

DOMINIKA GRABIEC

Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Warszawa

## *Seventeenth-century chant manuscripts held at University of Warsaw Library in the context of Bernardine musical culture*

**ABSTRACT:** The Music Department at Warsaw University Library is in possession of three seventeenth-century chant manuscripts. All three were probably produced in the Bernardine community, although only two of them contain provenance notes which allow us to establish more precisely where they were compiled or used. In the present paper, the focus is on one of those manuscripts, which formerly belonged to the Bernardine nuns of Łowicz. This source provides valuable information on such subjects as the exchange of musical experiences and cooperation among various congregations.

**KEYWORDS:** Bernardine nuns, liturgical-musical manuscript, Gregorian chant, Bernardine convent in Łowicz

The Music Department at Warsaw University Library is in possession of three chant books dating from the end of the seventeenth century. It has not been fully established what happened to them from the time they left their rightful monastic owners until they were acquired by the University Library in 1956. Neither have they been thoroughly analysed by researchers such as musicologists, liturgists or historians of monastic orders. Yet they offer very interesting material for the study of Franciscan chant in Poland during the Baroque and Enlightenment periods, as well as research into the liturgy used in convents and Polish illumination art of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These issues still await investigation in order to fill the gap in historical research.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> A number of authors have written in general about Bernardine liturgical manuscripts. See, for example, Emilian Lenart, 'Bernardyńskie rękopisy liturgiczne w Polsce od drugiej połowy XV do końca XVIII wieku' [Bernardine liturgical manuscripts in Poland from the second half of the fifteenth to the end of the eighteenth century], typescript of dissertation, KUL, Lublin, 1985; Hieronim Feicht, 'Muzyka w okresie polskiego baroku' [Music during the Polish Baroque], in Zygmunt M. Szweykowski (ed.), *Z dziejów polskiej kultury muzycznej* [From the history of Polish musical culture], (Kraków, 1958), repr. in Feicht, *Studia nad muzyką polskiego renesansu i baroku* [Studies on the music of the Polish Renaissance and Baroque] (Kraków, 1980), 178. I would like to thank Professor Barbara Przybyszewska-Jarmińska for some important bibliographic information.

All three books probably originate from Bernardine monastic communities. This is indicated primarily by the provenance notes in two of the manuscripts and the chants relating to the celebration of Franciscan saints and patrons of the order, which are highlighted by elaborate ornamentation. In view of their poor state of preservation and considerable depletion, all the books have undergone conservation in recent years. They are large manuscripts, and two of them still have their original binding of leather-covered boards with embossments and protective clasps.

The first book is an antiphoner (Mus 99), produced with great care and richly embellished with colour miniatures and ornamental initials. At present, it numbers 122 sheets measuring approximately 250 x 380 mm. The original pagination preserved on the sheets indicates that some pages are missing from the manuscript. The book does not contain any notes relating to its provenance or the copyist or any dates that would allow us to establish more precisely the time when it was compiled and used. The only note is an ornamental but brief inscription at the end of the book: *Na chwałę Bogu w Troycy / Jedynemu Najświętszey Matce Zbawiciele / la naszego, Patriarchy Serafickiego, / Klary Przebłogosławioney. / Ten, który był zaczął, / skończył.* [To the glory of one God in Trinity, the Holy Mother of our Saviour, the Seraphic Patriarch, the Most Blessed Clare. He who began, finished] (Ill. 1) Evidence that the manuscript originates from the Franciscan or, more precisely, Bernardine community is provided by the antiphons it contains: 'Na święto Stigmatu Ojca naszego Franciszka s.' [On the Feast of the Stigmata of our Father Francis] and 'Na święto Patrona Zakonnego Didaka Ś.' [On the Feast of the monastery's patron Saint Didacus]. Saint Didacus, a monk of Spanish origin, was the patron of the rejuvenated branch of the Franciscans and one of the first Observant saints.

Alongside the charming colour miniatures (Ill. 2, 3 and 4), which are of interest for their artistic qualities, the book contains a number of other interesting elements that might provide clues as to their provenance,<sup>2</sup> such as the consistent spelling of the word 'nieszpór' [vespers] in its regional form 'mieszpór' (Ill. 5 and 6).

