

Animals as symbols of heretics in Latin European literature and art from the 9th to the 16th century

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Numerous medieval unorthodox Christian movements, charismatic preachers refusing to submit to bishops and gathering followers around them, and finally the very phenomenon of heresy, representing a serious threat and competition for the Catholic Church, motivated it to counter-attack. This was reflected in literature and art (allegorical performances, narrative scenes based on the legends of saints), where to the character of a heretic the role of an opponent was assigned: discussing, fighting and opposing church authorities, or already defeated, ashamed and punished. This role determined the choice of the iconographic formula¹. To some extent it also decided on the shape of animal symbolism, but in the latter more emphasis was placed on the expression of hidden intentions and mental traits attributed to heretics, and the main inspiration were quotations from the Bible, including the verse “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Matthew 7:15). By associating the terms sheep-wolves, shepherd-herd, this symbolism had to be particularly close to shepherding peoples in antiquity, and also in the Middle Ages it did not lose its intelligibility. The image of a wolf kidnapping sheep from the herd could arouse great emotions due to the sense of real danger, as well as due to the traditional hostility towards wolves and their image as a symbol of evil powers or even Satan himself. St. Paul referred to this group of associations when saying goodbye to the Ephesians: “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of



¹ See J. Dobkowska-Kubacka, *Przedstawienia heretyka w sztuce łacińskiego średniowiecza*, “Ikonotheka” vol. 18 (2005).



fig. 1 P. Berruguete, *Santo Domingo de Guzmán*, 1493-1499, oil on board, 177 × 90; Museo del Prado, Madrid. Fot. Museo del Prado, public domain, <https://www.museodelprado.es/coleccion/obra-de-arte/santo-domingo-de-guzman/2e9faf04-90cf-4973-b253-c77c53dd1ccf> (access date: 8 IX 2018)

your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts. 20:29–30). St. Ambrose compared heretics to wolves with their legendary ability to deprive man of his voice, if they spotted him before they were noticed, in his *Commentary on the Gospel according to Luke*: “It is said that if wolves are first to see someone, they have a natural power of striking that person dumb. But if the person should happen to see them first, he can put them to flight (VII, 48)²; “If they [heretics] get round someone by the specious cleverness of their arguments, they will robe him of the power of speech; they will make him dumb. Be careful that the heretics does not robe you of the Word. See the heretic before he sees you. He slithers and glides so long as his bad faith remains hidden” (VII, 51)³. In his discourse Ambrose also referred to the above mentioned biblical verse and emphasized the motif of trap and trickery: “It need not at all surprise you that they [heretics] put on a human appearance. On the outside you see a human being, but inside it is a beast that grinds its teeth” (VII, 52)⁴.

Physiologus, a collection of information about real and legendary animals, created between the 2nd and 4th centuries, a kind of an archetype for medieval bestiaries, also considered wolves as a symbol of heretics. The words of St. Basil are attached to this compilation: “This is the [wolf’s] nature of heretics, who in sheepskin, however, rob your hearts like attacking wolves, exploit your naivety and destroy your souls”⁵. As a side note, it is also worth mentioning that the wolf as a symbol of a heretic functioned in the Middle Ages not only in Latin Europe, although this article focuses only on this area. Heretics were described as ravenous wolves, which on the outside seem to be similar to lambs also by Kosma Prezbiter, the author of a polemic treaty against the Bogomils, written in Bulgaria in the second half of the 10th century⁶.

Latin European art depicted the very phenomenon of heresy in the form of an infernal wolf. The images of Saint Dominic trampling the wolf or piercing a processional cross into his mouth, made in Spain at the end of the 15th and the first half of the 16th century, may serve as an example. The wolf symbolizes here not some particular heretic, but heresy in general. In a painting created (around 1505) by Pedro Roman and located in St. Andrew’s church in Córdoba, St. Dominic inserts a processional cross into the mouth of a wolf, whose hellish origin is evidenced by the flames surrounding it. The saint is accompanied by a black-and-white dog-Dominic’s own symbol and, at the same time, a symbol of the brothers of the order founded by him to fight heresia (*domini canis* – “the Lord’s dog”), holding in its mouth a torch with a ribbon wrapped around it with the inscription “*Columen ecclesiae, doctor veritatis*”⁷. The colour of the dog’s coat refers to the black and white habits of the Dominicans. A similar painting, attributed to Pedro Roman, made before 1536, was also hung in the sacristy of the Jesuit church in Córdo-



² **Św. Ambroży**, *Wykład Ewangelii według św. Łukasza*, trans. W. Szołdrski, ed., introd. A. Bogucki, Warszawa 1977, p. 271; St. Ambrose writes in a similar way about wolves also in *Hexameron*, homily IX, [in:] **M. Michalski**, *Antologia literatury patrystycznej*, vol. 2, Warszawa 1982, p. 379.

³ **Św. Ambroży**, *Wykład Ewangelii...*, p. 272.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ *Physiologus. Frühchristliche Tiersymbolik*, trans., ed. **U. Treu**, Berlin 1987, s. 108.

⁶ See **S. Bylina**, *Ruchy heretyckie w Średniowieczu. Studia*, Wrocław 1991, p. 95.

⁷ See **Ch. Post**, *A History of Spanish Painting*, Cambridge [Massachusetts] 1947, vol. 10, pp. 211–212, Fig. 76.



⁸ See *ibidem*, p. 212.

⁹ See **W. Cahn**, *A Defense of the Trinity in the Cîteaux Bible*, “Marsyas” vol. 11 (1962/1964), pp. 61–62.

¹⁰ From 1576, the Dominican chapter house served as the chapel of a small Spanish colony settled in Florence, hence the name; see **E. Borsook**, *The Mural Painters of Tuscany: From Cimabue to Andrea del Sarto*, Oxford 1980, pp. 140–141.

