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The Polish Translation of the *Historia Trium Regum* from a Textual Criticism Perspective

In the latter half of the 14th century, the German Carmelite Johannes de Hildesheim completed a work – still well-known today – in which he recast numerous apocryphal narratives on the events concerning the biblical Magi, intertwined with tales of the *mirabilia* of the East and the Three Indias, taken mainly from Eastern sources¹. The *Historia Trium Regum* enjoyed widespread fame for at least the next two centuries, as evidenced by an impressive number of manuscripts and various printings, as well as its many translations into national languages, in particular German, English, Flemish and French².

Less well known, however, is that in the second half of the 15th century, the *Historia* of the Carmelite monk was also translated into Polish and Ruthenian. Three manuscripts of the Ruthenian translation are known, two from around the mid and the late 1400s, and a third from the following century³.

The Polish translation has not survived in its original, instead coming down to us in a copy from the mid-16th century, transmitted as part of an impressive codex. Apart from the *Historia*, this codex contains a narrative on the passion of Christ, titled *Sprawa chędogo o męce Pana Chrystussowej*, and a translation of the widely disseminated *Gospel of Nicodemus*, known to the literary tradition of the entire Christian world.

The codex in question⁴, assembled in 1544 by an otherwise unknown Laurentius a Lasco (Wawrzyniec z Łaska), probably the copyist and perhaps also editor of the texts⁵, in a

¹ On the sources used by Johannes of Hildesheim, see the indispensable work of Ugo Monneret de Villard (1952).

² See, most recently, Schaer 1992: 22; for the translations into Germanic languages, the summary by Meregalli (2006).

³ For detail on the Ruthenian translation, see Piacentini 2021.

⁴ Preserved in the National Library in Warsaw. For a description of the codex, see the excellent study by Wiesław Wydra (Izydorczyk, Wydra 2007).

⁵ It is not entirely clear whether Laurentius a Lasco, who was certainly the copyist or at least the organiser of the codex, also played a part in revising the transliteration. Probably yes, but certainly not with much attention or success. On the role he may have played, and on the enigmatic abbreviated signature he affixed in some places in the codex, see Izydorczyk, Wydra 2007, as well as Piacentini 2011a.

typically medieval spirit, although at the dawn of a late-arriving Renaissance, holds considerable importance from the viewpoint of pre-modern Polish cultural history.

The innovative idea of Laurentius a Lasco was, in a single codex, to collect three fulsome narratives, undoubtedly saturated with apocryphal elements, on the two most important events of Christianity – the birth and the passion of Christ – just as announced in the *Titelblatt*, and where clearly the admirable story of the Three Kings takes a back seat, being cited as a sort of supplementary element⁶:

SPRAWA CHEDOGA O MECE PANA CHRYSUSSOWEJ | SPYSSANA PRZES SWIETEGO | LUKASSA: czo dobrze obaczis | pilno czthacz | Wthora czesz bendzie | o narodzeniu Ssyna bozego | thudzies o chwalebnych trzech | krolech | Liatha bozego: 1544 | Lau Las: Pel.

THE LIMPID NARRATION OF THE PASSION OF CHRIST THE LORD WRITTEN BY SAINT LUKE: which you would do well to read attentively. The second part will be about the birth of the Son of God. Here [you will also read] of the glorious three kings. In the year of the Lord: 1544. Lau Las: Pel.

For years, this Polish translation suffered from the harsh judgment of Aleksander Brückner (1888: 468-471, 619-620; 1904: 26-27), who labelled it unworthy of publication by reason of the slovenliness of the language and the incompetence in translating word for word from the Latin, at times without understanding what was written. In many passages, this in turn created difficulties for the readers, unless supported by reference to the Latin text⁷.

For a long time, the Polish translation languished without full publication⁸, until recently, the great medieval philologist Wiesław Wydra (supported by Marek Osiewicz) provided an edition in transcription and transliteration accompanied by an essential commentary (Johannes de Hildesheim 2024). At the same time, other scholars of ancient Polish literature began to study this text as part of an ambitious project on apocryphal literature in medieval Polish culture, providing their own transliteration and transcription of the Polish translation (Rojszczak-Robińska *et al.* 2018-2024).