The high degree of similarity in the notation, ornamentation and actual manufacture between this book and the other two manuscripts indicates that they are likely to be closely related. It is even possible that they may have been produced in the same scriptorium.

The second book is also an antiphoner (K 213/56), but it is much more modest in terms of ornamentation, which is limited to moderately embellished initials in red, green, blue and yellow. The book now numbers 307 sheets, of which 276 are the original ones, while the remaining sheets have been glued into different parts of the book, clearly at different periods in its usage, since they vary in format and content. The dimensions of the original sheets are approximately 385 x 253 mm.

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Dr Jolanta Gwioździk of the University of Silesia for her valuable comment that such rich ornamentation may mean that the book was created for a female convent.

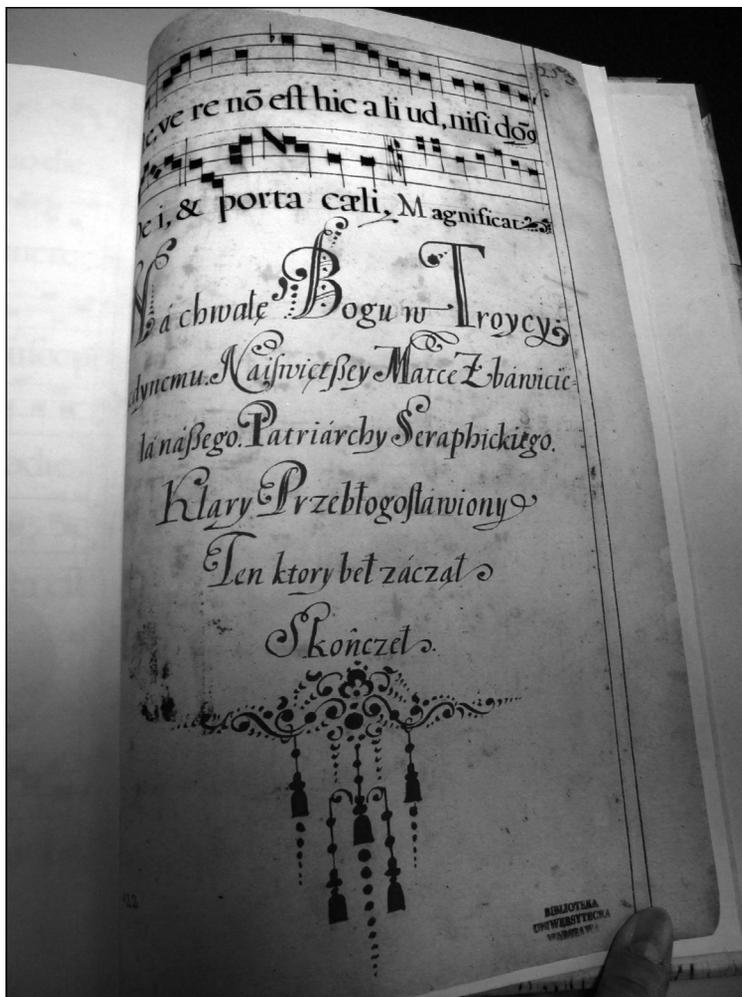


Illustration 1 Bernardine antiphoner, BUW Mus 99, fol. 253r; copyist's inscription.

The original binding with boards covered in leather, together with the metal ferrules and clasps, has also been preserved, and the spine still shows remnants of gilding. The sheets, which carry numerous annotations by copyists and users of the book, show signs of having been repaired many times with wastepaper obtained from older Latin prints and music manuscripts dating from around the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; this indicates that the book was used a great deal.

The book contains a note indicating Sieraków as its place of origin or use (fol. 275). The church and monastery dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, founded by Piotr Opaliński and designed by Krzysztof Bonadura, existed there from 1629. The monastery was regarded as quite rich.



Illustration 2 Bernardine antiphoner, BUW Mus 99, fol. 188r; St Michael the Archangel.



Illustration 3 Bernardine antiphoner, BUW Mus 99, fol. 8v; initial of the Christmas antiphon.