¹¹ See **F. Antal**, *Florentine Painting and its Social Background: The Bourgeois Republic before Cosimo de Medici’s Advent to Power: XIV and Early XV Centuries*, London 1947, p. 250.

¹² See **H. Grundmann**, *Der Typus des Ketzers in mittelalterlicher Anschauung*, [in:] *Kultur- und Universalgeschichte*. Walter Goetz zu seinem 60. Geburtstag dargebracht von Fachgenossen, Freunden und Schülern, Leipzig-Berlin 1927, p. 95.

¹³ See *idem*, *Oportet et haereses esse. Das Problem der Ketzerei im Spiegel der mittelalterlichen Biblexegese*, “Archiv für Kulturgeschichte” vol. 45 (1963), pp. 160–161.

¹⁴ **H. Grundmann**, *Der Typus...*, p. 95, note 3.

¹⁵ Persistence in error characteristic of heretics was mentioned, e.g., by **J. de Voragine** in *Złota legenda* (trans. J. Pleziowa, selection, introd., notes M. Plezia, Warszawa 1983, p. 323).

ba, now located in the bishop’s palace in the same city; here, too, St. Dominic inserts a processional cross into the mouth of a infernal wolf described as “*Heretica pravitas*”⁸. Saint Dominic tramples the wolf of heresy and pierces his tongue in paintings created by Pedro Berruguete (between 1493 and 1499, Madrid, Prado) [Fig. 1] and Juan Correa de Vivar (mid-16th century, Madrid, Prado) [Fig. 2]. In addition to evoking associations with the representations of virtues and vices, piercing the tongue itself was a punishment prescribed for blasphemers. It was supposed to be a symbolic “neutralisation” of the enemy and to emphasize the “tool” of his crime⁹.

The motif of wolves-heretics also appears in the fresco decorating one of the walls of the Chapter House (called the Spanish Chapel) in the Dominican monastery at S. Maria Novella Church in Florence¹⁰. The iconographically intricate complex of frescoes, founded by the rich bourgeoisie of Florence, Buonamico di Lapo Guidalotti, was created by Andrea da Firenze (also known as Bonaiuti) and a team of collaborators between 1366 and 1368. One of the compositions shows the tasks of the order of the preachers’ brothers, including, as an extremely important element of its mission, the fight against heresy. In the fresco, the Dominicans defend the perfect Christian world against the attack of heretical chaos and anarchy. Saint Dominic releases black-and-white dogs, with a gesture pointing to them the target of the attack-wolves kidnapping sheep [Fig. 3]. This representation is interpreted as a symbol of inquisition, which the papacy entrusted to begging orders, the majority of inquisitors were recruited from among the Dominicans. However, it can be understood more broadly: as a representation of the struggle of the Dominicans against heresy in all fields and fronts¹¹.

The basic characteristic of all heretics and schismatics is pride. “*Superbia radix est omnis hereseos et apostasie*”, “*Omnis hereticus superbus est*” – these two quotations were attributed to St. Augustine in the Middle Ages¹². St. Thomas of Aquinas also pointed to pride as the main cause of heresy¹³. This source of all evil gave birth to the sin of disobedience and apostasy from the Church. Driven exactly by pride, Lucifer apostatized from God and some angels followed his example. This was the beginning of hell. Pride, which directed heretics, was seen as leading them to appropriate priesthood and preaching functions, thus also to committing deception. It was also pride that made the heretics insist on their own views¹⁴. Envy and willing to match the doctors of the Church, they usurped the possession of education, knowledge and spirit. Pride was also supposed to induce heretics to audacity and obstinacy-stubborn persistence in heretical error¹⁵.

Apart from pride, heretics were primarily accused of *hypocrisy* – hypocrisy, somehow instrumental one, because it was seen as a means of setting a trap on the naïve. Already in the Gospel passage cited at the beginning of this article (Matthew 7:15), false prophets



fig. 2 J. Correa de Vivar, *Santo Domingo de Guzmán*, ca. 1550, oil on board, 96 × 41; Museo del Prado, Madrid. Fot. Museo del Prado, public domain, <https://www.museodelprado.es/coleccion/obra-de-arte/santo-domingo-de-guzman/839cfe29-9145-4cf4-bcab-9a72fd15f109> (access date: 8 IX 2018)

