that if he could bear this burden, he would receive a miraculous crown (*admiranda tus corona*)³⁶.

The Cistercian colloquies also contained didactic material which showed not only the cunning and venality of demons, but also ways of fighting the devil and demons. The texts include methods such as: fervent prayers: in his battle with demons, the monk Christian was absolutely victorious, defeating demons with prayer (*et pertitus in medio eorum prostravit se ad*

³² 'Vidi etiam quondam abbatem qui inteneboso nemore ambulante et quem diabolus post terga secutus et quondam monialem obtulit. A qua inultum fugiendo et a se repellendo nullo modo in per confessionem liberari potuit'. APANW, sygn. 302/631/0, col. 1a.

³³ 'Vidi etiam quondam abbatem qui inteneboso nemore ambulante et quem diabolus post terga secutus et quondam monialem obtulit a qua inultum fugiendo'. (APANW, sygn. 302/631/0, col. 1a) It should be added that in this vision the abbot was walking in a dark forest. The forest (*silva*, *forestum*, *foresta*, *emus*) very often appears in medieval examples as a place of meetings with the world of demons. In the era in question, it was believed that this space was the domain of evil forces. We can treat the forest in these stories as an equivalent of the early medieval desert, as an unfriendly, wild and uninhabited place. W. Brojer, *op. cit.*, p. 570.

³⁴ APANW, sygn. 302/631/0, column 1a; In the 13th century, confession was presented as the best way to protect yourself from the devil and free yourself from his influence. W. Brojer, *op. cit.*, p. 173; A. Guriewicz, *op. cit.*, pp. 199, 204.

³⁵ APANW, sygn. 302/631/0, col. 1a.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, cols. 5a–b.

orationem)³⁷; the use of appropriate signs – such as the sign of the cross³⁸, the utterance of appropriate formulas, the use of light as a counterbalance to darkness and thus evil. It should be emphasized that demons were also dealt with by ordinary monks. The stories took on a didactic character for all members of the Cistercian order, nuns and monks, who, following the example of the first hermits, could prepare themselves for the actions of demons, learn about their behavior and ways of temptation³⁹.

These stories further indicate a sense of the uniqueness of the entire order as those who see demons, effectively fight them, but also help the laity⁴⁰, an interesting example of which is the story of a certain soldier who was advised by a Christian monk to take on the monastic habit before he died. The monk was unsure of his advice, but heard a voice telling him that if, *qui in habitu cisterciensis ordinis moritam nullam habiturus est diabolus potestatem donec data fuerit de eo sententia*⁴¹. The importance of the story of the soldier is underscored by another passage in the collection of Kołbacz, according to which it was soldiers, as well as clergy serving in parishes, jesters and merchants, who had little hope of salvation⁴². To reinforce the message, the depiction of the groups for whom salvation is hindered is followed by a passage describing the fate that befell the human soul after death. In accordance with Christian theology, the analyzed text depicted three basic places in the hereafter.

Souls that had a chance for salvation, after leaving their bodies, were transferred by Saint Michael to the purgatorial fire (*ad purgatorium ignem*)⁴³, in order to be freed from their guilt. The source lists four natures of this fire, which were divided according to the color of the flame: red (*rubeam flammam*), yellow (*croceam flammam*), black (*nigram flammam*) and peach (*persicam flammam*). The soul, depending on the taint of sin, could experience all types of flames or only one of them⁴⁴. After purification, on the

³⁷ *Ibidem*, cols. 5b–6a.

³⁸ The theologian Mikołaj of Jawor recommends prayers and the sign of the cross to deal with the action of demons. K. Bracha, *Teolog, diabeł i zabobony. Świadectwo traktatu Mikołaja Magni z Jawora De superstitionibus* (1405), Warszawa 1999, p. 92.

³⁹ C. Fanger, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

⁴⁰ J.F. Ruys, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁴¹ APANW, sygn. 302/631/0, col. 7b.

⁴² Unlike the peasants who nourished the church and lived in simplicity: '[...] ecclesiam pascunt et simpliciter vivunt'. (APANW, sygn. 302/631/0, cols. 1a–b.) Lectures of this type were nothing unusual. See: J. Strzelczyk, *Szkice średniowieczne*, Poznań 1987, p. 56.