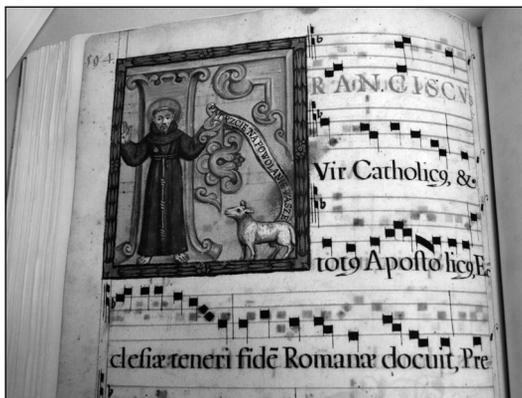


Illustration 4 Bernardine antiphoner, BUW Mus 99, fol. 183v; St Francis.



Illustration 5 Bernardine antiphoner, BUW Mus 99, fol. 39r ; initial of the New Year antiphon.



Illustration 6 Bernardine antiphoner, BUW Mus 99, fol. 28r; initial of the antiphon for the Purification of the BMV.

As early as the beginning of the seventeenth century, it began to create a book collection, which gradually increased, partly thanks to collections bequeathed to the monks by priests. In 1818, the partitioning authorities ordered the cassation of the monastery, which took place on 10 February 1819. The church and its fixtures were made over to the parish, while the moveable contents found their way to the remaining Bernardine establishments.<sup>3</sup> The church and the monastery building, including the original early Baroque, mannered decor, have survived in

<sup>3</sup> Father Hieronim Eugeniusz Wyczawski OFM, *Klasztory bernardyńskie w Polsce w jej granicach historycznych* [Bernardine monasteries in Poland within its historical borders] (Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, 1985), 318–322.

good condition to this day and serve the congregation as the parish church of the Immaculate Conception of the BVM.

Its provenance note also gives the date 1699 and the name *Fr. Carolus*, which probably refer to the copyist and the date when the work was completed (Ill. 7). On the first sheet, we also find the surname *Gawroński*. On the other hand, on the inside cover there is a glued-in insert which may point to a connection with Łowicz, since it tells us that the antiphoner was a gift from Father Sebastian Gawłowski, rector of Koczerów and vicar of Łowicz collegiate church (Ill. 8).<sup>4</sup> However, the insert does not give any detailed information about when the gift was made or who received it.

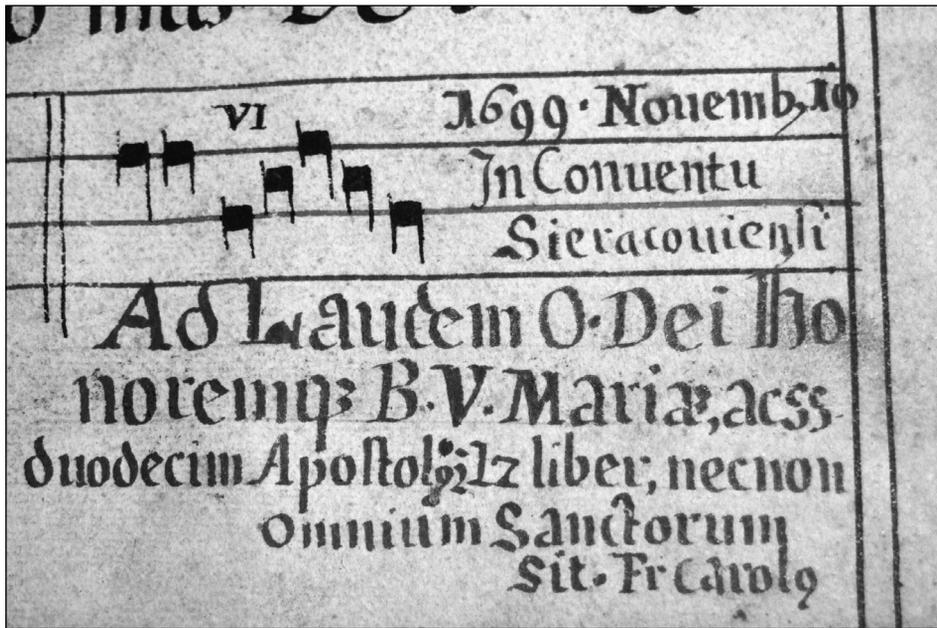


Illustration 7 Bernardine antiphoner from Sieraków, BUW K 213/56, fol. 275r; provenance inscription with date and copyist's name.