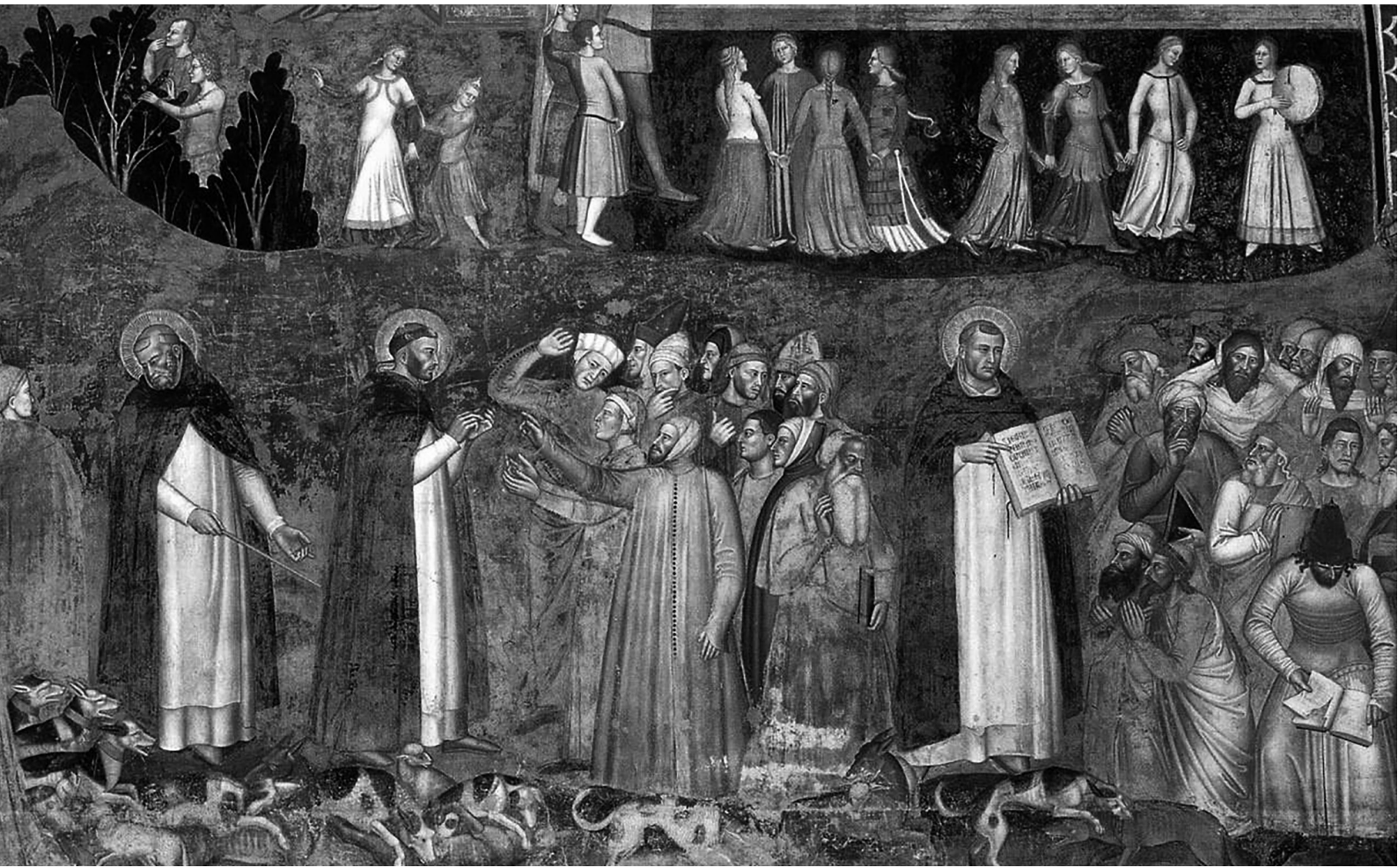


fig. 3 A. da Firenze and co., *Dogs of the Lord (domini canis) attacking the wolves of heresy*; a fragment of composition *The Road of Salvation*, 1366–1368, fresco; Spanish Chapel by S. Maria Novella, Florence. Fot. J. Dobkowska-Kubacka

were accompanied by the motif of hypocrisy connected with trickery – the “sheepskin” quoted above. The question arises what specifically would serve heretics as this infamous “sheepskin”? Literature that spread the negative stereotype of heretic gave an exhaustive answer to this question. In his *Discourse Against the Arians*, St. Athanasius quoted St. Paul (1 Timothy 4:1):

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron.

He further explained it in his own words:

The youngest of the heresy, called the Arian, newly born messenger of the Antichrist, acts especially cunningly and deceitfully. Seeing older sisters,

former heresies, discredited in the eyes of the whole world, it follows the example of its father, the devil, and is hypocritically hiding by quotations from the Scriptures, demanding that it be allowed back into the paradise of the Church, where, under the mask of authentic Christianity, it may more easily gain supporters of its false Christology with seductive sophisms¹⁶.

The accusation of heretical hypocrisy in the service of deceit, supported by the authority of quotations from the Gospel, continued through other anti-Christian polemics. In a set of traits of which apostates of faith were accused, hypocrisy was sometimes used interchangeably with *species pietatis* – “false piety”. This term was used by St. Paul in his second letter to Timothy (2 Timothy 3:5) “Having a form of godliness”. According to Catholic authors, heretics were hypocritical because they concealed their true nature, i.e. pride, under the guise of piety. False piety deceived simple people, just as sheep’s skin “hid” the bad intentions of the wolf. Sympathizers of heretics admired their generally ascetic and exemplary way of life, the ecclesiastical preachers explained that it was nothing more than hypocrisy, pretence, with the intent of deceiving as many gullible ones as possible. Bertold of Regensburg, a popular Franciscan preacher from the mid-13th century, claimed: “*Omnis hereticus est superbus, sed heretici suam superbiam valde occultant*”¹⁷. In his *Golden Legend*, Jacob de Voragine mentioned the women living near Toulouse, whom “the heretics deceived with the appearances of piety and won for their errors”¹⁸. In order to overcome the influence of heretics and demonstrate the ascetic way of life of representatives of the Catholic Church, St. Dominic and his companion stayed at these women’s home for a week, fasting all this time. The accusation of false piety was extremely useful in the Church’s fight against heresy. *Hypocrisy*, alternately with *species pietatis*, was to explain the frequent discrepancy between the image of a heretic proclaimed from the pulpit and the observed reality. Hypocrisy discredited in the eyes of the faithful the generally exemplary way of life of members of sects, and emphasized the danger for the naïve. It gave heresy disturbing features of trickery and traps. Church explained the preaching or priestly ambitions of heretics as pride, while the wearing a pseudo-monastic attire by itinerant preachers, practicing asceticism and “apostolic” way of life as a hypocrisy.

Therefore animals symbolizing heretics in church art had to be associated not only with danger (like wolves), but also with hypocrisy and deceit. *Physiologus*, attributing trickery, hypocrisy and perversity to the followers of heresy, compared them to centaurs and sirens. Centaurs (half people, half beasts) symbolized people who, under the guise of faith and piety, creep into the Church and delude the simple-minded¹⁹. Sirens in turn tempt and deceive with their sweet singing, similarly like heretics with their false arguments²⁰. However, the other animal that made the most dizzying anti-heretical career and



¹⁶ M. Michalski, *op. cit.*, pp. 123, 129.