Thus, having at least an introductory sketch of the rich issues concerning this translation, and more in general of the entire codex of Laurentius a Lasco, we can now turn to the textological examination of the transmission of the Latin text and of the Polish translation.

Brückner's harsh judgment was not without reason. However, it is difficult to speak of a 'reference' Latin text, considering that manuscripts of Johannes de Hildesheim's *Historia* circulated throughout medieval Europe, and as the copies were handed down, the text un-

⁶ On this subject see also Piacentini 2011a.

⁷ See also Adamczyk 1994.

⁸ In fact, at the end of the 1950s, Stefan Vrtel-Wierczyński had announced the publication of the Polish translation, for which he had prepared the transliteration, to be completed by a pool of Polish medievalists (Vrtel-Wierczyński, 1959: 322). The death of the distinguished philologist in 1963 brought an end to the project. On this subject, see also Kuraszkiewicz 1963: 3.

derwent significant alterations⁹. It could sound trivial to recall that any translation depends on the transmission of the original text, whether in manuscript or printed form, just as also on its redaction, a maxim applying not only to translations of past centuries but equally those of today. I mention this here because in the case in question, it seems only very recently that Olga Ziółkowska, a researcher at the University of Poznań, first raised the problem, in much the same terms as those presented here. Her work, published in mid-2025 (Ziółkowska 2025), was brought to the author's attention in early 2026, during revisions to the current article¹⁰.

So, what text should we choose for comparison with the Polish translation, at least approximately, given that there are more than a hundred manuscripts of the *Historia* (plus also the old printings), and that aiming for a critical edition seems unrealistic?

It is true that, at the end of the 19th century, Carl Horstmann had collated several manuscripts (and printings), providing numerous variants in the apparatus (Johannes de Hildesheim 1886), but Horstmann himself recognised this was no critical edition. Nevertheless, his work remains an important reference¹¹, even if not always helpful in explaining numerous baffling passages, variants and errors in the Polish translation. In fact, in searching for explanation, as will be seen below, it becomes clear that not all the misunderstandings and errors scattered throughout the Polish translation can be blamed on the translator.

For example, the passage¹²:

[...] były a stały <z>¹³ znamieniem krzyża littery albo słowa wypisany obyczajem kaldejskim i gwiazdy na wyobrażenie i na podobieństwo jako Trzem Krolem błogosławionym czasu narodzenia Bożego ukazała się była [...] (HTK: 158r).

⁹ This does not mean that manuscripts marred by obvious errors cannot convey correct readings elsewhere: not a new idea, in textual criticism. Paradoxically, Jaques Bédier himself (Bédier 1928: 163) mentioned this in his article on the edition of *Lais d'Ombre* ("En effet, qu'appellera-t-on le meilleur manuscrit? Le plus ancien? il peut être le plus déformé. Le plus correct? il peut abonder en leçons refaites, et le plus incorrect peut, en certains passages, avoir seul conservé la leçon authentique"). In a Slavic context, see Giorgio Ziffer's discussion of the β sub-archetype of the *Vita Constantini* (Ziffer 2013).

¹⁰ Some of the author's comments certainly deserve further elaboration. For the moment, I would only note that the variant she cites, 'de Synaj ad Egiptum,' is attested in the three Latin manuscripts discussed here. The reading 'Synaj' is, of course, a paleographic misinterpretation of "Syria" (moreover, in the manuscripts Jag 1507 and Cz, the reading is 'sijna').

¹¹ On the importance of Horstmann's edition, despite some valid criticisms, see also Schaer 1992: 25-41.

¹² I will quote directly from the manuscript of *Historia Trzech Kroli* (hereinafter HTK). Corrections to the text are in square brackets.

¹³ Integration by conjecture, correcting a normal and ordinary aplography.