⁴³ E. Tingle, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁴⁴ 'A purgatorial spirit called Margaret is at the heart of this story, which saw the visionary seized and carried into purgatory during sleep. Even here, however, purgatory was not conceptualized in geographic terms, but rather as three raging fires, each discharging

other hand, each soul had to pass between two trees burning and fighting with each other (*Sed ante quā transeat alia ad consortium bonorum certum est eam transire premediam pugnam illarum arborum*). The angel would then transfer the soul and present it before the majesty of God. Given Christian theology of the resurrection of bodies, this may not be the final Heaven, but rather a place where good souls can stay until the Last Judgement⁴⁵.

The damned souls, on the other hand, were skewered with fiery pitchforks, struck with iron hammers and led to hell, from which there was no way escape⁴⁶. In addition, a vision appears in another passage, showing the fate of the elect souls: *Etiam omnis electe anime coronate erunt. Sic rex de omnes erunt unus rex et dominus unus*⁴⁷.

Finally, it is important to point out what devils and demons looked like in Cistercian visions, especially since the monks paid quite a lot of attention to this issue. Herbert of Clairvaux, for example, informed his readers that demons had large heads, distended bellies, short, hunch-backed bodies, protruding necks, long arms and legs. The creatures could also take the form of beasts, including dragons, snakes and toads, black dogs, monstrous horses and other terrifying creatures. In his narrative, Herbert points out that human senses cannot fully grasp the enormity of the monstrosity and deformity of demons⁴⁸. They could also appear to the monks in the form of saints, angels and even Mary and Christ, which was a cunning and insidious act, since the devilish forces took advantage of the desire of the inhabitants of the monasteries to commune with the saints and, above all, with God⁴⁹. Herbert of Clairvaux also wrote about demons who pretended to be monks or beautiful women⁵⁰. Another

a specific function in the progressive cleansing of the soul. Margaret is purged first of deadly sins (confessed but unexpiated), then of venial sins, and in the last of the fires endures a final burnishing. As she passes from one fire to the next, her soul changes color, from that of black lead through blood-red meat to shining clarity'. C. Watkins, *Landscapes of the dead in the late medieval imagination*, "Journal of Medieval History" 2022, 48, 2, p. 259. DOI: 10.1080/03044181.2022.2060489; D. Żukowska, *Szczęście w czyśćcu*, "Resovia Sacra. Studia Teologiczno-Filozoficzne Diecezji Rzeszowskiej" 2006, 13, pp. 107–123.

⁴⁵ J.F. Ruys, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

⁴⁶ 'Anime vero dampnande quando egrediuntur de corpore angeli sathane statim presentes veniunt. Atque eas cum furcis igneis atque malleis ferreis tundentes que discerpentes ad infernum perducunt ibique eas ulterius non egressuras derelinquunt'. APANW, sygn. 302/631/0, col. 2a.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, cols. 6a–b.

⁴⁸ C. Fanger, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 90; W. Brojer, *op. cit.*, pp. 134–140.

⁵⁰ J.F. Ruys, *op. cit.*, p. 41; Wojciech Brojer also describes exempla in which the devil takes on various forms, including saints. W. Brojer, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

characteristic element appearing in most Cistercian visions was the multitude of demons. According to them, demons travelled in groups and their number seemed infinite to the authors. The motif of a large number of demons⁵¹ attacking individual members of the monastic community also appears in the preserved miracles from the library of Kołbacz⁵². In the fragments analyzed, the devil and demons were mostly depicted as terrifying beasts⁵³. According to the first Kołbacz vision, the demon had two heads: a red one and a black one (*duo capita huius scilicet rufum et nigrum*). Another emphasized that the demon's face was terrifying (*horribili atque teterrima faciet*). The leader of the group of demons, on the other hand, was shown as a horned (*cornutus*) creature with a tail (*caudatus*), with a mouth full of flames⁵⁴. Descriptions of the devil included a fiery mouth (*ore flammivomo*), as well as burning eyes (*ardentibus oculis*). There are no references in the surviving fragments to the size of the demons, nor do we find details relating to the appearance of the various body parts of these beings.