¹⁷ E. Potkowski, *Stereotyp heretyka – innowiercy w piśmiennictwie kaznodziej-skim*, [in:] *Kultura elitarna a kultura masowa w Polsce późnego średniowiecza*, ed. B. Geremek, Wrocław 1978, p. 129.

¹⁸ J. de Voragine, *op. cit.*, p. 324.

¹⁹ *Physiologus...* pp. 30–31.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.



²¹ S. Bylina, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

²² See *ibidem*.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 48.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

²⁵ Św. Ambroży, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 265.

²⁷ See M. Michalski, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

²⁸ See S. Kobięłus, *Bestiarium chrześcijańskie. Zwierzęta w symbolice i interpretacji. Starożytność i średniowiecze*, Warszawa 2002, pp. 193–194.

²⁹ *Doctoris Angelici Divi Thomae Opera Omnia*, ed. S. E. Frette, vol. 18, Parisiis 1876, p. 568.

was the most popular symbol of heretic, was a fox, considered to be the embodiment of cunning. Of course, it did not have to mean only a heretic. In the New Testament Christ calls Herod the fox (Luke 13:32), while *Physiologus* interpreted the fox as a symbol of Satan himself, thus emphasizing the cunning and cleverness with which the devil lures people into the trap of sin. Links with heretics were also drawn from the association sequence with trickery and trap, but the exegesis of the verse from *Song of Songs* was of fundamental importance here. (2, 15) „Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines,„ The vineyard is commonly compared to the Church, and the foxes that ravaged it were interpreted as heretics. In the 12th century, the outstanding theological authority of the time, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, commenting in *Sermones in Cantica* on the above mentioned fragment of the Song of Songs, recommends capturing the heretics “*non armis sed argumentis*”²¹. However, if the arguments do not succeed, the heretics will prove stubborn, hardened, reluctant to renounce their errors and return to the Catholic Church, then they should be excluded from the community of the faithful, so that they can no longer „destroy the vineyard of the Lord”. Ultimately, such hopeless cases must be handed over to the secular authorities in order to be adequately punished. According to St. Bernard, it was the duty of the rulers to help the Church in the fight against heresy²². The same author commented on and developed the idea of two swords, a clerical and a secular ones, which was already known and close to the papacy. Both are given by God and both should be subjected to the Church, serving its good. This theory was reminded by Innocent III calling for a crusade against the Albigenses. In a letter of 1213, he expressed the victory with the words “when the foxes devastating the Lord’s vineyard in Provence had already been captured”²³. He also used the biblical phrase about the foxes devastating the vineyard with reference to the situation of heretics in society in a decree called “*Vergentis in senium*”, addressed to the authorities and people of the city of Viterbo, where, to the indignation of the Pope, nobody persecuted a blooming colony of local heretics²⁴.

An anti-heretic meaning was also given to the words from the *Book of Ezekiel* (13:3,4) “Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! O Israel, thy prophets are like the foxes in the deserts”. and to the biblical story of Samson tying torches to the tails of foxes to burn the fields of the Philistines. St. Ambrose, referring to the above fragments of the Bible, wrote: “For heretics try to burn someone else’s harvest”²⁵, and “The fox is an animal full of deceit, it prepares a pit for itself and always wants to hide in it. Such are heretics who cannot build a house for themselves, but they try to deceive others with their trickery”²⁶. St. Athanasius called Arius a cunning fox in his *First Discourse Against the Arians*²⁷. The heretics were compared to foxes by Orygenes²⁸, St. Jerome, Rabanus Maurus, and later also by St. Thomas of Aquinas²⁹.

But it is not the foxes among the ruins or foxes with torches tied to the tails, but these devastated vineyards have become in art a flagship allegory of heretics doing damage to the Church. In *Hortus Deliciarum* (ca. 1180) Herrada of Landsberg we find a representation of Christ in the crown, which points to the Ecclesia and the daughters of Jerusalem the foxes standing under the bush of grapes and looking up at the vine grapes³⁰. They are signed as „*Vulpes hereticos et scismaticos designant qui vineam Domini devastant*”. The drawing clearly refers to the quoted verse from *Song of Songs*: “Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines”.

In the Late Middle Ages, heresy threatening the Church in the form of Waldhism or the Hussite movement was often the subject of sermons³¹. Traditionally, they compared heretics to foxes ravaging the vineyard, as well as to wolves in a sheepfold, often dressed in sheepskin for disguise³².

And while early Christian polemic treaties (such as the works of St. Augustine: *On the Morals of the Catholic Church and on the Morals of the Manichaeans*, *Antimanichean Interpretation of the Genesis* or Irenaeus *Adversus haereses*) dealt with analysing doctrines and breaking the arguments of the enemy, contrary to them sermons (if not of a missionary nature, such as the sermons of St. Dominic and his companions in the Languedoc to convert Cathars), did not generally go into the analysis of views or try to combat specific heterodoxical religious postulates point by point. The preachers focused not on convincing heretics or discussing with them what the Church considered to be theological errors, but on shaping the attitude of the masses towards heresy and its followers. Sermons addressed to the faithful were supposed to evoke special emotions, arouse fear and disgust at heresy and thus prevent falling into its trap. For this reason, the image of a heretic proclaimed from the pulpit, which served to disgust and warn against him, was a specific set of negative traits attributed to all those who departed from faith (to a certain extent also to Jews) without insight into the real beliefs and the often diametric differences that divided them among themselves. Preachers, comparing heretics to wolves, referred to the feelings of hostility and fear that these animals evoked. In turn, the biblical verses quoted from the pulpit, talking about foxes destroying the vineyard or ravaging in ruins, could-and probably were supposed to – bring to the minds of listeners the very popular figure of the fox from Aesop’s fairy tales. The sneaky fox, inventing more and more fraud, is also the protagonist of popular stories about animals that were created on the canvas of the fables of Aesop, more or less accurate to the text attributed to the legendary fairy-tale writer. As an example can serve *Ecbasis Captivi* written around 940 by an anonymous monk of German origin, or *Ysengrimus* by the Flemish master Nivardus from the second half of the 12th century. A famous novel about the fox, the protagonist of which took over many features of the fox of Ae-



³⁰ See H. von Hohenbourg, *Hortus deliciarum*, ed. R. Green [et al.], London 1979, vol. 2, p. 771, fig. 301.