[...] there were, with sign of the cross, letters, that is words, written in the Chaldean way and stars in the form and likeness as it appeared to the Three Kings at the time of Jesus' birth [...].

Grammatically, the passage makes no sense, considering that 'gwiazdy' ('stars') seems to be a plural feminine noun (subject)¹⁴, while the verb form, undoubtedly referring to that subject, is singular third person ('ukazała się była'). The passage is also incoherent with respect to tradition since we all know that, for the Three Kings, only one star would appear¹⁵.

The Polish translator had not noticed this problem¹⁶, but preceding him, neither had most of the copyists of the Latin text, and the error in the Polish translation derives precisely from the Latin text:

[...] fuerunt et steterunt cum signo crucis littere caldayce et stelle in forma et similitudine prout tribus regibus beatis in natiuitate domini apparuit [...] (Johannes de Hildesheim 1886: 214).

The error had likely arisen very early in the manuscript tradition of the *Historia*, given that the Latin reading 'stelle' (Polish: 'gwiazdy') is not a plural noun at all, but a singular genitive left isolated following the dropping of the word 'ymago'. The passage should have read 'ymago stelle', as found in the manuscript of the Corpus Christy College Library, collated by Horstmann (Johannes de Hildesheim 1886: 214, n. 30). Horstmann corrects the obvious error in 'stella', on the basis of the reading of another manuscript, but the reading 'stella' is itself, I believe, an *ope ingenii* correction by a conscientious copyist of the Latin text, adopting the simplest and most intuitive solution to remedy the error.

In his edition of the Latin text, Horstmann would not even have known of the manuscripts preserved in Polish libraries¹⁷, let alone be able use them, but it is precisely in three of these 'Polish' manuscripts that we can find possibilities for resolving some, though not all, of the issues relating to the Polish translation. However, it should be clarified immediately that the Polish translator did not translate from any of the three manuscripts considered here, as we will see at the end of these notes.

I limit myself here to a handful of examples, providing, as far as possible, a literal translation of the Polish, as this was in turn a literal translation of the text first written in Latin, but in a Latin greatly transformed from that of classical times.

¹⁴ The word is in fact commented in this manner in Rojszczak-Robińska *et al.* 2018-2024.

¹⁵ On the star of the Magi in apocryphal narratives, see recently Starowieyski 2017.

¹⁶ Unfortunately, this is not even noted in the previously cited editions of the Polish translation.

¹⁷ There are currently 26. See the fundamental work by Jerzy Kaliszuk (2005). I will omit here the manuscripts found in Bohemian and Slovak libraries, which could also be quite useful for the history of transmission of the Latin text.

Right at the beginning, in the first chapter of the Polish translation, we read this passage:

[...] przez ktoryż to wschod słońca wszytek jego zachod jako zorza barzo jasna światle powietrze naśladowujące znamionując już oświeca. Bowiem ten zachod słońca przerwczoni Trzej Krolowie jich relikwiami wielebnymi i znamiony rozmajicie okrasili a ożłobili [...] (HTK: 153r/153v).

thanks to that rises of the sun is already shining its sunset, which glows beautifully like an aurora heralding a bright light, because mentioned Three Kings once freed from the flesh, adorned in many ways and with signs those lands where the sun sets.

The Latin text of Horstmann's edition would seem almost identical when compared with the Polish translation, yet these differ in two consequential details: the preposition of place 'in' ('in quem') instead of 'per' ('przez', in the Polish) and the adjective 'totus', which would have been at origin of the Polish 'wszytek', but is not found in the Horstmann text:

[...] in quem tamen ortum solis eius occasus quasi aurora valde rutilans claram auram sequentem presignans iam refulget. Nam ipsum occasum solis prefati tres reges eorum reliquijs venerandis et signis carne soluti multipliciter ornauerunt [...] (Johannes de Hildesheim 1886: 211).

yet in that rising of the sun already shines its sunset which glows beautifully like an aurora heralding a bright light, because mentioned Three Kings once freed from the flesh, adorned in many ways and with signs those lands where the sun sets.