To sum up, in Kołbacz's vision, demons appeared as spiritual and physical entities that attacked, harassed the monks and caused bodily pain. However, we have no examples showing visible traces of this activity⁵⁵. Nevertheless, awareness of the danger and real threat from demons is indicated. For example, in the passage about the two presbyters, one of them kept vigil all night because he was afraid, of being strangled (*Nam que ipsem metueris ne suffocarent me*)⁵⁶. The extant fragments also lack descriptions of demons appearing in the form of people, monks or saints, but this does not mean that a motif of this type did not occur in the book, since, as indicated above, it was very often used in the demonic tradition. In the analyzed fragments, we also find groups of demons that do not seem to be dangerous, although disorganizing the life of the community. In the monastery in Łąd, a group of small Ethiopians (*conspicet interea parvos quosdam ethiopes*) appeared to a monk who was keeping vigil during night prayers, laughing and playing games in the monastery, thus

⁵¹ 'Venit ad me etiam multitudo demonum; Venerat hic denuo circa lectum meum permaxima multitudo demonum'. APANW, sygn. 302/631/0, column 4a.

⁵² 'Cum vero omnes irruerent super me ut me discernerent que unum deglutirent'. APANW, sygn. 302/631/0, col. 4b.

⁵³ A. Diem, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

⁵⁴ 'Glomereabat etiam vorax flamma de ore suo, qui de camino ardente'. APANW, sygn. 302/631/0, column 4a.

⁵⁵ 'Diabeł niszczy, powoduje ból, zadaje cierpienie, paraliżuje ciało i władze duchowe, przeraża i uśmierca: dusi, rozrywa, strąca z wysokości'. W. Brojer, *op. cit.*, p. 289; C. Fanger, *op. cit.*, pp. 88–89.

⁵⁶ APANW, sygn. 302/631/0, col. 5b.

disturbing the monks' routine and peace⁵⁷. It is worth mentioning that the term Ethiopians used is very common in descriptions of evil beings, used either directly or as a reference to the skin color of Ethiopians⁵⁸. Indeed, black, dark skin was a sign of evil in medieval Europe⁵⁹. Such descriptions highlighted to the readers the difficulties of the monastic profession, and sensitized and sensitized them to the activities of demons. Other terms for the forces of evil that we find in the analyzed passages are: *diabolus*, *Sathan*, *demon*, *demones*, *hostis antiquus*, *hostis humani generis*.

Demons in the surviving fragments occupied a multifunctional, well-defined position; they could be real, appear in visions and dreams, or have a purely metaphorical function. The image of the devil and demons is consistent and draws on the ideas of the supernatural world of the time, including above all the thoughts of the white monks. In Cistercian literature, demons were portrayed as forces that attacked individual communities, but also the entire order. In view of this, an important element of the narrative was the ways in which demons were recognized, revealed and expelled from the monastery⁶⁰. These were based on the experiences of the monks⁶¹. These experiences probably shaped and contributed to the monastic community feeling the presence of demons and recognizing them as independent entities. The Cistercians further stressed that the attacks were more frequent, more fervent and more frightening than those in other monastic communities⁶². They regarded themselves as soldiers in the service of God, and their lifestyle was understood as a way of fighting evil alongside the saints and angels. The Cistercians also emphasized their spiritual purity and effectiveness in the fight against Satan⁶³. The authenticity of these stories was not questioned. The authors of the collections often emphasized the veracity of the events by referring to witnesses as well as their own experiences⁶⁴. It must be acknowledged that this order shaped a peculiar rhetoric for the depiction of demons. Admittedly, some scholars point to certain contradictions in these narratives. However, they may attest to the openness with which this mysterious and impenetrable subject of the evil forces was

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁸ 'Demon senności i gnuśności, mały czarny chłopiec, ethiops, przez wieki uprzykrzał się braciom w modlitwie przy śpiewie psalmów i palcami zamykał oczy, od eremu opata Makarego po cysterski klasztor w Heisterbachu'. W. Brojer, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

⁵⁹ J.F. Ruys, *op. cit.*, pp. 16, 40, 53; D. Brakke, *op. cit.*, pp. 157–158.

⁶⁰ C. Fanger, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 91.