³¹ See S. Bylina, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-142; E. Potkowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 121-137; H. Grundmann, *Der Typus...*, pp. 91-107; H. Grundmann, *Oportet et haereses...*, pp. 129-164.

³² The anti-Waldensian treatise by P. of Pilichsdorf refers to the Waldenses who abduct calm people like wolves who kidnap sheep from the herd; *Contra sectam Waldensen liber*, known from many codes under different titles, e.g. a 15th-century manuscript of the Jagiellonian Library is titled *Tractatus optimus de secto Waldensium*; see J. Wyrozumski, *Z dziejów waldensów w Polsce średniowiecznej*, “Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego” 1977, “Prace Historyczne” no. 56, p. 43.



³³ See T. Szostek, *Świat zwierzęcy w średniowiecznych exemplach kaznodziejskich*, [in:] *Wyobraźnia średniowieczna*, ed. T. Michałowska, Warszawa 1996.

³⁴ Quote from: J. Drabina, *Wierzenia, religie, wspólnoty wyznaniowe w średniowiecznej Polsce i na Litwie i ich koegzystencja*, Kraków 1994, p. 83.

³⁵ J. R. Benton, *Holy Terrors: Gargoyles on Medieval Buildings*, New York 1997, p. 83.

sop and experienced similar adventures was also *Roman de Renard*. The individual parts of *Roman de Renard* were created from around 1174 to 1250. Later the German version was created, usually entitled *Reineke Fuchs*. All these stories gained great popularity in the Middle Ages, becoming both useful works to illustrate, the basis of many visual representations, as well as a source of motifs to add colour to the sermons³³. The moralistic message of the fables of Aesop has been deepened and transformed in the spirit of Christian ethics according to the didactic function of animal allegories. An example of the use of fox stories in the spirit of anti-heretic rhetoric can be the sermon of the Silesian Dominican and preacher Peregrine of Opole (1260–1333):

[such] creature is the fox with the help of which sorcerers and heretics are portrayed. Because they have beautiful and sweet words that cheat and deceive people, just like a fox praises cheese to a raven³⁴.

It is also worth mentioning the juxtaposition of a fox not only with heretics, but also with sorcerers. For both were, together with Jews and Mohammedans, to form a camp of opponents of the religion of Christ (and enemies of Christian society in general), the so-called devil's state. This motif in sermons and ecclesiastical literature caused a merging of not only symbolism but also the ways of depicting heretics, Jews, Mohammedans and sorcerers, both in terms of physical type and costumes.

Janetta Rebold Benton, an art historian, also mentions the use of the fox-preacher motif in Catholic propaganda against the English Lollard movement, which in the 14th and 15th centuries called for, among other things, the liquidation of large church estates and was treated as heresy³⁵.

The themes drawn from fairy tales inspired by Aesop's fables have established themselves not only in the folk imagination, becoming the subject of numerous proverbs and parables, but also in exemplars used in sermons. Translated into the language of the image, processed freely and with fantasy, they were woven into bordures of miniatures, decorated church stalls, portals, etc. creating a complicated micro-world of grotesque, satires and entangled meanings. These images generally remain unrelated to anti-heretic themes or the Church's action against heresy, but not always. As has already been mentioned, one of the main characters in the fables was a fox. It was regarded as the embodiment of cunning, falsehood and hypocrisy-the same features were seen to characterize heretics as well. Stories about a fox, which coloured the sermons, apart from amusing and at the same time moralizing the faithful, were often meant to evoke associations between the main character and the figure of a heretic. The sculptural decoration depicting foxes looking greedily at grapes reminded of the threat to the Vineyard-Church, depicting

foxes speaking to geese reminded of the hypocrisy and craftiness of false prophets. In these last representations the foxes were often dressed in a habit. This pseudo-confessional attire served as the “sheep’s skin” to help deceit and facilitate the use of someone else’s naivety. Of course, the meaning of such a popular motif as the stories of a fox, especially those in which, dressed in a habit, it kidnaps the listening intently geese, is not limited only to the associations with the figure of a heretic. The context of the place and the foundation is crucial here. The representation may also be a caricature of false or greedy monks, an expression of the secular clergy’s reluctance towards religious orders, emphasizing that “the habit does not make a monk”, etc. We also encounter the expression of anticlerical moods through the representation of a fox dressed in a bishop’s dress, a parody of a mass in which animals participate, etc. Each time, however, it is essential to emphasize hypocrisy, false piety and deceit.