However, if we look for example at manuscript 1713 (hereinafter PAU 1713)¹⁸, held by the Biblioteka Polskiej Akademji Umiejętności in Krakow, the matter is different:

[...] per quem tamen ortum solis totius [sic] occasus quasi aurora valde rutilans claram auram sequentem prefigurans iam refulget. Nam ipsum occasum solis prefati tres reges eorum reliquijs venerandis et signis carne soluti multipliciter ornauerunt (PAU 1713: 195v).

The same reading is found in manuscript 1509 (hereinafter referred to as Jag 1509)¹⁹ of the Biblioteka Jagiellońska in Krakow and in manuscript III-18²⁰, located in the Biblioteka Ojców Paulinów in Częstochowa (hereinafter referred to as Cz):

[...] per quem tamen ortum solis totus eius occasus quasi aurora valde rutilans claram auram sequentem presignans iam refulget. Nam ipsum occasum solis prefati tres reges eorum reliquis venerabilis et signis carne soluti multipliciter ornauerunt [...] (Jag 1509: 63r).

¹⁸ The manuscript was copied between 1470 and 1472, cfr. Kaliszuk 2005: 82.

¹⁹ Dates back to the mid-15th century (Kaliszuk 2005: 78).

²⁰ Dating back to the second quarter of the fifteenth century (Kaliszuk 2005: 72).

[...] {per quem tamen ortum solis}²¹ totus occasus quasi aurora valde rutilans claram auram sequentem presignans iam refulget. Nam ipsum occasum solis prefati tres reges eorum reliquijs venerandis et signis carne soluti multipliciter ornauerunt [...] (Cz: 1010a).

Johannes of Hildesheim, albeit in a somewhat convoluted style, had constructed a striking image, almost in the spirit of Baroque conceptualism. It is true, he says, that the eastern regions are resplendent because not only does the sun rise there to illuminate the west, but also because they are the origin of the Three Kings; however, now it is the west itself that shines in the eastern regions ('in quem tamen ortum solis'), because in the west (Cologne) rest the relics of the Three Kings. A copyist of the Latin text clearly did not understand this, seeing that naturally we have the west illuminated by the rising sun of the east, and so, I believe, he changed the preposition of place 'in' to 'per', which is precisely the reading we find in all three manuscripts PAU 1713, Jag 1509 and Cz, as well as in the Polish translation²².

This is not the only example of *varia lectio* and error already in the opening lines of the Latin text, which contaminate the Polish translation and sometimes open to embarrassingly hazarded interpretations, or to hazarded opinions on the work of the translator himself. Take the example of a passage immediately following the one just quoted:

[...] bo w tem wschodzie słonecznym, rozumiej prawego Boga i człowieka jich dary prawnymi a dostojnymi <ci> jiści Trzej Krolowie błogosławiony cieleśnie będąc żywi szukali a chwali Pana wszechmogącego [...] (HTK: 153v).

[...] indeed in that sunrise, that is to say the true God and man these Three Glorious Kings alive in the flesh sought and praised with their true and worthy gifts the almighty Lord [...].

Instead, the generally accepted Latin text reads (I quote from the Horstmann edition):

Nam in ipso solis ortu, videlicet in oriente, verum deum et hominem eorum muneribus veris et mysticis idem tres reges beati in carne viuentes quesierunt et adorauerunt (Johannes de Hildesheim 1886: 211).

Indeed, in that sunrise, that is in the east, the true God and man, these glorious Three Kings alive in the flesh sought and praised with their true and worthy gifts.

Just recently, a scholar²³, comparing the Latin text, as read from the incunabulum printed by Johann Guldenschaff in 1477 (Johannes de Hildesheim 1477), which here is

²¹ Added in the margin by the copyist, who realised he had skipped a line.