Its Bernardine provenance is confirmed by the presence of antiphons for the feast of the Stigmata of St Francis and, above all, for the feast days of St Bernardino of Siena and St John of Capistrano, a reformer of the Franciscan Order.

<sup>4</sup> We have some information about this priest, who made some copies of musical works, for example of Marcin Mielczewski's *Requiem* from 1681. My thanks again to Professor Przybyszewska-Jarmińska for this information and for bibliographic indications. See Delma Brough, *Polish Seventeenth-Century Church Music. With Reference to the Influence of Historical, Political, and Social Conditions* (New York, 1989); Barbara Przybyszewska-Jarmińska, *Muzyka pod patronatem polskich Wazów. Marcin Mielczewski* [Music under the patronage of the Polish Vasa kings. Marcin Mielczewski] (Warszawa, 2011), 117.



Illustration 8 Bernardine antiphoner from Sieraków, BUW K 213/56, fol. 275v; glued-in insert with provenance.

Also in this book, we encounter characteristic features of orthography. These are not regionalisms, however, but Polish versions, or simplifications, of Latin spellings: for example, 'Kwi' instead of 'Qui', and 'Fak nos' for 'Fac nos'. This may be due to carelessness on the part of the copyist or simple ignorance, due to an inadequate education, but it also might be evidence of the general vulgarisation of Latin, which was used only during the liturgy and was disconnected from everyday life.

Another interesting detail to which attention should be drawn is the small fibula painted at the end of the second system on sheet 102 (Ill. 9). One can hardly surmise that it came to be there by accident. It is a puzzle of the sort that is typical of this kind of research. What could the copyist have meant by placing a fibula at the end of the verse referring to God's command to be merciful, as our Father in Heaven is merciful? One of the sheets added to the original manuscript also describes the gestures of the celebrant and the actual procession on the day of the Lord's Resurrection.

The third book is a missal (without any identification). Its initial sheets, written in colour and large notation, seem to be a separate part added to the book. These sheets are in very poor condition, with significant depletion, which is why it was necessary to reconstitute the damaged sheets (Ill. 10). The book now numbers



Illustration 9 Bernardine antiphoner from Sieraków, BUW K 213/56, fol. 102r; fibula (detail).

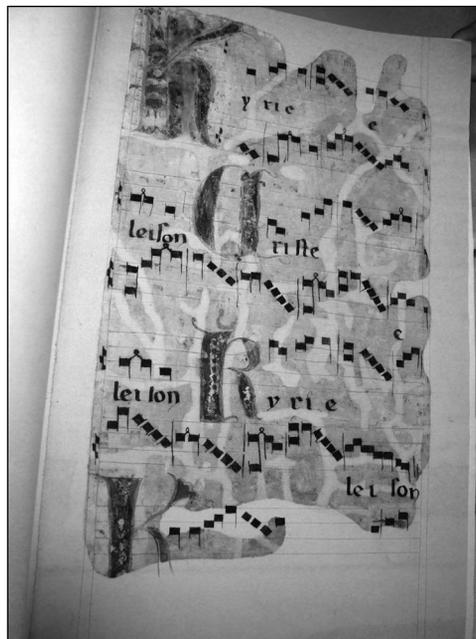


Illustration 10 Missal from Łowicz, fol. 2r; reconstituted sheets.

273 sheets in total, measuring approximately 455 x 275 mm. The original leather-on-board binding also survives, together with the clasps. The ornamentation in this manuscript is much more modest than in the first book discussed here, but in places we find ornamentation in the margins which is modelled on older-style illuminations, as well as colourful, decorative initials (Ill. 11). An exceptional elaborate decoration is found on the sheet with the Mass for the dead. At the top of the page, someone drew an extraordinarily realistic skull and bones – a characteristic element in the iconography of Bernardine spirituality, where thoughts of death and the necessity of doing penance in this life were ever present.