The representation of a fox from the fables of Aesop trying to taste the grapes, climbing up and gazing at the fruit hanging high, formally resembles the image of a fox-heretic shown next to the vine bush symbolizing the Church (an example can be one of the illustrations in a work entitled *Life and Fables of Aesop*, published by Johann Zainer of Ulm in the late 15th century)³⁶. Similar associations are aroused by another German illustration from the end of the 15th century to the fables of Aesop, published by Moritz Branois, showing two foxes romping on a vineyard symbolized by a vine³⁷. The merging of two motifs—two images of a fox: one based on the exegesis of the biblical verse about foxes in the vineyard and the other, from the fables of Aesop, a fox as the embodiment of cunning and hypocrisy, can also be observed on the example of sculpture decorations. The pulpit of the 13th-century parish church in Huckarde near Dortmund shows an image of a fox, depicted as a preacher, against the background of the wine-giving grapes, one of which hangs just below the fox’s mouth³⁸. Examples of similar images can also be found in Poland: a fox climbing up to the wine bunch is shown on one of the ribs of the vault of the cathedral in Gniezno (end of the 14th century), a fox accompanied by grapes on the portal of the cathedral in Tarnow (first quarter of the 16th century)³⁹. On the other hand, on stalls (ca. 1380) in Worcester Cathedral, among many other images, there are foxes running in and out of the burrows. Opposite this scene St. John the Evangelist was carved with the Gospel in his hand and an eagle at his feet. Given the heretical overtones attributed to the *Gospel of St. John*, it seems more likely that the artist intended to depict heretics under the form of foxes, rather than monks as suggested by Edward Payson Evans⁴⁰. Here, however, it should be repeated once again that in order to properly analyse the representation, and not only to suggest, as in this article, possible interpretative clues, the conditions of the place and the foundation should be thoroughly examined.



³⁶ See A. Schramm, *Der Bilderschmuck der Frühdrucke*, vol. 5: *Die Drucke von Johann Zainer in Ulm*, Leipzig 1923, fig. 199.

³⁷ See *idem*, *Der Bilderschmuck...*, vol. 12: *Die Drucker in Lübeck*, Leipzig 1929, fig. 603.

³⁸ See D. Lämke, *Mittelalterliche Tierfabeln und ihre Beziehungen zur bildenden Kunst in Deutschland*, Bamberg 1937,

³⁹ M. Gutkowski, *Komizm w polskiej sztuce gotyckiej*, Warsaw 1973, p. 132, fig. 56. The same researcher also gives another example of a similar image of a fox and grapes, dating from the first quarter of the 16th century and decorating the portal of the cathedral in Tarnow. Opposite the latter scene there is a bear eating a pear. According to Gutkowski (*ibidem*, pp. 132–133), both images are to symbolize heretics destroying the fruits of the Church. The fox and bear are contrasted with the figure of Christ imagined as the mystical Fons Vitae. See also J. Trajdos, *Portal południowy katedry w Tarnowie*, “Biuletyn Historii Sztuki” t. 22 (1960).

⁴⁰ E. P. Evans, *Animal Symbolism in Ecclesiastical Architecture*, Detroit 1969, pp. 210–211.



⁴¹ Examples from England, Germany and France are given by E. P. Evans (*ibidem*, pp. 178–245).

⁴² See J. Magrian, *Szlakiem kościołów Gniezna*, <http://muzeumgniezno.pl/fotki/files/files/aktualnosci/2016-03/SZLAKIEM%20KOSCIOLOW%20GNIEZNA.pdf>, (access date: 4 VIII 2018), p. 9.

⁴³ M. Gutkowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 133–134, fig. 58–59.

⁴⁴ See J. Dobkowska–Kubacka, *op. cit.*

⁴⁵ See E. P. Evans, *op. cit.*, pp. 185–186, 210, 231.

⁴⁶ See R. Wittkower, *Eagle and Serpent. A Study in the Migration of Symbols*, “Journal of the Warburg Institute” 1939, no. 4.

⁴⁷ Cf. e.g. S. Kobieltus, *op. cit.*, pp. 325–329.

⁴⁸ See W. Cahn, *op. cit.*, fig. 6, p. 61.

From the repertoire of “fox motifs” based on Aesop’s fables and their adaptations, the most popular in art was the motif of a fox (with or without a habit) preaching to geese (or other poultry), benefiting from their naivety and weakening their vigilance to seize them later⁴¹. Examples of similar images from Poland can be the sculpture on the nave supports in the Church of St. John the Baptist in Gniezno (second half of the 14th century)⁴² or the side wall of the stall from the Blessed Virgin Mary’s church in Toruń (beginning of the 15th century)⁴³. They can also be found on bordures of miniatures, e.g. in the Arras Bible from the end of the 13th century, stored in the library of the University of Pennsylvania (MS Codex 724, fol. 247v.). In *Hours of Utrecht* [Fig. 4] made between 1460 and 1470. (Museum Meermannno-Westreenianum, The Hague, Ms. 10 F 50, Fol. 6r), attributed to Master Catherine of Kleve and Lieven van Lathem, the fox dressed in the monastery hood does not preach, but studies the book—the book is a common attribute of heretics and an inseparable attribute of heresiarchs. It accompanies them in almost all scenes, both allegorical and narrative⁴⁴. It represents heterodoxical writings, authority, on which they support themselves in moments of doubt or in the fire of discussion, being at the same time a symbol of the views of their owners (authors), beliefs inconsistent with the teaching of the Church, and even more broadly—a symbol of heresy itself.

Representations of foxes dressed in habits and/or preaching are sometimes interpreted as an expression of the aversion of the secular clergy to mendicant orders⁴⁵. In such a case, the fox would be the embodiment of the monks’ hypocrisy, and the whole scene a satire on their greed, voraciousness and cunning. However, such decoration also occurs in churches of beggars’ orders. In many cases, the figure of a fox in a habit may therefore symbolize a heretic, whose main animal symbol, next to the wolf, was precisely the fox, a typical way of behaving was putting on the sheep’s skin—the habit, while the characteristic features of character are deceitfulness and hypocrisy.