²² The passage quoted has been the subject of a lengthy and convoluted attempt at explanation by Zofia Bryłka-Baranowska (2023: 100-102), who credits the translator with the intentional substitution of the preposition of state in place, despite the very nature of the translation, which is literal and word for word, and would rather bring into question the state of the Latin text.

²³ The aforementioned Zofia Bryłka-Baranowska (2023).

the same as in Horstmann's edition, believes that the translator would have deliberately omitted the gloss ("videlicet in oriente" / "that is in east") applied to the syntagma 'in ipso solis ortu'. This because in the translator's opinion (as interpreted by the scholar), it was a redundant gloss, but at the same time the translator (still as interpreted by the scholar) had left and translated "videlicet" ('that is' / 'rozumiej')²⁴, to establish a comparison between the rising of the sun and Christ. Thus, the scholar launches into a long discourse on the translator's skills of theological elaboration (Brylka-Baranowska 2023: 96-98) – skills definitely lacking, as is clear from the translator's entire work – without even touching on the idea that the absence in the Polish version of the place complement 'in oriente' ("videlicet in oriente"), could be due to an oversight on the part of the translator, or indeed to a fault in the Latin copy from which he translated, which is what we read in the manuscripts PAU 1713 (195v), Jag 1509 (63r) and Cz (1010a)²⁵:

[...] in ipso solis ortu videlicet deum verum et hominem [...].

The addition, in the Polish translation, of the object complement at the end of the sentence ("Pana wszechmogącego" / 'the almighty Lord') is instead the work of either the translator or the later copyist/editor, to replace an object complement that in fact was present in the original text ("verum deum et hominem"), but had been diverted from its syntactic function and absorbed by the comparison "videlicet verum deum [...]", resulting from an error following the loss of the original comparison ("videlicet in oriente"). This is one of the rare examples of the translator's (or copyist/editor's) attention to repairing a Latin text, even though they were not fully aware that it was corrupted, nor to what extent.

Yet another example, taken from chapter XI, discussing the *mirabilia* of the Indias:

[...] A w trzeciej Indyjej było krolestwo Tharsis, w którym czasie narodzenia Bożego był krolował krol Kasper, ktorego też między jinszymi ziemiami był on sławetny wysep, Egrismilla tako rzeczony, w którym więcej niżli w jinszych ziemiach na świecie mirra roście, a roście jakoby cierznie, ale barzo wysoko a szeroko, a dwa razy do roka gotuje sie [...]. (HTK, 177).

²⁴ Which the author says is a verb: 'Pozostawił on jednak czasownik *videlicet* i przetłumaczył go jako *rozumiej* [...]' ('He left the verb *videlicet*, however, translating it as *rozumiej* [...].') (Brylka-Baranowska 2023: 97). Surely a *lapsus*, one hopes, however embarrassing.

²⁵ Moreover, the majority of the scholar's arguments in the cited work, starting with those on the *incipit* of the Polish translation of the *Historia*, miss the mark precisely because they fail to take into account the possibility of *variae lectiones* in the manuscript transmission of the Latin text, complicated by errors made by the Polish translator and the copyist of the Polish text. She is not alone in this, however, in the recent studies on the Polish translation of the *Historia Trium Regum*, but this is not the place for further discussion.

And in the third India there was the realm of Tharsis in which, at the time of God's birth, King Casper reigned, of whom [NB: the Polish text reflects the "Barbarian-Latin" construction of Johannes of Hildesheim to the letter, as seen in the complement of belonging referring to Caspar, i.e. "to whom also belonged..."] was also, among other lands, the famous island called Egrismilla, in which more than in other lands of the world myrrh grows, and it grows as a thorny bush, but very tall and wide and ripens twice a year.

"Roście jakoby cierznie" therefore means that myrrh grows in the form of (like a) a thorny bush.