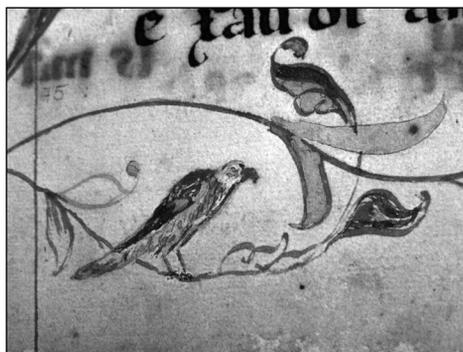


Illustration 11 Missal from Łowicz, fol. 75 r; example of a miniature in the margin of the sheet.

This book contains the greatest amount of information about provenance of the three. Already on the reverse of the first sheet, we find a note with a date ('16 iunii 1708'), the actual owner of the manuscript (the convent in Łowicz) and an anathema typical of that period, which includes any potential thieves of the book (Ill. 12).

The convent was created in the mid seventeenth century by Eufrozyna Walewska and Marcin Sadowski, who wanted the sisters to devote their time not only to prayer and manual labour, but also to bringing up and educating young girls.<sup>5</sup> A dozen or so years later, the community suffered a split, during an attempt at transforming it – in accordance with the decisions of the Council of Trent – into a cloistered convent subject to three vows. After a few years, in 1678, the community was renewed, thanks to collaboration with the Benedictine sisters, who had earlier been reformed by Mother Magdalena Mortęska (1554–1631).<sup>6</sup> Extant chronicles tell us about short stays by Bernardine sisters at Benedictine nunneries when undertaking longer journeys. These contacts undoubtedly provided opportunities

---

<sup>5</sup> Anna Ewa Kędracka OSFB, *Dzieje łowickich bernardynek 1650–2000* [History of the Bernardine sisters of Łowicz 1650–2000] (Łowicz, 2000), 9.

<sup>6</sup> Kędracka OSFB, *Łowickie bernardynki* [The Bernardine sisters of Łowicz] (Łowicz, 2005), 19–23.

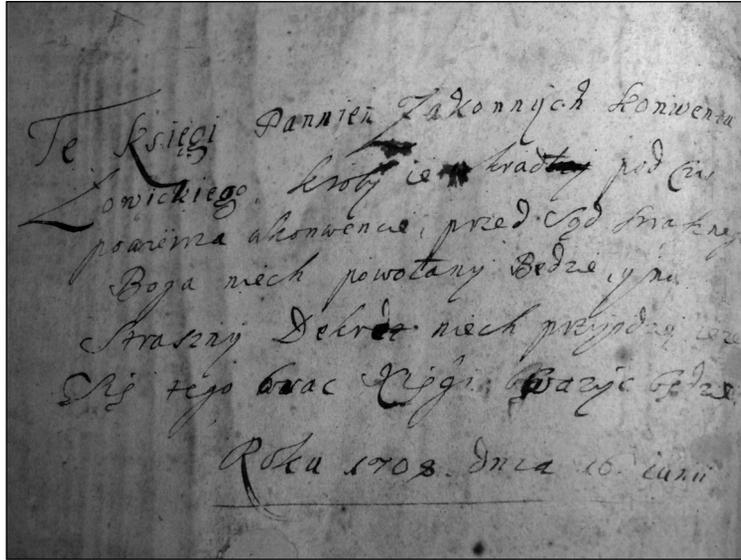


Illustration 12 Missal from Łowicz, fol. 1v; inscription with anathema.

for an exchange of spiritual experiences, but also for discussion of such subjects as music and domestic customs. For example, in 1764, the Bernardine nuns of Lviv presented the Benedictine nuns in Sandomierz with a picture of the Holy Mother of Sorrows, which may have been linked to the popularising of the kind of service typical of Bernardine spirituality. In June 1768, the Sandomierz convent was visited by a Bernardine nun, Sister Konstancja Borowska, with her niece and another convert sister Józefa. We also have a note from January 1775 about two Bernardine sisters Drzewieckie spending the night at that convent.<sup>7</sup> It is highly probable that during these visits the sisters exchanged both spiritual and cultural experiences, and it is possible that they also exchanged musical repertory at the same time.