Cunning and deceitfulness were seen to characterize also the snake, which could be a symbol of heresy itself as a phenomenon⁴⁶. However, within the extremely rich and complex symbolism of the snake, this meaning is marginal⁴⁷. The snake rarely appears in the context of anti-heretic iconography. The image of an eagle grabbing the snake in its claws on the first page of the 9th century *Gospel Book of Metz* (Biblioteka Narodowa MS. Lat. 93388, fol 105 v.) is a representation that can reasonably be read in this way⁴⁸. The interpretation of it as a symbol of the victorious struggle of the Church against heresy seems justified because of the links between the *Gospel of St. John* and anti-heretic polemics. The beginning of the fourth Gospel: “At the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (J. 1:1 KJV) was one of the most serious arguments put forward by orthodox people against the Arians. This quote was supposed to testify, among other things, to the eternal

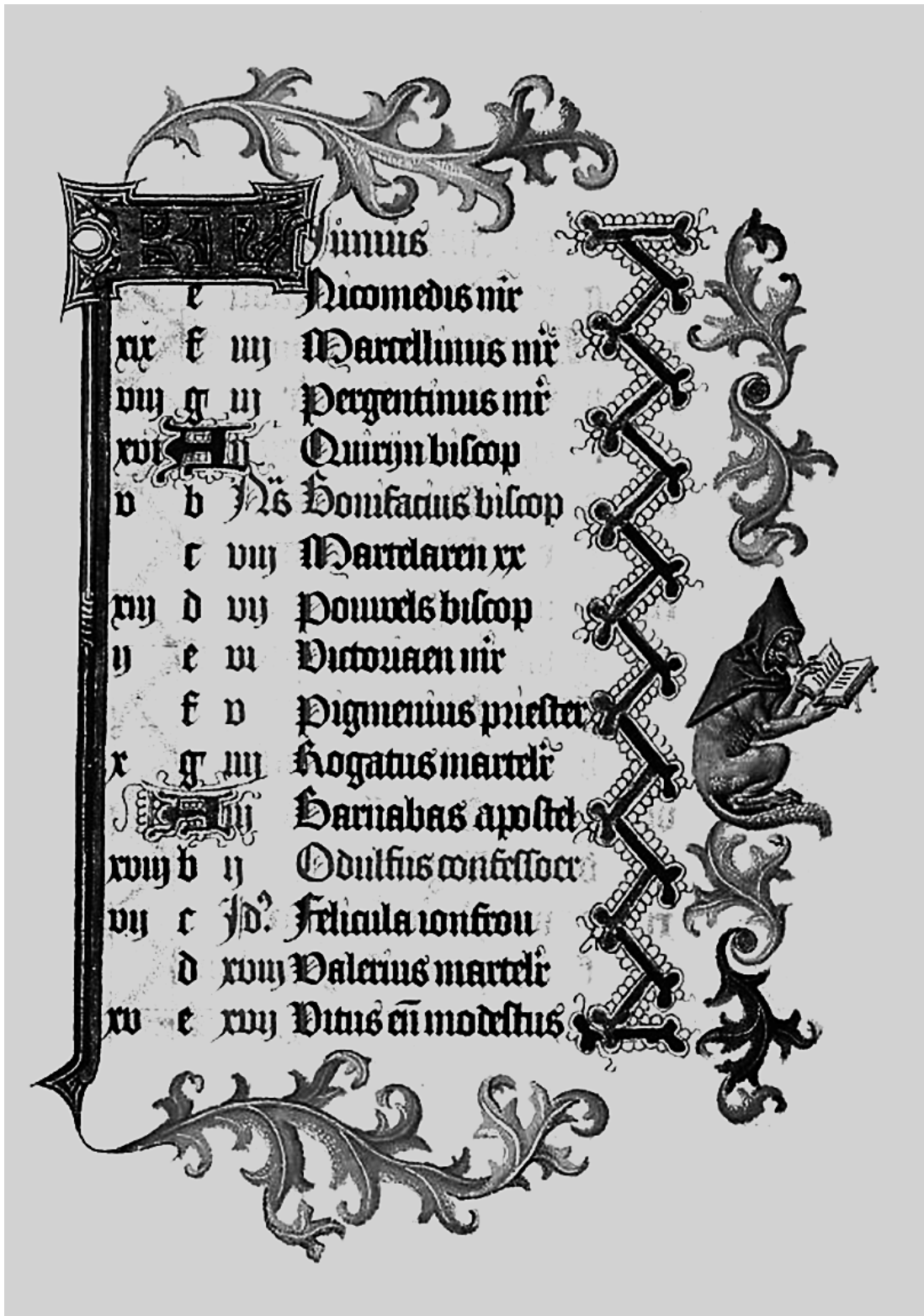


fig. 4 Master of Catherine of Kleves, L. van Lathem, *A fox in a monk's hood studying a book*; the cycle *Hours*, Utrecht, 1460–1470, manuscript; Museum Meermanno–Westreenianum, Hague, Ms. 10 F 50, fol. 6r. Fot. public domain, <https://nl.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bestand:Fuchs.margin.jpg> (access date: 8 IX 2018)



⁴⁹ Iconographic schemes used in anti-heretic representations are described in: J. Dobkowska-Kubacka, *op. cit.*

⁵⁰ W. Cahn, *op. cit.*, pp. 58–62, Fig. 1–2; Y. Załuska, *L'Enluminure et le Scriptorium de Cîteaux au XIIIe siècle*, Cîteaux 1989, pp. 110–111, fig. 1.