In Horstmann's edition, however, we read something else (in brackets, the variants noted in his apparatus):

[...] In tertia India fuit regnum Tharsis, in quo (in quo temporibus nativitati domini) regnavit Jaspas mirram offerens (Jaspas, qui domino mirram obtulit); cuius etiam (inter alias diuersas terras) fuit insula Egriseula (fuit illa famosissima insula Egrisoula / Griscula / Egrisculla / Egrosilla vocata), in qua corpus beati Thome quiescit, in qua plus quam alibi (in qua etiam plus quam in alia mundi parte) crescit mirra, super herbas in modum spicarum advstarum formatas [sic]²⁶, in maxima quantitate (et dum in herbis maturescit, est tam mollis quod vestimentis transeuncium se connectit [...]) (Johannes de Hildesheim, 1886: 227-228).

In the third India there was the realm of Tharsis, in which (at the time of the birth of the Lord) reigned Jaspas, who offered myrrh (who brought myrrh to the Lord); of which also (among other different lands) was the island Egriseula (was that very famous island called Egrisoula / Griscula / Egrosilla), in which rests the body of the blessed Thomas, in which more than elsewhere (in which also, more than in other lands of the world) myrrh grows, on the herbs formed in the manner of toasted ears, in great quantities (and while it ripens among the herbs, it is so soft that it attaches to the clothing of those who pass by).

The variant "in modo spinarum" ('as a thorny bush') is not recorded by Horstmann. But here is what we read in the 1713 manuscript of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Krakow (PAU 1713: 202):

[...] Item in tertia India fuit regnum Tharsis in quo temporibus natiuitatis domini regnavit Caspar cui etiam inter alias diuersas terras fuit illa famosissima insula Egrinulla in qua plus quam in alijs terris mundi mirra crescit et crescit in modum spinarum adu-starum formatas in maxima quantitate et herbis maturescit et tam mollis est quod vestimentis transeuncium se connectit [...].

²⁶ The passage is not very clear, mainly because of the adjective "formatas" as applied to "herbas"; so much so that the scribe of the manuscript at the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel (Aug. 4° 23. 2), after writing "formatas," erases the final "s" (f. 13v), evidently considering it more logical that the adjective should refer to "myrra." For example, in the manuscript at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (Clm 2941), we read precisely "formata" (f. 7v). In my English translation of the passage, I will apply the adjective in question to "myrra."

The exact same passage (with the variation ‘per vestimenta’) is found in manuscript 1509 of the Jagiellonian Library in Krakow (Jag 1509: 67v) and in the Częstochowa manuscript (Cz: 1017b):

[...] mirra crescit. Et crescit in modum spinarum adustarum formatas in maxima quantitate et herbis maturescit et tam mollis est per uestimenta se connectit [...].

This could well be the original reading, considering that myrrh also grows in the form of a thorny shrub; however, we do not know where Johannes of Hildesheim got his description of this plant. After all, the problem of sources and the phenomenology of text transmission are different, albeit related, issues.

In the same passage of the Polish translation we have another peculiar enigma, namely that myrrh ‘ripens twice a year’ (“dwa razy do roka gotuje się”).

As far as I know, myrrh today ripens once a year, at summer’s end, but I cannot say whether seven hundred years ago, when Johannes from Hildesheim was gathering materials for his *Historia*, it actually ripened twice a year. I have not asked botanical scholars, but I doubt it.

Be that as it may, if we take another look at manuscripts PAU 1713, Jag 1509 and Cz, we can clearly see that the passage in question is corrupted: “et dum in herbis maturescit” (Johannes de Hildesheim 1886: 228) > “et herb(is) maturescit” (PAU 1713, Jag 1509, Cz).²⁷

In this form, the sentence no longer makes sense and it is easy to guess a further minor corruption, consisting either in the omission of ‘her’ by a copyist of the Latin text, or attributable to the carelessness of the Polish translator. It is also likely that the word was abbreviated, as for example in the Leopoldian manuscript: “[...] et du(m) i(n) h(er)bis maturescit [...]” (f. 158r)²⁸. But it is also possible the origin was a mechanical failure occurring in a Latin manuscript, so that only ‘bis maturescit’ remained, hence the Polish ‘dwa razy do roka’, i.e. twice a year. And this is not the only example of corruption originating as a result of the progressive degradation of the original text²⁹.