⁶² J.F. Ruys, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

⁶³ C. Fanger, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁶⁴ J.F. Ruys, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

addressed. The material of Kołbacz follows the assumptions of the genre and Cistercian thought, it does not express all these ideas explicitly, but they reverberate throughout the surviving narrative.

Without doubt, the Cistercian miracles point to the difficulties of monastic life⁶⁵. At the same time, they are a metaphor for the various temptations, fears, passions and lusts with which the members of the monastic communities were confronted. It must, therefore, be recognized that these collections were written to exhort and strengthen faith. Indeed, it seems that stories of the devil's attacks were more likely to mobilize people to work on their own weaknesses than to highlight man's propensity to sin⁶⁶. In the passages of Kołbacz, the figures of the holy women Agatha and Agnes, who appeared to the aforementioned monk Christian of Łąd, were also used to admonish individual members of the community. He ate a *pitančia*, i.e. an extra portion of the meal⁶⁷. The holy virgins admonished him that they had achieved salvation „*non pro deliciis et suavitates mundi provenimus sed promittas tribulationes pro que ingentes afflictiones*”⁶⁸. Miraculous tales of demonic attacks may also have been a way for monks to discharge and soothe difficult emotions as they struggled with the harshness of the rule. This reveals an interesting procedure of placing the sinful act or desire outside the monk⁶⁹. The Cistercians, using the tradition of struggling with the demons of the desert fathers, implemented the spiritual concepts that had been preserved individually but also communally. Stories of monastic miracles also reaffirmed the role of monks in society. The laity would go to the Cistercians and share their visions, which would provide a sense of security. It also established the monks' reputation in the fight against demons. It is also worth noting at this point that the monastery, by virtue of its very presence in the area, sacralized the space and, as a result, provided protection for the immediate surroundings.

In conclusion, we should regard the Kołbacz fragments as a kind of compilation of visions from popular collections of Cistercian miracles. Borrowings of this kind were not unusual at the time⁷⁰. However, we

⁶⁵ E. Kuzmenko, *Monastic Reading in the Cistercian Visionary Texts of the XIIIth Century*, "Symposia. The Journal of Religion" 2019, 10, pp. 1–8.

⁶⁶ C. Fanger, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

⁶⁷ R. Żerelik, *Ze studiów nad uposażeniem klasztoru Cystersów w Henrykowie w średniowieczu. Wykaz pitancji klasztoru henrykowskiego z pierwszej połowy XIV w.*, in: *Historicae viae. Studia dedykowane Profesorowi Lechowi A. Tyszkiewiczowi z okazji 55-lecia pracy naukowej*, eds. M. Goliński, S. Rosik, Wrocław 2012, pp. 29–42.

⁶⁸ APANW, sygn. 302/631/0, col. 6a.

⁶⁹ J.F. Ruys, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

⁷⁰ In the work of Caesarius of Heisterbach, for example, there were stories by Polish Cistercians. *Kultura Polski średniowiecznej XIV–XV w.*, eds. B. Geremek et al., Warszawa

cannot completely exclude the possibility that the first highlighted group of visions was not written down based on the experiences of the community of Kołbacz. The included accounts from other collections would then be a supplement and thus a confirmation of the prevalence of the threat and possibility of diabolical forces. Unfortunately, just as we cannot exclude, we also cannot document that this compilation was created in Kołbacz and that it was given to the Cistercian nuns as part of their spiritual care. Nevertheless, if this collection was in the possession of the nuns, it can be concluded that they built their identity and sense of belonging to the Cistercian order through these texts.

Finally, we can cautiously conclude that these stories provide insights into the complex mental worlds and experiences of medieval society⁷¹. We should also bear in mind the highly symbolic nature of monastic discourse, for even narratives with explicit implications could, point to hidden conflicts within the monastic community or serve to show the writer's veiled purpose. Stories of this type travelled between different monasteries, built a common identity, and unified visions of the forces of evil, the role of the Cistercians and the scope of their activities. The Kołbacz fragments are part of the Cistercian tradition, testifying to a strong awareness of the role, tasks, difficulties of monastic life, and belonging to a unique monastic community.

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⁷¹ *Ibidem*, p. 41.

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