The missal from the Bernardine convent in Łowicz shows traces of such exchanges, in the shape of a number of settings of the Gloria of the Mass from different regions, or perhaps borrowed from various convents. This is suggested by titles such as ‘Lubelskie’ [from Lublin], ‘Mazowieckie / prawy Mazur’ [Mazovian / Masurian], ‘Francuzkie’ [French] and ‘Furmańskie’ [from ‘furman’, meaning ‘carter’ or ‘wagoner’].

One is struck by the fact that this manuscript again gives the name of the copyist, *Fr. Carolus*, with a surname that is difficult to make out (fol. 264). This may well be the same brother who copied the antiphoner from Sieraków, which would

<sup>7</sup> *Dzieje klasztoru sandomirskiego od roku 1615. 30 października. Spisane w roku 1763 za przelożenia P. Maryanny Siemianowski ksieni 13. Tom pierwszy* [History of the Sandomierz convent from 30 October 1615. Compiled in 1763 under the supervision of Sister Maryanna Siemianowski abbess 13. Volume one], ed. Anna Szylar (Sandomierz, 2005), 65, 117, 194.

be very interesting information, testifying that both books were written in the same scriptorium, although not necessarily in Sieraków, and that both convents were subordinate to the same province, which provided them with liturgical books. This book must also have been heavily used, since we find in it numerous notes, additional annotations and dates: '1685, Jan 22' (fol. 89v), '28 Maji 1685 / Petric' (fol. 264), '1733' (fol. 119r).

These books clearly originate from various Bernardine establishments. However, at a particular moment in their history, when the partitioning authorities abolished successive monastic establishments, annexing their property or exposing it to dispersion or destruction, the books must have been moved to a common collection, which must then have become dispersed. The fate of the Bernardine convents' book collections has not as yet been sufficiently researched, and a time of 'great discoveries' is probably still before us. Of enormous help here would be a thorough search of monastic and state libraries throughout the whole country, particularly of their manuscript sections; it might turn out that many books have survived, in spite of everything, and could provide material for more thorough research into the liturgy and the music of Bernardine convents.

Another issue worthy of more in-depth study is the musical culture, chant repertory, performance practice and form of the liturgy in female convents in Poland, particularly after the Council of Trent. This period in particular is still a blank spot in the history of female congregations. Thus far, in practical terms, researchers have focussed only on the Benedictine and Carmelite sisters, which may be judged a correct approach in view of their quite large extant repertory. However, it would be worthwhile completing the picture that is slowly emerging from the current research by providing the context of other congregations, perhaps the Bernardine sisters in particular. They are regarded as the earliest Polish female monastic order, initially created on an informal basis as communities of secular tertiaries who lived together, at the same time as the branch of Observant Franciscans was being created; after the Council of Trent, it was gradually transformed into a regular cloistered order, where the liturgy played a particularly significant role.

Finally, a separate issue, not included in research at present, relates to the manuscripts themselves, particularly the illuminations, which are clearly modelled on decorations in earlier books, yet at the same time display an already different craftsmanship and conception. It would be worthwhile conducting comparative studies to show whether, and if so how, the Bernardine manuscripts differ from the liturgical books of other congregations, or whether they are similar regardless of the environment in which they were produced. Did the Bernardines also stay faithful to their original vows of poverty in the area of ornamenting liturgical books?

The existing literature on music, culture and art in Bernardine convents is quite limited. The bibliography of this order is dominated by historical and theological studies in the areas of spirituality and preaching. Much attention has been devoted to the outstanding figures to come from that order, in particular Blessed Władysław

of Gielniów; many studies, both theological and literary, have been devoted to his output as a writer and a preacher. A number of male and female monasteries have also been the subject of monographs, some in recent years, such as the monograph of the convent in Łowicz cited earlier. Around the turn of the twenty-first century, there has been increased interest in Bernardine art in Silesia. The beginnings of the order's activities have been studied quite thoroughly, but we still lack a perspective that would encompass all of its later culture. The existing monographs and articles, as well as the chronicles of a number of convents published in recent years, still constitute mere footnotes to a more comprehensive research project.