Further on, in the sixth chapter of the Polish translation³⁰, we read an account of a type of man called “alhaji”:

²⁷ In brackets, the manuscript abbreviation.

²⁸ This interesting manuscript codex, registered in the L’viv University Library simply as “Kodeks polovini xv v.” (current call number 33.II), would be deserving of further description in a suitable forum.

²⁹ In the Częstochowa manuscript, the text is further corrupted by the omission of the verb ‘est’ and the syntactic-grammatical inconsistency of the form ‘vestimenta’ due to the omission of ‘per’ ([...] et herbis maturescit et tam mollis quod vestimenta [...]).

³⁰ Both the Latin text and the Polish translation are organised in chapters. In the Latin manuscripts these are numbered. In the Polish, the chapters are identifiable thanks to the initial capital letters, however after a certain point, the correspondence with the numbered chapters of the Latin

[...] tamo są w domiech ludzie rozmajici, ktore tam jiste zową alchaji [...] (HTK: 167r).
there are special men who call there alchaji.

I have already touched on this passage elsewhere (Piacentini 2011a: 550–551), but briefly revisit the topic here. It is not a matter of “special men”, as the Polish translation states, but rather of “special houses”, as we read in the Horstmann edition:

[...] quod in ipsis sunt domus speciales que ab ipsis alchan vocantur [...] (Johannes de Hildesheim 1886: 220 and variants in the apparatus).

The reference is certainly to an *al-hān*, an inn of Arab tradition³¹.

However, if we look at the text as handed down by PAU 1713: 199r and Jag 1509: 65r, we read:

[...] sunt in ipsis domibus homines speciales qui ibidem alchay vocantur (Jag: vocant)
[...].

The Częstochowa manuscript offers no help on this passage, since a long part at the beginning of chapter VI (Cz: 1013) is missing, probably due to a mechanical fault in the copy used by the copyist, although certainly not due to homoteleuton.

It is difficult at present to establish where the error originated in the Latin manuscripts, but it is certain that it transferred into the Polish translation. This does not mean, I repeat, that the antigraph from which the Polish translator worked was one of those three manuscripts. Certainly not.

Another curious and significant reading of the Polish translation is found in the passage where the Virgin Mary is described with the adjective ‘łathnya’, whose graphic decipherment presents challenges. I have already written in detail on this several years ago (Piacentini 2022), so here I will limit myself to summarising the issue. That adjectival form should be transcribed as ‘letnia’, which corresponds to the Latin ‘annosa’ (old). Such a transcription is justifiable on the basis of another, identical graphic form of an adjective referring to Pilate, a man now advanced in years. Except that everyone knows, today as they did seven hundred years ago, that the Virgin Mary was a maiden who had just given birth.

Instead, what we read in the generally accepted Latin text is that Mary was “carnosa” (fleshy):

(taking Horstmann’s edition as a reference) is no longer perfect.

³¹ In the Polish translation, similarly to the two Latin manuscripts cited below, “alchaji” is a simple palaeographic error.

[...] et Maria mater eius erat in persona carnosa et aliquantulum fusca [...] (Johannes de Hildesheim, 1886: 236).

It is not so difficult to guess that the adjective ‘letnia’ / ‘annosa’ is the result of a misreading of the Latin adjective ‘carnosa’, probably written in abbreviated form (Piacentini 2000; 2022).

Nor was this an error on the part of the Polish translator, since in manuscripts PAU 1713 (205r), Jag 1509 (69v) and Cz (1021a), we read precisely the word “annosa”, written without abbreviations.