existence of Christ and his equivalence to God the Father. St. John the Evangelist was often presented in the company of Arius, e.g. he triumphs over the heresiarch pressed under the saint's footstool on a miniature decorating one of the cards of the so-called *Gospel Book of Eadwig* (Eadui Codex), dated around 1020 and made in Canterbury (Hanover, Kestner Museum WM XXIa 36, fol. 147 v)⁴⁹. The evangelist holds a scroll with the written beginning of the Gospel. The second scroll informing about the sin of the denial of the fullness of the divinity of Christ is given to the heresiarch. Similarly, as a defeat of heresy by the power of the Evangelist's authority, it can be interpreted the scene incorporated into the initial beginning the *Gospel according to Saint John* in the so-called *Bible of Cîteaux* from the first half of the 12th century (Dijon, Bibliotheque Municipale Ms 15, fol. 56 v)⁵⁰. However, it is no longer John the Evangelist but his symbol—the eagle that sat on the monk's head. At first glance, this scene seems to be similar to the Evangelist's representations with his symbol. The sitting monk, however, is not St. John the Evangelist. He certainly represents Arius, as evidenced by the inscription on the scroll that he holds in his hand: "*Arrius. Erat aliquando quando non erat*". The eagle clenches its beak on the second ribbon, on which are written the words which are the beginning of the fourth Gospel. In addition, the eagle—a symbol of the Evangelist not only sat on his head, but also attacks with his claws the eyes, ears and lips of the man. The initial from the Bible of Cîteaux is therefore an illustration of the struggle of the representative of orthodoxy against heresy, or rather already the triumph of the Church and the punishment of the renegade. In the context of the above mentioned iconographic schemes used in the images of St. John the Evangelist together with Arius, in the last case of the symbol of the Evangelist with Arius, it seems justified to interpret the representation of the eagle and serpent on the first page of the *Gospel Book of Metz* as the Evangelist's triumph over heresy (and Arian heresy often served in church writings as the figure of any other heresy).

To sum up: in the art of Latin Europe in the period from the 9th to the 16th century heretics were most often symbolized by wolves and foxes. They also served as symbols of Satan himself. They owed their anti-heretic meaning to the exegesis of biblical verses and comparisons taken from literature, especially the patristic one. Considering the traditional association of foxes and wolves with the realm of evil, their choice as symbols of heretics emphasized the evil origin and character of heresy. However, its purpose was also to emphasize the specific character traits attributed to apostates from the Church, and associated with these animals, especially rapacity and deceitfulness. A variety of this trickery was *species pietatis* – false piety. The use of these traits to heretics served to discredit them in the eyes of the rest of society, and to warn against them, so it was largely instrumental. Especially in the Late Middle Ages there is a great con-

vergence between the image of heretic in art and the psychological stereotype of heretic existing in literature, especially in preaching. Occasional sermons about heresy using a simplified and prepared for the anti-heretic campaign image of heretic did not go into details of doctrinal differences between followers of different sects, treating all heresy as one offence. Catholic art, of course, was also not interested in objectively reflecting beliefs or depicting the real rites of heretics, the stereotypical features of character and the role of enemies of Christianity and mankind attributed to them were sufficient. From this point of view, animal symbols, as a tool for fighting heresy, could be extremely effective.

While medieval animal iconography enjoys considerable interest among art historians⁵¹, the anti-heretic themes still remain on the margins of their interest, discussed only in a few studies and most often in passing. However, they are an important part of medieval iconography, because heresies were a serious problem for the Church at that time, and as such they need to be examined more thoroughly.



⁵¹ E.g. *Flora i fauna w kulturze średniowiecza od XII do XV wieku. Materiały XVII Seminarium Mediewistycznego*, ed. A. Karłowska-Kamzowa, J. Kowalski, Poznań 1997.

Słowa kluczowe

średniowieczna symbolika zwierzęca, heretycy, walka Kościoła z herezją, Europa łacińska IX–XVI w., lisy i wilki w sztuce

Keywords

medieval animal symbolism, heretics, the Church's fight against heresy, Latin Europe of 9th–16th century, foxes and wolves in art

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Quotations from the *New Testament* from *King James Bible*.

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Summary

JOANNA DOBKOWSKA-KUBACKA (University of Lodz) / Animals as symbols of heretics in Latin European literature and art from the 9th to the 16th century

Medieval heresies, posing a threat and competition for the official Church mobilized it to counter-attack, which was reflected in the animal symbolism both in literature and in the visual arts. In the period from the 9th to the 16th century, heretics were most often symbolized by wolves (the phenomenon of heresy itself was also represented in the form of a wolf, whose hellish origins were to be seen in the flames surrounding it) and foxes. Both served also as symbols of Satan himself. They owed their anti-heretical meaning to the exegesis of biblical verses and comparisons taken from literature, especially patristic one. The problem of sects has been discussed in the writings since the beginnings of Christianity, and later polemicists have often been inspired by the works of old Christian writers. Given the traditional association of foxes and wolves with the realm of evil, their choice of symbols of heretics emphasized Satanic origin and the character of heresy. However, its purpose was also to emphasize the specific character traits attributed to apostates from the Church: rapacity and deceitfulness associated with these animals. A variant of this deceitfulness was *species pietatis* – “false piety” attributed to heretics and associated with the Bible’s motif of “sheepskin” hiding the evil intentions of false prophets. In art this “sheepskin” took the form of a habit in which foxes were often dressed. The phenomenon of merging the fox figures from the fables of Aesop and their adaptations and symbols of the fox taken from the Bible took place. Attributing a “fox cunning” to heretics served to discredit them in the eyes of the rest of society, and to warn against them, so it was largely instrumental. Especially in the Late Middle Ages there is a great convergence between the image of heretic in art and the psychological stereotype of heretic existing in literature, especially in preaching. Occasional sermons about heresy using a simplified and prepared for the anti-heretic campaign image of heretic did not go into details of doctrinal differences between followers of different sects, treating all heresy as one offence. Catholic art was obviously not interested in objectively reflecting beliefs or depicting the real rites of heretics, the stereotypical features of character and the role of enemies of Christianity and mankind attributed to them were sufficient. From this point of view, animal symbols, as a tool for fighting heresy, could prove highly effective.