It would be implausible to suppose that three copyists of the Latin text, and in addition the Polish translator himself, independently made the same mistake, the same as they would have independently transmitted the reading on the shape of the myrrh bush, or on the ‘special men’ called ‘alchan’ (‘alchaji’), or the other examples cited (and we could add still more). Such examples could be instead considered *Leitfehler*, or indicative errors³². It is thus possible to re-gather the Latin manuscripts PAU 1713, Jag 1509 and Cz, within a single, well-characterised stemmatic branching, along with the late 15th-century Polish translation. However, this translation does not descend directly from any of the three Latin codices mentioned. In fact, each of the three Latin witnesses is also characterised by several separate errors (*Trennfehler*) – that is, none of these three Latin witnesses is a *descriptus* of the others – and the Polish translation agrees now with one, now with another of them. I limit myself to two examples.

A case of agreeing between the Polish translation, PAU 1713 and Cz *versus* Jag 1509:

[...] były a stały z znamieniem krzyża littery albo słowa wypisany obyczajem kaldejskim [...] (HTK: 158r).

[...] there were, with sign of the cross, letters, that is words, written in the Chaldean way [...].

[...] fuerunt et steterunt cum signo crucis littere caldayce [...] (PAU 1713: 196v; Cz: 1012a).

[...] fuerunt et steterunt cum signo crucis caldayce [...] (Jag 1509: 63v).

A case of agreeing between the Polish translation, Jag 1509 and Cz *versus* PAU 1713:

[...] pirwsi będąc z pogaństwa i z ludzi pierwszych dziewic [...] (HTK: 153).

[...] they were the first among the pagans and among men of the first maidens [...].

³² Obviously, the methodological reference point is neo-Lachmannian textual criticism, starting with Paul Maas’ very familiar *Textkritik*. With regard to neo-Lachmannism, see Trovato 2020.

³³ The Polish translation clearly does not make sense given that the second ‘primicie’ (“primicie virginum”) has been translated with a genitive plural form agreeing with “virginum” (“dziewic”).

[...] primicie gencium et ex gentibus primicie virginum [...] (Jag 1509: 63r; Cz: 1011a).

[...] primicie gencium et ex gentibus primicie Regum [...] (PAU 1713: 195v).

In conclusion, the Polish translation, as well as the three Latin witnesses considered here, seems to derive from a common antigraph, not in our possession. It seems without doubt that the text betrayed by these three Latin manuscripts, or more precisely of an antigraph to which they belong, is also relevant to the Polish translation, although at least a couple of passages in the Polish translation require more thorough evaluation.

However, this common antigraph can also be reconstructed by tracing the textual transmission of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, considering that immediately following the *Historia Trium Regum*, both PAU 1713 and Jag 1509 (but not Cz) transmit a part of the *Gospel* (the *Gesta Pilati*): the same part that we read immediately after the Polish *Historia*. It seems evident and demonstrable (Piacentini 2011b) that the Polish translator considered that fragment of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* as a continuation of the *Historia*, but again in this case the translation does not derive directly from either PAU 1713 or Jag 1509, the readings instead agreeing now with one then the other of these two Latin manuscripts.

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Abstract

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The Polish Translation of the Historia Trium Regum, from a Textual Criticism Perspective

The anonymous Polish translation of Johannes of Hildesheim's *Historia Trium Regum*, as handed down in a copy dated 1544, has received substantial attention. Scholars, mainly Polish, have focused their attention on the phonetic and orthographic peculiarities of the transmitting manuscript, and more generally on the place of the translation in the literary culture of Poland as the Middle Ages arrived at their delayed ending. However, there has been little concerted effort at comparing the translation with the Latin text, above all accounting for the possibilities of alteration in the handwritten transmission of the Latin, although it has been noted that without this 'original' text it can be difficult to understand the meaning of the Polish. Not only, we would add, but without the Latin it remains difficult to objectively evaluate the work of the translator, or of the copyist. The aim of this contribution is to identify some errors in the translation which derive from the redactions of the Latin text; in this same analytical path, using the basic tools of neo-Lachmannian criticism, to identify the branch of transmission of the Latin text from which the Polish translation was probably derived.

Keywords

Historia Trium Regum; Historia Trzech Króli; Johannes de Hildesheim; Laurentius a Lasco; Textual Criticism.